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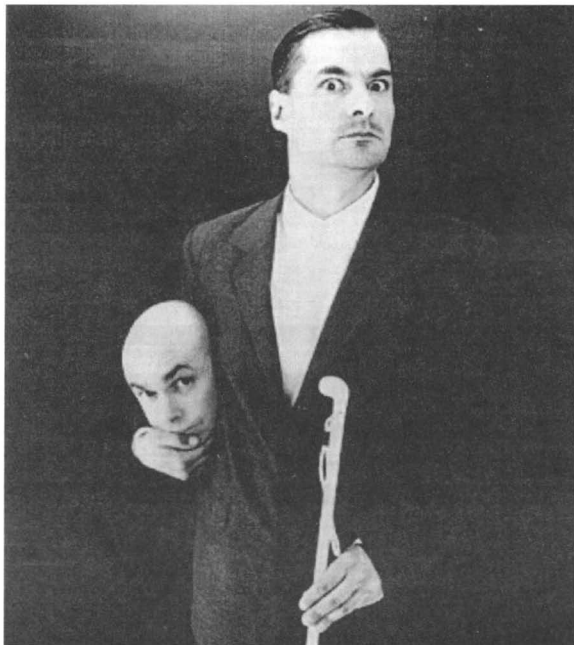
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THE CRITICAL JOURNAL OF THE BSFA

£2.25

July/August 1997

The Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad Worlds of Jeunet and Caro



Ian McDonald's *Hearts, Hands and Voices*

New Worlds in the New World

Vector

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THE CRITICAL JOURNAL OF THE BSFA

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VECTOR

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

EDITORIAL TEAM

Production and General Editing

Tony Cullen - 16 Weaver's Way, Camden, London,
NW1 0XE
Email: tcullen@as-lonsb.demon.co.uk

Features, Editorial and Letters

Andrew M. Butler - 33 Brook View Drive,
Keyworth, Nottingham, NG12 5JN
Email: A.M.Butler@english.hull.ac.uk

Gary Dalkin - 5 Lydford Road, Bournemouth,
Dorset, BH11 8SN

Book Reviews

Paul Kincaid 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone,
Kent CT19 5AZ
Email: mks_pk@cix.compulink.co.uk

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RENEWALS AND NEW MEMBERS - PAUL BILLINGER, 1 LONG ROW CLOSE, EVERDON,
DAVENTRY, NORTHANTS NN11 3BE

USA Enquiries - Cy Chauvin, 14248 Wilfred Street, Detroit, MI 48213 USA

Other BSFA Publications

Focus: Carol Ann Green, Flat 3, 141 Princes Avenue, Hull HU5 3DL Email: metaphor@enterprise.net
Julie Venner, 42 Walgrave Street, Newland Avenue, Hull, HU5 2LT

Matrix: Chris Terran, 9 Beechwood Court, Back Beechwood Grove, Leeds, West Yorkshire LS4 2HS

BSFA Officials

Administrator - Maureen Kincaid Speller, 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent CT19 5AZ
Email: mks_pk@cix.compulink.co.uk

Treasurer - Elizabeth Billinger, 1 Long Row Close, Everdon, Daventry, Northants NN11 3BE
Email: billinger@enterprise.net

Publications Manager - Steve Jeffery, 44 White Way, Kidlington, Oxon, OX5 2XA

Orbiters - Carol Ann Green, Flat 3, 141 Princes Avenue, Hull HU5 3DL

Awards - Chris Hill, Rook's Cottage, 3 Lynch Hill, Whitchurch, Hants RG28 7ND

Publicity/Promotions - Claire Briale, 26 Northampton Road, Croydon, Surrey, CR0 7HA
Mark Plummer, 14 Northway Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 6JE

London Meeting Coordinator - Paul Hood, 27 Strawberry Lane, Tiptree, Essex CO5 0KX

Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial

Last week I was chatting about H. G. Wells in my favourite second-hand bookshop when this middle-aged chap overheard me and asked was I only interested in Wells, or sf in general. I replied the latter, added that unfortunately it appeared to be dying out. This gentleman replied, 'You must be joking!' and went on to ask if I had ever heard of Iain Banks. I answered that indeed I had, and then suggested that the best sf now being written was probably the best ever, but that it wasn't getting into the shops in more than token amounts. The gentleman had to eventually agree that wookiee books, fantasy trilogies and comic fantasy were in predominance commercially. Now it was interesting that the one author he cited to claim that sf was alive and well was Mr Iain M. Banks (see also the letters page as in the recent BSFA survey Iain Banks came out as the author most people would like to see featured in *Vector*, Iain Banks is undoubtedly, and deservedly, very popular. But my esteemed co-editor said the other day, 'one swallow does not a summer make'.

I mention this ongoing concern about the state of 'real' sf because it ties into a major article in this issue, David Garnett's editorial to the relaunched series of *New Worlds* anthologies. It is a sign of the state of the publishing scene that Mr Garnett has so far been unable to find a UK publisher for this legendary title, and that *New Worlds* is now an American publication. David Garnett also laments the rise of the wookiee book.

In his final book, *The Demon Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*, the late Carl Sagan ruminated upon the decline in the standards of American intellectual life, of education and popular culture. He voiced great concern at the rising tide of irrationality that has embraced everything from UFO cultism, crystals, Atlanteans and channelling, to the most obviously fraudulent extremes of the new generation of televangelists. Tellingly, Sagan contrasts George Washington in 1790 saying, 'There is nothing which can better deserve our patronage than the promotion of science and literature. Knowledge is in every country the surest basis of public happiness', with Ronald Reagan in 1980: 'Why should we subsidise intellectual curiosity?'

Sagan turns to the portrayal of science in

popular culture. He points out that even in the many ways 'admirable' *Star Wars* a parable is misused as a measure of time rather distance. (Han Solo: 'This is the ship which made the Kessel run in less than 12 parsecs')

Star Wars has just recently re-written the Hollywood rule book yet again, becoming a cinematic blockbuster after years of TV and video sales. It is also the film which many people believe began the 'dumbing' of popular cinema, resulting in the culture of mindless summer block-busters. And, the dumbing of sf itself, leading to the revival of *Star Trek* and the deluge of *Trek* and *Wars* books which now fill the bookshops. This, I believe, is to get matters back to front.

In the first instance Lucasfilm has been giving the public what it clearly wants. No one has to go and see the *Star Wars* films, or any of the blockbusters which followed in their wake, and no one had to buy the associated books. George Lucas began twenty years ago to meet an untapped and unrecognised public demand. It should also be realised that, far from 'dumbing' the cinema, he was largely instrumental in saving a doomed industry.

Cinema in the pre-*Star Wars* era was dying. Audiences were falling. The number of cinemas had halved every six years since 1958. On the eve of the original release of *Star Wars*, 20th Century Fox was on the verge of bankruptcy. It was widely predicted that within ten years there would be only a handful of cinemas running the occasional epic for months on end, while all other production would be for the booming TV and the then infant video markets.

With the complete triumph of television by the mid-70s, the public was no longer prepared to go to the cinema regularly to see the kind of quality drama that mainstream critics acclaim. The sort of pictures that had once been a staple of the weekly trip to the movies could now be seen, made for TV, free, at the press of a button. Just like the 1950s, when movies discovered colour, 3D, CinemaScope and 70mm to combat TV, if the audience of the 1970s and 1980s were to be lured out of their houses, it had to be for something big, spectacular, overwhelming, the kind of entertainment TV could never hope to offer.

The growth of the blockbuster – special effects-dominated events – movie of the last two decades has returned the public to the cinema, resulting in an increase in the number of screens and actually a much wider distribution of all kinds of films, from independent and subtitled 'art' movies to the Hollywood spectaculars that are so often derided, than was possible in the period before *Star Wars*.

Certainly a lot of the big pictures have been very poor, and many of them have done little for the reputation of written sf, but there are signs of a change. Several films based on real sf novels are soon to reach our screens. Among these is an adaptation of Carl Sagan's only novel, *Contact*. There is a certain irony here, in that it is being directed by sometime Lucas associate Robert Zemeckis, the man behind *Forrest Gump* (1994). *Forrest Gump* is, of course, the movie most often held up to ridicule as the glorification of all things dumb, reactionary and blindly patriotic about recent American culture. Which is, incidentally, to miss that the film does not condone all that it depicts. Whatever, the film *Contact* will be well promoted, as will films of David Brin's *The Postman* and Michael Crichton's *Sphere*. If these encourage some of the audience to read some 'real' sf it will be a good thing.

Then again, they might have trouble finding some. After I left the second-hand shop I went into Ottakars and picked up their May/June Science Fiction and Fantasy Newsletter. Of the new title highlights there is one collection, *Matter's End* by Gregory Benford, and four novels which, so far as I am aware, are not part of series. Two of these are reprints: *The Heart of the Comet* by David Brin and Gregory Benford, and *More than Human* by Theodore Sturgeon. Everything else, even the titles by Iain M. Banks, Greg Bear, Gregory Benford, Ben Bova, Stephen Donaldson, Barbara Hambly, K. W. Jeter, Stephen Palmer and Brian Stableford are either sequels, parts of ongoing series or media tie-ins and spinoffers. Perhaps reports of the death of real, original, stand alone, brand new world with every story, packed to the brim with real sense-of-wonder ideas sf have been exaggerated. But, on the evidence, not by much.

by Gary S. Dalkin



Jon Courtenay Grimwood emailed us from jon@hardcopy.cityscape.co.uk to continue the debate about the films of Derek Jarman as represented by Bob Ford [Vector 190]:

'Jarman was not any way an SF film-maker, but merely a purveyor of pretentious, badly-made, muddled, incoherent "art flicks", according to Mal Washington. [Vector 192]

Hang on, didn't this guy make *Jubilee*?

The definitive fast-forward hymn to punk England, reeking of cheap sex, cheaper drugs and a time-travelling Queen Elizabeth II. The film that had us cross-legged with shock at the violence, but still sent us staggering out when the lights went up in search of amphetamines and nitrate.

Pretentious, yes...

But badly made, incoherent, muddled? Show me a single UK film that captured as cleanly the spirit of the 1980s and 1990s.

Andrew M. Butler: And all back in the 1970s as well.

Gary Dalkin: But the time travel was achieved by magic, which makes it fantasy, not sf, whatever its merits. Mal's point stands.

AMBE: Hmm, as I recall it was John Dee's magic, or alchemy, so... 'Any sufficiently advanced magic?' And it wasn't exactly set in the present... But this, I fear, grows weary.

Putting the other 99% of BSFA members to shame, Jon managed to email us again before the echoes of the thud of the last mailing falling upon the doormats died away.

Thanks for the review of *neoAddix* by Mark Plummer. The 'cyber noir ultrashocker' strap line was slapped on by Hodder, but then that's marketing (and I've already been torn off a strip for it in SFX!). The real positioning, as I try to make clear on the first page is 'silicon punk retro'. It'll be interesting to see how Hodder position *Lucifer's Dragon* and the book after.

The Jack Womack interview was brilliant. I remember grabbing a drink with someone senior from Unwin Hyman just before *Terraplane* was published in the UK and being told, 'hey, we've found the new Gibson.' Luckily for both Gibson and Womack it didn't turn out that way...

But back to Vector 192 and a letter from the BSA Publishing Supremo, Steve Jeffery, patting us on the backs:

This mailing is damn near as good as it gets. I thought that was a stimulating and thoughtful editorial on Cronenberg's *Crash* and I can't argue with it (ha, wimps out on controversial editorial). I haven't seen the film, and it's one of those I now think I 'ought' to, rather than would have rushed to see it had it not been the subject of so much uninformed controversy. Personally I found *Videodrome* yukky and risible in equal parts.

What was interesting to find, in Gwyneth Jones's *Phoenix Café*, the character Mish's comment on the 'sacred, reverent and death-laden' nature of car adverts in the display of late 20th century adverts at the Tate. A Peugeot advert in that case, though one wonders what he might have made of some of the other ads.

Did Gary write *A Cronology*? It's uncredited, but I assume it ties into his editorial.

[GSD: Yes, I did write it; the person responsible for my lack of appellation has been used as a crash test dummy.]

AMB: Assuming Gary exists, of course. *Mea culpa* – I meant to specify that it should run on from the editorial but that bit of the brain fused from the terrors of cycling in traffic for the first time in ten years. Humble apologies to my esteemed co-editor. Actually, one of the paragraphs was written by myself rather than Gary. A small prize to the person who guesses which?]

As an observation on Paul Kincaid's 'Cognitive Mapping' on Invisibility, I can also think of Ellison's 'Are You There?' and Tiptree's 'The Women Men Don't See', and wonder if this is more from unfamiliarity or a partisanship for certain UK authors.

[We suspect the former – even PK can't have read everything – Eds.]

Nice to see the Holdstock bibliography including the *Bulman* novelisations (I embarrassed Rob by presenting one of these for signing). I hadn't realised he was responsible for some of *The Professionals* as well.

Was it Chris Terran who stumped me by observing that 'All Holdstock's novels are about stolen children. I wonder why that is?' and then to realise, in *The Emerald Forest*, that it's exactly the same theme. There's a line from Belly's 'Full Moon, Empty Heart' that runs through my head when I read Holdstock now: 'see that child twice-stolen from me / out the window backwards'.

Rob himself, in a letter to *Attitude* 10, regards *Ancient Echoes* as an awkward failure due to an overburdening of effect and information, and a resort to characters having to lecture each other to keep up with the plot. And yes, that was my sense of acute disappointment with that novel.

More intriguing was his observation of

Lavondyss and *The Hollowing* as being both 'classically defined in the middle, each in effect being two books in one.' At some point I'll have to go back to those two books with that observation in mind, and see where he stopped, and struck off in a new direction.

Robert Holdstock wrote to comment about the curious features on his work in Vector 192:

I was impressed by Andrew Butler's thoughtful analysis of *Mythago Wood*, if a little taken aback to find that a Freudian 'castration complex' runs at the book's heart. Makes a change from Jungian archetypes, I suppose, and he's probably right.

The 'generic hybrid' nature of the book is common to all my work – it's there in my first space opera, *Eye Among the Blind* (Ghosts in space, and reverse evolution. How very likely!) – and something that was a very conscious decision when I started was back in the 70s. I've long since accepted that the direction of any sense-of-wonder in my work is affected by the 'genre-hybrid' Quatermass stories (especially *The Pit*) of Nigel Kneale. Brilliant imagination, that man.

The Bone Forest was written to flesh out the film of *Mythago* and is certainly only a prologue. But the awful death of Jennifer Huxley is at the heart of the forthcoming *Gate of Ivory*, which is a sequel to *Mythago*, plus archetypes, myths and, Oh, all right, perhaps just a tad of castration.

I didn't write *Death Angel*, whatever that is. Bibliographers please note!

And I certainly don't regard *Ancient Echoes* as 'peripheral' to the *Mythago* sequence – it's a journey into the various levels of the unconscious mind and – sorry *Cross of Iron* – 'takes you to where the Mythagos grow!' This one really is a hybrid!

GSD: Thanks for your kind words. Actually we feel you've been more than kind in passing a blind eye over the collection of typos and misinformation – notably Merlin's Wood is subtitled 'or the Vision of Magic' – in V192. Our apologies are offered. I own up to describing *Ancient Echoes* as 'peripheral' to the *Mythago* sequence. Surely we all know that it's the critic's job to misunderstand an author's most deeply held perspectives. I was only doing my job. One last point: why are so many writers resusing famous titles for new work? First it was Michael Crichton with *The Lost World*, now Robert Holdstock 'borrowing' the title of the highly acclaimed Sam Peckinpah war film. What next? Star Wars: A New Culture Novel from Iain M. Banks?

AMB: When I've removed this seat belt I'll fall on my sword. I think I miscorrected the subtitle of Merlin's Wood from *The Vista of Magic*, possibly foolishly trusting the *St James's Guides*. I'm not sure where the *Death Angel* title came from. A solid day's research turned up the bibliographic detail on *The Professionals* which is curiously missing from the reference books, and then a diversion on the

walk home from the bus stop turned up two of the very books in question. We have been promised an article on Nigel Kneale, so watch this space! And a Certain Party did offer to write on *Lavondyss* so further castration will occur if he doesn't follow through... (This violence from V193 is catching)

And speaking of Iain M. Banks, a letter from Robert Holdstock's World Fantasy Award-winning co-author of *The Raghorn*, Garry Kilworth.

Two reviewers have recently remarked on my 'prolific' output, one suggesting (jokingly I hope) that I was producing a book every two months. Public perception and reality are as usual mile apart. I do write quite a few books, but on average less than one (count 'em, one) novel a year since 1977. On three occasions 1988, 1992 and 1996 I had two novels published in one year. But in 1980, 1982, 1983, 1985 and 1991, I published no books (count 'em, none).

1977 – *In Solitary*
1978 – *The Night of Kalar*
1979 – *Split Second*
1980 – NONE
1981 – *Gemini God*
1982 – NONE
1983 – NONE
1984 – *Theatre of Timesmiths*
1985 – NONE
1986 – *Windwater Country*
1987 – *Spiral Winds*
1988 – *Cloudrock, Abandonati* (two very short novels)
1989 – *Hunter's Moon*
1990 – *Midnight's Sun*
1991 – NONE
1992 – *Fort Dancers, Standing on Samian*
1993 – *Angel*
1994 – *Archangel*
1995 – *House of Tribes*
1996 – *Roof of Voyaging, A Midsummer's Nightmare*

I have of course published collections of short stories but since they are simply collected stories already published, they do not really count. Yes, I do publish a lot of books, but for heaven's sakes let's keep it in perspective. I'm sure Terry Pratchett and Iain Banks publish as much as I do (or do they just sell more than I do) how come no one calls Terry or Iain prolific authors? Come on, who's got a Pratchett/Banks bibliography? Let's have a look at the numbers, chum.

GSD: Your editors don't like the supercilious condensation or the aggressive sarcasm of being called 'chum' in the above fashion. But perhaps Mr. Kilworth was having a bad day when he wrote his letter, so we'll let it go.

Mr Kilworth had a new book reviewed in V190, and two more reviewed in V192. With Vector being bi-monthly this makes, as Barbara Davies observed in her glowing review of *The Roof of Voyaging*: 'a new book every other month' [our emphasis – Eds.]. All Ms Davies suggested was that the author was able to write both well and quickly, surely a double compliment? She recorded: 'As you'd expect from Kilworth, plot, characterisation, dialogue, viewpoint and pace are expertly

handled.'

Actually Mr Kilworth has been disingenuous in his letter, downplaying his prolificacy by omitting collections and juveniles. Regardless of their containing previously published material, or being intended for children, they still surely take time to write! Therefore, in the interests of completeness and accuracy we add the following to the list included in Mr Kilworth's letter: Highlander (1986), The Wizard of Woodworld (1987), The Street (1988), Trivial Tales (1988), In the Hollow of the Deep-Sea Wave: A Novel and Seven Stories (1989), The Rain Ghost (1990), Dark Hills, Hollow Clocks: Stories from the Otherworld (1990), The Drowners (1991), The Third Dragon (1991), The Electric Kid (1994), The Brontë Girls (1995) and Cybercats (1996).

AMB replies: Gary is unnecessarily harsh and I don't want to start a feud with one of my favourite writers – whose Abandonati I once described as one of the best baths I had ever had. (It is clearly a test of a book's worth if the bath water gets cold three times whilst reading it.) Our chum invites us to do the maths, so – reluctantly, I have to say – we will. Gary (and Garry) has forgotten The Songbirds of Pain (1984), The Voyage of the Vigilance (1988), Billy Pink's Private Detective Agency (1993), Hogfoot Right and Bird-Hands (1993), In the Country of Tattooed Men (1993), The Phantom Piper (1994) and The Raiders (1996). So if my count is correct, thirty-seven books bear the name of Garry Kilworth or Garry D. Kilworth or Garry Douglas (would it were even more – I don't begrudge any of these bar the novelisation, and even true artists have to pay the rent). Rather less than a book every two months, but surely more than one a year (frankly, I wouldn't object to a book every two months, but my bank manager would). 1997 sees the second Navigator Kings book and a mainstream Gary Douglas title to look forward to. For information, excluding maps and plays, Pratchett has produced something

like twenty-seven books since 1976 (but he is speeding up) and Banks fifteen since 1984. (Which, just-a-bit-of-fun, would extrapolate to 23.03 if he'd been published in 1977, or just over one a year). Kilworth's stuff is the Right Stuff: Go forth and buy.

Martin Taylor writes from Swaffham Bulbeck to lengthen the list of recommended readings:

I read the list of recommended books of the year with interest and wouldn't have had any quibbles, but for one omission (which wouldn't have been omitted had anyone asked me for my recommendations, but they didn't, for the first time in many years. Sniff. How the old farts sink from sight.)

Manda Scott's *Hen's Teeth* is a muscular combination of a lesbian non-chic story of personalities and a clever whodunnit with a very practical science conundrum at its core (which is more than can be claimed for many of those books listed, but that is an almost irrelevant by the bye). It would have been nominated for a Silver Dagger had the committee had their arses in. It is on the Orange Prize shortlist and has been much mentioned in the broadsheets of late. As far as I'm concerned it is up there with *Johnny and the Bomb* and *Whit* as book of the year

GSD: Our apologies for your not being asked for your recommended books of the year, and our thanks for writing to let us know about Manda Scott's novel. As you know, the recommended books of the year are but the personal choices of the BSFA reviewers and committee, and can be anything, fiction or non-fiction, mainstream fiction, or even science fiction. From your description *Hen's Teeth* seems to be a crime novel with some real science involved in the plot. That doesn't make it science fiction as such, and there's no reason why the BSFA committee should have noticed the book from the 8-10,000 titles published last

year. Presumably, the *Silver Dagger* is an award for crime fiction, and I can't understand how the BSFA committee could have helped the book to be nominated for this award. However, if *Hen's Teeth* is as good as you suggest then we should be grateful for you bringing it to our attention, and hopefully many of our readers will seek it out and enjoy it.

AMB: Mr Taylor probably means the Crime Writers' Association committee rather than any other committee which may or may not have its arse in. Or perhaps the committee which awards the Daggers (the Dagger comes in Gold and Cartier Diamond as well). It sometimes feels like there are 8-10,000 award ceremonies a year. *Hen's Teeth* was published by The Women's Press in 1996 and was also short listed for the First Blood Award for Best First Crime Novel of the Year 1996.

We also heard from Dave Langford, muttering darkly about no longer being able to complain about not receiving his BSFA Award, and wishing to correct a false impression caused by a further delay:

To correct my own *Vector* review of *Night Lamp*, it was in 1996 rather than 'this year' that Jack Vance turned 80. I failed to allow for the eight-month lag before publication.

We should have caught this error, and we apologise for the delay which caused the error. Last year we developed a backlog of reviews which is slowly being cleared. At least we've published the correction relatively quickly. We're getting there, as BR used to say.

Letters to *Vector* should be sent to Gary Dalkin, 5 Lydford Road, Bournemouth, BN11 8SN and marked 'For publication'. We reserve the right to edit or shorten letters.

Continuity Corner: An occasional series on Gaffes, Goofs and Gaps

Dan Simmons, *Endymion* (1996)

"And then Robinson Crusoe stripped naked, swam out to the ship, filled his pockets with biscuits, and swam back to shore [...]"

"[Martin Silenus] used to say that proofreaders have always been incompetent assholes – even fourteen hundred years ago" (255).

Dan Simmons's novel *Endymion*, which continues the Hugo and BSFA award-winning *Hyperion* Cantos, includes the preceding speech by its child heroine Aenea. The abuse is strangely out of place, even drawn attention to, within the novel. It's odd, especially given what Silenus says to the narrator Raul: "Your hair is long, but not wild" (69). The talk of hair length is forgotten within sixty

pages: "This is the way we look to each other at that moment [...] my short hair filthy" (129).

This is not so striking as a later description of the heroine: "Aenea was excellent at chess, good at Go, and terrible at poker" (182). Less than twenty pages later we have: "playing cards in the evening (she was a formidable poker player)" (200).

Yet this is trivial beside the continuity flaw in the description of the architect they seek:

"Who is he – the architect?"

"He's a she," said Aenea, "and I don't know her name" (183).

We learn little about her in the next four pages until they reach the architect's planet:

"I thought he [the architect] was a genius" [...]

"I have to study under this man, Raul" (591-2).

Why is the female architect now a man? What are we to make of this? It is clear that Raul has written the account which forms the novel some years later, but surely he should remember something as important as this? Is he mad? An unreliable narrator? Perhaps Simmons had nodded, and made the mistakes. Or are they simply a joke played upon asshole proofreaders?

Andrew M. Butler, with thanks to Gwyneth Jones and Steve Jeffery

SF AND THE TROUBLES

John Newsinger explores Ian McDonald's allegorical
Hearts, Hands and Voices (published in the USA as *The Broken Land*)

The war in Northern Ireland has since 1969 cost over three thousand lives. This might not seem a high number for such a protracted conflict especially if compared with Bosnia or Chechnia. If we were to take an equivalent ratio of victims to population for Britain, however, then the number of people killed would be over a hundred thousand. During the same period, some thirty-five thousand people suffered serious injury, about one in fifty of the province's inhabitants. The equivalent figure for Britain would be well over one million people. For the people of Northern Ireland, and in particular for those Catholic and Protestant working class communities that have borne the brunt of the violence, the thirty years war has been a catastrophe.

How has this conflict affected the science fiction that has been written in Northern Ireland during this period? It seems to have hardly impacted at all on the fiction produced by the province's two senior sf writers, the late Bob Shaw and James White. The obvious implications of 'slow glass' for the war were never explored by Shaw, and White, of course, remains best known for his 'Sector General' stories. Arguably, White's little known novel, *Underkill* (1979) reflects the Troubles, but neither writer has confronted the conflict directly.

This is certainly not the case with Ian McDonald. A number of his short stories have dealt with the Troubles ('Empire Dreams: Ground Control To Major Tom' and 'Legitimate Targets'). But much more important are his three Irish novels – one is tempted to call them a trilogy – *King of Morning*, *Queen of Day* (1991), *Hearts, Hands and Voices* (1992) and most recently *Sacrifice of Fools* (1996). The first is an exploration of the power of myth in Ireland and its effect on the lives of three young women, and the third an account of alien encounters in the post-war North. The opening of *Sacrifice of Fools* is quite inspired: a UFF hit squad hear the news of first contact on their car radio while on their way to assassinate someone. Both these novels are among the best fantasy and sf written in recent years. It is the second novel, however, *Hearts, Hands and Voices* that actually confronts the Troubles head-on.

Just as McDonald's earlier *Desolation Road* retold the story of the making of America so *Hearts, Hands and*

Voices retells the story of the Irish War of Independence and of the partition of the country in the early 1920s. His fictional reworking of this particular conflict provides the background, the context, for the odyssey of young Matembe Fileli and her family. In fact, McDonald generalises his portrayal of revolt, repression, ethnic and religious conflict, war and its aftermath so that The result is a powerful, passionate novel written with a tremendous satiric bite, one of the master works of contemporary sf.

The story takes place in the Confessor (Catholic) provinces of the Proclaimer (Protestant) Empire in the era of the Green Wave, a genetic revolution that made machinery redundant. The Green Wave involved the

...the suffering he describes becomes the suffering of the victims of all wars, his refugees are all refugees.

development of a synthetic polymer ('plasm') that functioned as a living organism and the discovery of a genetically tailored virus that enabled humans to interact with it at the molecular level. The result is that people grow their own houses, drive organic vehicles and sail organic

boats. It is this superbly realised exotic world that is engulfed by revolution and war.

Imperial rule is being challenged in the Confessor provinces by the Warriors of Destiny (the Fianna) who are waging a rather ineffective guerrilla war but provoking drastic repression. The rebels have a certain amount of popular sympathy, but for the time being this remains passive. The Fileli family are overwhelmed by disaster in these opening stages of the conflict. The village of Chepseny, where the family have lived for centuries and where their ancestors are embedded in the dreaming is destroyed by Imperial troops as a reprisal when one of the villagers, Mr Kakamega, is discovered to be hiding two guerrillas. McDonald provides a grim account of the execution of the three prisoners, an account that is both terribly familiar (how many such executions have been carried out in various countries in recent years?) and wonderfully strange (the Green Wave has brought with it new weapons, new punishments, new methods of execution). The Chepseny villagers are assembled and forced to watch:

The three soldiers unclipped tools from their battle packs and started to dig three holes outside Mr Kakamega's house. The prisoners struggled but the soldiers held them firm. The young man began to cry. The young woman swore and cursed imaginatively. The shovellers dug up spadefuls of

ceramic cobbles and chocolate black earth. The shovels dug and dug. Under the guns of the militia, the people watched [...] the sobbing of the young man grew fainter and less coherent, a burble of fear. A small pool of liquid had formed on the cobbles at his feet. Matembe closed her eyes. It was a shameful thing to see a man piss himself.

The three prisoners are stripped naked, bound with wire and planted thigh deep in the black earth. The officer orders the carrying out of the death sentence:

The sergeant opened a canister with a red bio-hazard symbol on it. He removed three round black seeds. Round and black and pitted, like the heads of long-dead ancestors. He wore gloves and moved cautiously, careful not to let the seeds touch his flesh [...] the seeds sprouted the instant they touched the soil. Within seconds they had put out roots and shoots. Within one minute they had encased the prisoners to the waist in vines. Within five minutes they were wrapped head to toe in growth and their legs were turning to wood. The black and brown officer made the people watch until the prisoners' cries had ceased and the first branches were reaching out of their mouths and eye sockets. When there was nothing left of the young man and the young woman and Mr. Kakamega [...] but three small trees bound in wire, he gave everyone five minutes to return to their homes and collect what they could. Five minutes. Not one instant more.

Chepsenyi is burned to the ground and its inhabitants are driven out, refugees in a land descending into rebellion and war. Students of Irish history will, of course, have recognised 'the Warriors of Destiny' as Irish Republicans and 'the black and brown officer' as a Black and Tan. This is not to say, however, that McDonald is reproducing the Irish War of Independence in some crude fashion, but that he is utilising it to provide a structure around which he can develop his own concerns. It does however place McDonald's concern with the horrors of civil strife, government repression and war very much in an Irish context, in the context of contemporary Northern Ireland.

Worse is yet to befall the Fileli family. On their flight to find refuge in the city of Ol Tok, they are forced to provide shelter for the remnants of the guerrilla band the Imperial troops are hunting. Matembe's father is among those arrested, never to be seen again, executed in secret.

McDonald shows these terrible events through the eyes of a remarkable young girl, Mathembe Fileli, fiercely independent, who has forsworn speech. The world is too terrible a place to talk about and speech is an obstacle rather than an aid to communication, erecting barriers, creating misunderstanding and conflict rather than harmony and understanding. Accompanied by her irascible argumentative late grandfather's head, still sentient thanks to the wonders

of the Green Wave, she is swept along by the revolution and war that sweeps across the Confessor provinces.

McDonald's evocation of Ol Tok is magnificent. He brings the city, presided over by the Five Hearts Beer Girl, to life. The city is indeed a living thing:

In Ol Tok the city is at war with itself. New strong suburbs push up through old, long grown half-dead districts, sending out roots and tendrils and rhizomes that are sewers and water pipes and conduits and ducts and power lines and telecom channels [...] In Ol Tok demons stalk the night; very small demons, discarded domestic organicals, stray organs, lost or abandoned toys or plasmaballs, all fused together into elegantly obscene hybrids, seeking heat, seeking blood, seeking completion [...] Ol Tok is fish and spices and breadapples grilling over radiant elements or pans of charcoal made from ancient lignified houses [...] Ol Tok is five million bicycles [...]

McDonald is the poet of the unfamiliar with an uncommon ability to conjure up the exotic, making it seem both wonderful and everyday. His worlds have the feel of being live in rather than just visited.

Mathembe survives, indeed prospers in Ol Tok, working the streets as a seller of plasm toys that she designs and breathes into life herself. Family responsibility bears down on her however. She worries about her brother Hradu's involvement with the rebels, about her mother's mysterious illnesses and searches for her father (in the Bujumbura Ballpark there are thousands of trees, all people organically executed by the Empire). She saves her brother from arrest and imprisonment, rescues her mother from medical exploitation, falls in love... But the desultory guerrilla war explodes into full-scale rebellion.

In Ol Tok, the Ourselves Alone councillors (Sinn Fein) refuse to stand and bow to the Emperor's image, are suspended from office and fined. Twenty-five of them refuse to pay and go on hunger strike. After eighty-eight days, their leader, the Advocate Sharjah finally dies. The Confessor population are stunned that the Emperor could have let this happen. Fearful of disorder, Imperial troops are ordered to 'intensify their presence', a phrase that means:

troop transports on every street corner [...] roadblocks on every routeway between Confessor and Proclaimer boros [...] helicopters beating, beating, beating the sky to blood above Ol Tok [...] young men spreadeagled against walls while policepersons checked their smartcards [...] soldiers with sin-black datavisors smashing into homes to evaporate your daughter your son your husband your wife your lover: intensified presence.

Rioting breaks out in the city and quickly escalates into full-blown rebellion. The Imperial troops are momentarily driven from Confessor districts but return accompanied by drum-beating Proclaimer mobs. The

city goes up in flames and tens of thousands flee for their lives. When Mathembe's grandfather triumphantly proclaims that this is 'the Rising', that at last 'the people have risen'. His mother tells him to 'shut up, you old fool'. This rebellion is 'not the dream of heroes', but a grim, bloody, murderous affair. It is a war of massacre and execution. There is no glory, just bloody squalor: 'This was vicious as two drunken women fighting in an alleyway. This was as cruel as a father raping his daughter. There was no beauty in this. There was no nobility in this. This was war'.

The Confessor refugees from Ol Tok take to the river, thousands of refugees crammed onto the organic ships that trade up and down its length. Mathembe loses her family and finds herself alone on the Unchunkolo with only her grandfather's head for company. The refugees are not allowed to land until the war ends and a

Treaty is concluded. The Confessor provinces win their independence, becoming a Free State, except for the northern prefectures with their Proclaimer population which remains within the Empire, with semi-autonomous status. The northern prefectures have taken the distinctly Paisleyite name of 'God's Country'.

McDonald produces a fine biting satire of the concerns of new nations:

The tasks of nations are these: in the face of ecological collapse and genetic bankruptcy, in the cold wind beneath the wing of famine, to have every locomotive and country bus and government organical and police station and mail slot and telecom point and municipal glo-globe stand and public library and state genebank and law court and public park redecored in the green, silver and black of the new Free State. This is the first and great task of a nation.

He provides an extended diatribe against 'the two-handed idiocy' that sees the Free State and God's Country mirror each other, petty oppressive regimes that place the symbols of sovereignty before the needs of their people, that persecute minorities and seek to impose an authoritarian uniformity.

While the discussion here has focused on McDonald's political discourse, the point needs to be made that the success of the novel derives from the way this is combined with his incredibly rich, almost succulent creation of the world of the Green Wave and with the character and adventures of his protagonist, Mathembe Fileli. It is his success in combining these elements that makes the novel exceptional.

Mathembe's odyssey continues as she searches through the refugee camps for her mother and brother. In fact, it is her brother who finds or rather rescues her when she becomes a victim of the Free State's sex

industry. She does not provide sex as such but instead is kept sedated while her dreams and nightmares are recorded for sale. Apparently there is a thriving market for emotional distress of such quality. Meanwhile her brother has changed. Hradu is now the much-feared commander of a Warriors of Destiny Active Service Unit, running protection in the refugee camps, prosecuting a programme of ethnic cleansing, and harrying the border with God's Country. The war has turned him into a callous, conscienceless killer with a laugh 'that goes howling out across the world until it finds something it can flay'. Despite her rescue,

Mathembe cannot bear to be near him and goes in search of her mother.

What hope is there in this grim war-torn land? Does McDonald have a prescription that can end the pain and suffering, heal the hatreds and divisions? Mathembe's mother has joined the Listeners, a mixed

Hearts, Hands and Voices is a tremendous novel, a cross-over between sf and magic realism, written with poetic vision and a bitter satiric edge.

Proclaimer-Confessor community, who have abandoned speech ('a voluntary silencing of the outward voice to permit the inner voice to speak and be heard') and infected themselves with tailored viruses that allow telepathy and inhibit aggression and hatred. They have created a 'love plague' that can be passed on by blood, saliva or sexual fluid. The first tentative steps have been taken to transform humanity and make conflict and war a thing of the past. Mathembe, always a listener never a speaker, has found a home. The novel ends with her going out to reclaim her brother.

On one level it is a powerful retelling of Irish history that certainly does not let the British Empire off the hook but is also savagely critical of the Unionist and Nationalist regimes that were established in the aftermath of the Irish War of Independence. On another level it is the story of every war. And yet McDonald has successfully avoided the novel becoming a protracted lecture. His challenging imagination, his gift with language, his powers of description, his ability to create sympathetic characters all help make this an outstanding novel. What of his conclusion? Does humanity have to be transformed before we can have peace and justice? While the novel closes on a note of hope, with the process of transformation actually beginning, this is in fact a profoundly pessimistic conclusion for a world like ours where there is no 'love plague'. His conclusion has the reek of mysticism to it. In the real world, peace and justice will have to be established by the people we already are.

[John Newsinger has written for both *Foundation* and *Vector* — *Eds.*]

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Ian McDonald will be Guest of Honour at the 49th British National SF Convention, Intuition, which will take place on 10-13 April 1998 at the Jarvis Piccadilly Hotel in Manchester. Further details in *Matrix*.

The BSFA Award Winners

K.V. Bailey on Dan Simmons' *The Fall of Hyperion* (1990 – awarded 1992)

The Fall of Hyperion (1990) shares cosmic geography and matching technology with its predecessor *Hyperion* (1989). It shares, too, not simply the Keatsian titling but the historiographic / mythologic dialectic that underlies Keats's two great unfinished poems. In 'Hyperion' Keats summarises the dialectic in Oceanus's speech to the defeated and superseded Saturn, urging acceptance of the processes of nature: 'as thou wast not the first of powers / So art thou not the last; it cannot be: / Thou art not the beginning nor the end.' Keats is known to have been impressed and inspired by the famous speech from Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* where Ulysses tells Achilles that 'time is like a fashionable host, / That slightly shakes his parting guest by the hand; / And with his arms outstretch'd, as he would fly, / Grasp[s] in the corner.'

The Hyperion Cantos, written by Simmons's poet Martin Silenus, are in part a skewed recast of Keats's scenario. Throughout *The Fall of Hyperion*, Silenus's ambition is to complete the *Cantos*. He equates the protagonists of the Greco-Keatsian myth with the twenty-eighth-century powers he observes competing for existence. As the Titans strove against displacement by their offspring (the Olympian gods), so, in Silenus's *Cantos*: 'the Titans were easily understood to be the heroes of humankind's short history in the galaxy, the Olympian usurpers were the TechnoCore AIs, and their battlefield stretched across the familiar continents, oceans, and airways of all the worlds in the Web.' Humanity had created the now autonomous TechnoCore, and his fate might well be determined by what is described by the Jesuit Father Paul Duré (destined to become Pope Teilhard I) as 'a transcendent [...] Intelligence [...] not motivated by human concerns.'

The Fall of Hyperion is the story of humankind at this point of crisis. From the War Room on Tau Cet², Meina Gladstone, Chief Executive Officer of the Senate of the Hegemony (planets colonised by the 150 billion dispersed after Earth's apparently accidental destruction), is attempting to protect the Web worlds, especially Hyperion, from invasion by the barbarian Ousters. She deploys her taskforces via the instant-access technology of farcaster portals, which interlink the worlds and which are the basis of the Web's interstellar social and economic organisation. It is only later in the novel that she is made aware that the (supposed) Ouster invasions and the destruction of Earth are hostile moves of the TechnoCore AIs.

Inaccessible by farcasting are the Time Tombs and Sphinx, isolated in a valley of Hyperion. Seven pilgrims have been despatched to these to monitor the situation and to counter any Ouster move to open them and thereby liberate the all-destroying and torturing Shrike monster. And it is in order to keep acquainted with what is happening there, that she employs the dream telegnosis of the cybrid Keats-persona. The seemingly arbitrary opening and closing of the Tombs – and the visitations of the Shrike – steer on the fates and existential acts of individual pilgrims and the Keats persona. It is through this knowledge that Meina Gladstone learns the true nature of the TechnoCore operations and the fact that – as Keats also realises – the AIs inhabit 'the interstices of the Web farcaster network like rats in the wall of a house.' Hence she is compelled to destroy the portals, fragmenting the human community to a chaos in which only 'slow' Hawking drive spaceships can operate.

(*Endymion* [1996] deals with the consequences four thousand years later, where the dialectic is continued with other protagonists: the chief of whom is the child of cybrid Keats and pilgrim Brawne Lamia, an avatar delivered synchronously with an intervention by the Shrike at the opening of a Time Tomb.)

The Time Tombs' symbolic significance is central to the mytho-philosophic speculations of *The Fall of Hyperion* and the focal point for the transformation of Rachel, daughter of Sol, one of the pilgrims. During the pilgrims' journey, she has aged backwards to infancy and at the momentary point of her birth/disappearance – a willed sacrifice to the Shrike – the adult Rachel temporarily appears from the Tombs, reversing the process to grow to her adult form again. In addition to the Keatsian dialectic, Simmons, by strategically placed allusions, makes it clear that he is reflecting the philosophy of time inherent in such works of W. B. Yeats as 'The Second Coming' and *A Vision*. The former, quoted by Sol, counterpoints images of the Christian incarnation with those of the apocalyptic 'rough beast [which] its hour come round at last, / Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born.' In *A Vision*, Yeats imagines the growing and dwindling of successive/antithetical ages as interpenetrating 'gyres' or vortices; the vortex, forming and dissolving, is also a frequent image in Simmons. Yeats also associated this image with 'The Mental Traveller', Blake's allegorical poem of the sacrificial Babe grown to maturity only to shrink and grow again cyclically.

Such historical and spiritual allegory is located by Simmons within an even larger imaginative and fictional frame, where are heard two expository voices: those of the Jesuit, Father Duré, and the AI, Ummon. The former, though disillusioned, had adhered to the evolutionary theory of Teilhard de Chardin, which culminates, at the eschatological Omega Point, in the convergence of a transcendental triune entity and an evolved totality of human intelligence and feeling. The version of reality disclosed by Ummon to Brawne and to sundry Keats personae involves a different trinity: three variants of machine intelligence contending with each other as to the effective route to Supreme Intelligence, all three being negative in their attitude to supersedeable humans. Over and above this, there is warfare between their future (but paradoxically contemporary) Supreme Intelligence and the similar humankind god of the Omega Point.

The Shrike is a hunter, sent back by mutual accord to round up a deserter from the struggle: the humanly empathic wing of the Omega triune god, which may ally itself to successive avatars. The outcome is unresolved at the end of the novel: when Ummon is asked 'Are there multiple futures?', the reply is 'Does a dog have fleas'. Ummon also quotes extensively from Keats's 'Hyperion', including the crucial lines cited in my opening paragraph. Ummon says that this impermanence of stability is the belief of the relatively unlimited/limited Supreme Intelligences (both humankind and machine) which must in turn yield place to an Ultimate Supreme Intelligence – a hint perhaps at a resolution of dualisms beyond the time-space arena.

The Fall of Hyperion thus draws on a variety of sources: literary, mythological, philosophical, theological, cosmological, cybernetic and opens up speculation on a range of appurtenant ideas. It simultaneously provides an absorbing space-operatic drama as a frame for the reification and interplay of these ideas. This short essay doesn't afford space to exemplify the story's many descriptive and space-ranging pleasures – the landscapes of the planet Hyperion, Meina Gladstone's progress through the Web, the zero-g globe cities of the Ousters – but these combine with the novel's ideational complexity to make reading *The Fall of Hyperion* a stimulus to intellect and imagination alike.

[K. V. Bailey is a regular contributor to Vector and Foundation. His piece on Ballard's *The Unlimited Dream Company* appeared in Vector 189 – Eds]

THE HYPERACTIVE WORLD OF JEUNET & CARO

With the prospect of yet another sequel to *Alien*, Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc examine the career so far of director Jeunet and his long-term collaborator Caro

Cannibal butchers! Terrorist vegetarians! Noisy sex! Steampunk poison laden fleas! Clones, drones and cyclops religious groups! Welcome to the strange and hyperactive world of Jeunet & Caro.

With only two features to their name Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Marc Caro have risen from the live fast, die young world of the pop video to, in the case of Jeunet, the heady heights of the Hollywood big budget feature. Despite appearing to emerge at the tail end of the French 1980s *nouvelle vogue* (sic) their partnership began with the 1981 short *Le Bunker de la Dernière Rafale*, continuing sporadically to their feature film debut *Delicatessen* (1991). The unique visual style and the hyperbolic relational elements that characterise their work is reflected in both this period of pop videos/commercials and in Caro's *Metal Hurlant* (Europe's premiere science fiction comic) inspired style.

Fontaines (1990) won a César for best short. Shot in black and white, it is the filmic equivalent of the McLaren/Westwood tee-shirt (1976) in its lists of hates and likes, ranging from the personal to the hip, the surreal to the ordinary. Reminiscent of Jane Campion's *Passionless Moments* (1984) it delivers an eclectic and personal view of various (absurd) situations, into which the audience can delight in recognition and association. Visually slick, it harks back to Lynch's *Eraserhead* (1976) with a vacuous post-modern sheen – the spirit of 1976 given a 1990s polish. Star of the show is the remarkable Dominique Pinon whose elastic features enhance the hyperreality of both this and their two feature films.

Delicatessen (1991) was financed on the success of *Fontaines* by long-time collaborator and *Betty Blue* producer Claudie Ossard. The budget was twenty million francs, quite a high gamble for a debut. The money was well spent; you can see every centime on the screen. The plot: a house with a menagerie of tenants and a deli below. A butcher with a beautiful but myopic cello playing daughter. Meat is on everyone's mind and it's these tenants that may supply it, as dinner. Grain is the currency. Everyone is out to survive the best way that they can. Send in the clown, Louison (Dominique Pinon), looking for a room in exchange for handyman work. It soon becomes very clear that he will be next on the menu if he doesn't stay ahead of the game. Fear not, for the Troglodistes, an army of underground terrorist vegetarians, are on hand to save the day. Maybe.

The plot is superfluous to the relentless tide of set pieces. The film's world-wide success is perhaps accountable to its trailer which consists of one of the set-pieces in its entirety; it is also devoid of both subtitles and dialogue so your average cinema goer is not marginalised, until they've parted with their hard earned cash that is. It comprises the now famous bonking scene, where the creaking springs of the bed dictate the pace at which the entire household carries out its daily business and results in a truly catastrophic climax.

Jeunet and Caro enjoy exploring consequences, and mathematicians studying Chaos Theory could have endless fun investigating the probabilities of the various events occurring. The repercussions that result from a ball of string falling down the stairs have to be seen to be believed. There are also the Heath Robinson style devices which Amore, a particularly paranoid tenant, devises to bring about her suicide, which fail hopelessly at the very last moment.

Whilst the context of the film appears post-apocalyptic it could easily be placed in the rationed environment of post-war France. In this scenario modern ideals of everyone out for themselves meet a restrictive, old fashioned, yet community-based society. The only time this oppressive, fog and grime ridden world is ejected is in the final shot, with our hero and heroine playing their respective instruments (her a cello, he his trusty saw) in the oil painting intensity daylight on the rooftop. It's almost heaven – and perhaps it is.

Visually the film is a masterpiece; the camera swirls and glides effortlessly yet the overall look is that of the 1940s French films it often alludes to. Carné, Renoir and Ophüls are clearly the inspiration behind Darius Khondji's breathtaking cinematography. Ironically a great deal of this classical style visualisation was achieved using post-production video enhancement but, hey, that's post-modernism for you. Khondji (whose photography on *Se7en* saved the *Dr Phibes-meets-Silence of the Lambs* plot) uses a high contrast almost sepia toned lighting to further heighten the sense of otherworldliness.

Delicatessen's main trump card is its attitude towards the Hollywood style of film. It tackles it technically head on and matches it in both proficiency and seamlessness of effects. Yet, despite all this, it is resolutely French in both its outlook and portrayal. Food is the driving currency and concern, unlike the Australian Hollywood *Mad Max's* need for petrol. This emphasises the basic human needs; food sustaining life and petrol sustaining action-packed car chases. Let's face it, food is far more sophisticated and civilised anyway. The hero is a catalyst for the films events and not the motivation for them. The peripheral characters are given equal space in the film. The sex, however seedy, is not shot with gallons of baby oil, and the accompanying soundtrack consists of springs, dusters, a cello, a paint roller and the testing of 'sheep in a tin' as opposed to a heavy metal or sax score. Most of the cast are grubby in apparel, many of them would find casting in America very difficult outside of a David Lynch film. Even the titles dispose of the Letraset and go instead for a more contextual Peter Greenaway look.

The film's success is measured in the careers of all concerned. Khondji is one of the most sought after cinematographers in the USA, the effects crew were snapped up by Pedro Almodovar to work on Alex de la Iglesia's *Acción Mutante* (1992) – which features a similarly rich and dark group of misfit terrorists – and everyone was reunited to make the most expensive film in French cinema at that time: *La Cité des Enfants Perdus* (*The City of Lost Children*) (1995).

A young child sits in his cot in a room that is cheerily decorated. It is Christmas Eve. A tin clockwork soldier marches and clatters his cymbals making a gentle tinkling sound. The room glows with a soft, warm, homely light and peace is all around. A rope drops down from within the chimney and a pair of familiar looking black boots appear. It's Santa! He climbs down through the fireplace, carefully brushes the soot from his fluffy red coat and offers the child a wonderful toy. The soldier is still marching and the cymbals still tinkle. Then another pair of boots appear from within the chimney. And another. The room is soon full of smiling Santas. The child's expression changes from one of joy to fear. As the Santas begin to melt and warp, the child begins

to wait...

Far away out to sea on an oil rig platform surrounded by giant mines, the evil Krank arranges for the kidnapping of young children from the nearest port so that he can steal their dreams. It is the mission of circus strongman, One, with the aid of the streetwise orphan Miette, to find and rescue One's little brother.

Set in a world far removed from anything we could conceive, *The City of Lost Children* is a fairy tale for the 1990s. It is at once sinister and beautiful, funny and frightening, antiquated and futuristic. The diegesis is completely self-contained in that the film is not set in the past, present or future, and does not present an alternative history or a post apocalyptic environment. This is a world of dreams and nightmares and there is no other context upon which to base this reality.

The city is a port, with a filthy harbour. The streets are narrow and dingy and set on many levels, reminiscent of Victorian London. The residents are either corrupt or living in fear. Yet the technology is remarkable. The Cyclops, a religious group who kidnap the children on Krank's behalf, rely upon video implants direct to the optical nerve via a beautiful antique brass contraption. In one instance a deranged cyclops, infected by a trained flea to become homicidal, plugs his implant into the cyclops' victim in order that the victim may witness his own death, a cyberpunk updating of Powell's *Peeping Tom*.

Once again in-depth characterisation is lacking, but there are a plethora of subsidiary eccentrics, weirdoes and freaks who contribute to the narrative. There are the evil conjoined twins, known as the Octopus, who force the city orphans to steal for them, the clones (all played by Dominique Pinon, sometimes six in the scene at once) who have about maniacally serving their master Krank to the best of their ability, the mysterious amnesiac diver and the ex-circus owner who has the best trained fleas in the land. Add a sympathetic whore, a brain with an argumentative manner that is prone to migraine, defiant henchmen and a dog cruelly kept in line by having his lead attached, via pulleys, to a basket of sausages that rise tantalisingly out of sight upon every approach, and you have less a list of characters and more of a circus.

Set pieces abound, again applying chaotic principle to absurd conclusion. In one truly jaw-dropping sequence a single tear leads to the crash of a major ocean bound liner in a roller-coaster ride of implausible cause and effect. Others include the journeys of the aforementioned fleas, some dizzying green gas and the final rescue attempt. Clearly the result of extensive storyboarding – apparently the film had been gestating for almost fourteen years before realisation –

the marrying of conventional camerawork and computer generated effects has reached its pinnacle so far.

Inevitably the film begs to be compared to Gilliam's fantasy trilogy (*Time Bandits*, *Brazil* and *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*) in both look and feel. Many of the shots appear straight out of *Brazil*, and its blurring of dream and reality head in that direction. It fails to live up to these aims for a number of reasons; firstly there is the lack of character depth, then there is the lack of literary depth that imbues Gilliam's oeuvre and, most importantly, it replaces paranoia and impotence with Sadean cruelty. In *Delicatessen* the characters have a Chuck Jones style of violence associated with them, here the tone is altogether more unwholesome. The film delights in the torture of everyone involved, good, evil or indifferent – Miette is enslaved, forced into crime, bound, drowned, brutally beaten by her only friend (under the influence of poison), subjected to a multitude of mental tortures and exposed to unsavoury sexual behaviour. In this respect the film is Grimm in the strictest sense of the word and one of only a handful of films that is (*Company of Wolves* [1984] and *The Magic Toyshop* [1989] being the only others that spring to mind). Ultimately though, the fantasy context nullifies any perspective that would normally be considered unacceptable and the resolution justifies the means, as all good fairytales do.

Visually we have to thank not only cinematographer Khondji and Caro himself but also the talents of fashion fave Jean-Paul Gaultier (he of *Eurotrash* fame and also costume designer for Greenaway's *The Cook, The Thief His Wife and Her Lover* [1989] and Almodovar's *Kika* [1993]) and the work of the two effects groups used on the film. Indeed the effects remit was monumental, Pitof/Dudoï had to provide one-hundred-and-forty-four shots of digitally manipulated imagery including the multiple Clones, the giddy organic backdrops and the cyclops viewfinders; Buf Compagnie provided some forty-eight shots of computer-generated material including a flea so realistic it has you scratching. As a result of these efforts they are to be responsible for the visual effects of Jeunet's forthcoming movie *Alien: Resurrection*, one of the autumn's big Hollywood blockbusters.

So, what of the future? *Alien 4* as a concept seems like a monumentally bad idea, especially if it involves the resurrection of Sigourney Weaver. With Jeunet at the helm and his 'dream team' of effects technicians however, we may have a more unusual and interesting film than previous expectations have led us to believe. Perhaps what is really in order though is another high budget French film, without the artistic constraints of commercial Hollywood cinema but with the bizarre perspective of two European artists

Videos:

Delicatessen is available on Electric Video. If you are lucky you may still be able to pick up the box set that includes *Fantaisies*, a little booklet and a rather groovy pig badge.

The City of Lost Children is available on Lumière Video. DO NOT rent this from your local video store as it's both "pan 'n' scanned" and dubbed, besides which you'll probably want to watch it more than once!

Reference:

<http://www.movienet.com/movienet/sonyc/city/index.html> – is a couple of years old but really the only useful (English) Jeunet & Caro site.

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If you like these why not try:

The Brothers Quay, *Street of Crocodiles* (1986) & *The Unnameable Little Broom* (1985).

Terry Gilliam, *Brazil* (1985).

Alex de la Iglesia, *Accion Mutante* (1992).

David Lynch, *Eraserhead* (1976).

Roman Polanski, *The Tenant* (1976).

Steven Soderbergh, *Kafka* (1991).

Anything by Jan Svankmajer (Czech surrealist animator).

[Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc are part of the increasingly visible Coventry fandom, along with Paul and Elizabeth Billinger and John Ashbrook. They are also responsible for designing the BSFA Awards. With one of those coincidences which appear to plague fandom (in the nicest possible sense) Mitch used to live next door to K. V. Bailey... – Eds.]

THE NEW WORLD'S *NEW WORLDS*

David Garnett introduces the latest incarnation of a legendary title

A true story: London, England, 1946. The year after the end of the Second World War. First publication of a new science-fiction magazine. *New Worlds*. Edited by E.J. Carnell.

Since its original appearance, *New Worlds* has been through a number of incarnations. John Carnell edited the magazine for 18 years, and for a short time there was even an American reprint edition. (A very short time, five issues in 1960.) In 1964, at the age of 23, Michael Moorcock took over editorship of *New Worlds* – and shook up the whole multiverse of science fiction.

New Worlds was published as a monthly paperback for a few more years, before moving on to a larger format, and a gradually more erratic schedule. Ten volumes of *New Worlds* came out as paperback originals during the seventies, five of which also appeared in the USA as *New Worlds Quarterly*. There were a few more issues of the magazine. Then nothing. Until...

Meanwhile, I had edited two original anthologies, *Zenith* and *Zenith 2*. This was to have been an annual series, but the publisher was taken over by another and the series cancelled. Which was when Michael Moorcock asked if I would like to edit a new series of *New Worlds*. I would and I did, a four book series being commissioned by the late Richard Evans of Gollancz. Richard knew the importance of new short fiction to the future of science fiction. He was an excellent editor, a good man, and he died far, far too young.

The series was published and met with an excellent critical response. Then nothing. Until...

White Wolf, who are reprinting all of Michael Moorcock's books in America, asked if I wanted to edit another series of *New Worlds*.

Which is what you are reading the introduction to right now.

As it enters its second half century, this is the first time

New Worlds has seen initial publication in the USA.

From almost the very beginning, *New Worlds* has published stories by American authors. In a similar way, British writers might sell their stories to American magazines and their books may be published in America. (My first novel, for example, appeared in the USA before it found a British publisher.) This volume is being edited in Britain, and most of the contributors are British. Of the three American authors, Pat Cadigan recently moved to Britain, William Gibson lives in Canada – and Howard Waldrop's story is set in England. Michael Moorcock, however, now spends much of his time in the USA.

What British and American authors have in common, more or less, is the English language. It's an accident of history that Americans speak English. English is the language of Shakespeare – and of Hollywood. British films can be nominated for the Oscar (and even occasionally win). Because of the shared language, they are not considered 'foreign'.

America is the world's most powerful economy, and American media culture dominates the globe. English is the language of movies and television, music and advertising, comics and computer games, and so the world wants to speak English. English is the language of international trade, finance, commerce, diplomacy, and so the world has to speak English.

Despite the number of countries in which English is the mother tongue, it is not the world's most common first language. China is the most populous nation on Earth, and there are far more people who speak Chinese than English. But as a second language, the one people choose to learn, English has become the international *lingua franca*.

An apocryphal story: London, England, 1995. A young foreign visitor sees the 50th anniversary commemorations for the end of the Second World War, and he asks the tour guide who was fighting who. 'Britain, the Soviet Union and the United States were fighting against Germany and Japan,' he is told. 'Who won?' he asks, and the tour guide replies, 'It's too early to tell.'

Fifty years ago, *New Worlds* was not at all unusual. The majority of science fiction consisted of short stories published in genre magazines. There were very few sf novels, very few anthologies, the word 'sci-fi' had not been invented; but there were a lot of magazines, most of them in the USA.

Now, *New Worlds* is very unusual. There are only a handful of American sf magazines still being published, while *Interzone* is the only one in Britain. But *New Worlds* has become an original anthology – which is even rarer than a science-fiction magazine.

The science-fiction short story itself is becoming a rarity. There are probably more sf novels published every year

than short stories, although this stretches the word 'novel' to extremes. A novel should be something new, original, unexpected; but there are very few of these any more.

It sometimes seems that the majority of new sf books are sequels (often to books by authors who have gone to the great remainder house in the sky) or the latest episode in an interminable series or novelisations.

Just as life imitates art, so literature imitates media. There are books based on films, on television, on adverts (yes, really), on comics, on computer games, on board games, on gaming cards. Thanks to its re-release, the biggest-grossing film of all time is *Star Wars*. (Although an American movie, it was made in Britain.) There was, of

course, a book-of-the-film; and the two sequels were also 'novelised'.

More recently, new *Star Wars* novels have begun to appear with increasing frequency. This is an obvious attempt to follow the publishing success of *Star Trek*, and some authors write for both franchised series. There have been countless 'original' *Star Trek* novels, producing sales figures which make the imprint the seventh largest publisher in the USA.

Several years ago, I spent a month touring the USA, and I checked out the television stations in a dozen States. The shows which were screened most frequently were *Star Trek* and *Cheers*. But there don't seem to have been any *Cheers* books. Is there no demand for titles such as *Cliff Loses a Letter* or *Woody's Vacation*? Why not an *Early Years* series, with books such as *Young Norm* and *Carla's First Date*?

As part of their marketing strategy, tie-in books are often issued to generate publicity for new films. The book-of-the-film is little more than a padded-out version of the script. (I know because I've 'written' some myself.) But the phenomenon of a whole series of books based on a film or television show seems almost entirely restricted to science fiction.

Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, for example, was filmed as *Blade Runner*. Now there are

more *Blade Runner* novels. These are not written by Dick, however, who died in 1982. One of his short stories was filmed as *Total Recall*, and there was inevitably a novelisation of the screenplay. It must be time for a sequel. When will *Total Recall: the Forgotten Bits* be published...?

It's easy to understand why such books are published: because they sell. In the case of *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*, each volume sells hundreds of thousands of copies. It's less easy to understand why they do sell. A few of them, maybe. But a hundred *Star Trek* novels? Twenty, thirty, forty *Star Wars* novels?

And it's also understandable why 'authors' write such things, because they get paid. Some of them get paid very well. Despite receiving a low percentage, they are producing a high-grossing product, which means they can often earn more than they would from writing a book of their own.

Star Trek novels have become assembly line fiction, mass produced output from the fiction factory.

So, isn't everyone happy? Publishers make money, they pay their writers, and the readers get what they want: easy to read books.

In the short term, maybe everyone wins. But when it comes to the long march...

1946, the first year of *New Worlds*: Winston Churchill made his famous 'iron curtain' speech about the division of Europe into communist and non-communist countries. (He was in the United States at the time.) The Second World War was over, but the Cold War had begun.

Fiction can be divided into two categories: novels and short stories.

There are still some books of short stories being published. These will be either single-author collections, which are usually reprints of stories which first appeared in the magazines, or else multi-author anthologies – which are also usually reprints of stories which first appeared elsewhere.

Reprint anthologies will always have a theme. *Best of the Year*, for example, in which the editor will make his or her choice of the 'best' stories published the previous year. Or, say, *Robot Serial Killers*, in which the editor will choose from robot serial killer stories published in previous reprint anthologies. (The same stories tend to be recycled, on the basis that if they have appeared before they must be good enough to appear again. The editor thinks of a theme, checks out his computerised database, then up come the story titles. And there's another anthology.)

Nearly all original anthologies, books of new stories, also have a theme. A collection of lesbian cat vampire stories for example, all set in an alternate world where Abraham Lincoln married Queen Victoria. (If I'm exaggerating, it's not by much!) Theme anthologies are the only ones most publishers will produce. It's as if the reader wants to know what to expect before they even start a story:

it must be something very like the previous one.

And perhaps this is what people really do want. What other reason is there for the success of *Star Trek* books, of trilogies, of sequels, of series? People like what they know, are reassured by the familiar.

But that isn't what happens with *New Worlds*, where 'new' means exactly what it says. There is no theme. All the stories are completely different. They have no connection with each other or with any which have appeared in previous volumes.

Apart from the fact that some of the authors are the same, the only link between this book and the last series of *New Worlds* is what you are reading now, my introduction. This is where I continue my 'miserably rancorous' and/or 'keenly perceptive' (according to *Locust* and *Asimov's SF Magazine*) editorials about science fiction.

Since *New Worlds* first appeared, many other magazines and anthologies have come – and most have gone, while all the other titles which preceded it have vanished.

New Worlds must be doing something right. By sticking to its policy of presenting the best new short stories, it has become the oldest continuing science fiction title in the world.

The first *New Worlds* was published after the end of the Second World War. Now, it's said, the Cold War is also over. Who won? It's too early to tell.

I'm writing this editorial on my personal computer, which was manufactured in the United States of America. The software for my word processor, however, is British.

Two weeks ago, I bought a new printer from an

American company. On the back it says 'Made in China'.

China has the largest population in the world, and the Chinese People's Republic is still a communist dictatorship.

China also has the largest army in the world, but not

about the distant future, such as John W. Campbell (writing as Don A. Stuart) in 'Twilight' (1934) or Isaac Asimov in *Foundation* (1951), wrote about an evolved technology but an essentially unchanged humanity. And where some few, such as S. Fowler Wright in *The Amphibians* (1924), wrote about the evolutionary struggles of other species after humanity, the overwhelming impression was still one of a unique rise and fall.

Nevertheless, in saying that we shall change and in speculating upon what form such change might take, Wells

opened a door for many writers who have used science fiction to explore more philosophical notions. The most notable of these was Olaf Stapledon, whose interest in what we might become caused his work to be filled with wonderful images of changed mankind. This is most vivid, of course, in *Last and First Men*, which takes as its focus a broader and more detailed sweep of our destiny than any science-fiction novel before or since. Stapledon painted a picture in which humanity rose and fell in a ceaseless range of evolutionary guises. At times these future beings rise to near-unimaginable heights, at others they barely crawl from the depths, and always they are physically different to cope with different conditions. But it isn't just the 'hirsute, or mole-velvet', the yellow or 'translucent ashgreen', that marks the difference, for with these physical changes, as our modern observer begins to grasp in this extract, come changes in outlook, in behaviour, in taste. The physical evolution of humankind that Stapledon traces also allows him to trace differences in the human soul – and, perhaps more importantly, what stays the same, what makes these grotesquely different creatures recognisably and sympathetically human.

Though he seemed at odds with his science-fiction contemporaries and immediate successors (even Arthur C. Clarke, who owed so much to Stapledon's influence, peopled his far futures such as *The City and the Stars* (1956) with humans who had not changed significantly from our common stock) Stapledon's multifarious humanity has come to have a great effect upon more recent science-fiction writers.

For a while any change in humankind came from outside, either as a representation of external threat (as in Jack Finney's *The Body Snatchers* [1955]) or, particularly during the 1960s, as a manifestation of the hero's isolation or alienation (as in Robert Silverberg's *Thorns* [1967]). Gradually, however, as the pace of change in the world around us speeded up and the notion of Future Shock became familiar to all science-fiction writers, the idea that we might change ourselves as some of Stapledon's future men had changed themselves seemed like a serious way of coping

with our future or with other environments. Evolution was receiving a helping hand, and the changes we faced could be greater and more immediate than nature alone might bring about.

In an age of pacemakers and dialysis machines, such assisted evolution tended to be mechanical. We created cyborgs, which may have been further symbols of alienation in stories such as Frederik Pohl's *Man Plus* (1976) or James Tiptree Jr's 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In' (1973), but which became, through Martin Caidin's *Cyborg* (1972) and

more importantly its television spin-off, *The Six Million Dollar Man* (1973-8), and the later film on the same theme, *Robocop* (1987), neither disturbing nor threatening but rather a way of preserving the status quo.

By the time of *Robocop*, however, science fiction had already found another avenue for our assisted evolution: the computer. Cybernetics had replaced the cyborg, downloading human personality into a computer was largely a way of cheating death, as in Iain M. Banks's *Feersum Endjinn* (1994), Christopher Evans's *Mortal Remains* (1995) and Greg

Elena was beside him – superficially unchanged, although they'd both shrugged off the constraints of biology. The conventions of this environment mimicked the physics of real macroscopic objects in free-fall and vacuum, but it wasn't set up to model any kind of chemistry, let alone that of flesh and blood. Their new bodies were human-shaped, but devoid of elaborate microstructure – and their minds weren't embedded in the physics at all, but were running directly on the processor web.

'Wang's Carpets' (1995) Greg Egan

Egan's *Permutation City* (1995). Nevertheless, cyberpunks in particular saw the computer, coupled with the growing science of genetic engineering, as a new way of shaping our futures. Bruce Sterling explored some of the possibilities in his Mechanist/Shaper stories, notably *Schismatrix* (1985), while Greg Egan, in 'Wang's Carpets', is typical of the current generation of science-fiction writers who have used bioengineering, cybernetics and other such notions as a way of presenting varieties of transhumanity as diverse as anything Stapledon came up with. In this world, a logical development from the evolved future presented in Sterling's stories, people are able to choose any of a host of forms, whether biological or mechanical or cybernetic, and to slip into different shapes as easily as we might slip into a different coat. Though he has escaped the slow patterns of evolution that underlie the stately rhythms of Stapledon's work, the same exuberant diversity of possibility is there. Stapledon would readily identify his Last Men in Egan's computer simulations. And in both cases, whether our future is feathered or flowered, as pixels of information or waves of energy, one thing remains constant. The outward shape may affect many things in terms of our behaviour and outlook, part of the future that both Stapledon and Egan project depends on physical differences to raise different questions and expectations about what these future humans might do. Nevertheless these fabulous creatures, our successors, are never anything other than human in their impulses and desires, fear and motivations. It seems that however the body might be sculpted, the inside is forever the same.



First Impressions

Book Reviews

Edited by
Paul Kincaid

Note: All novels marked: are eligible for the 1997 BSFA Award for Best Novel. All collections and anthologies marked: contain stories that are eligible for the 1997 BSFA Award for Best Short Fiction.

Allen Ashley

The Planet Suite

TTA Press, 1996, 98pp, £4.99

John Light

Dotty

Photon Press, 1996, unpaged, £1.00

Reviewed by K. V. Bailey

Two things these books have in common: they are both from small presses and are both imaginatively innovative. *The Planet Suite*, at first contact, appears to be more postmodern phantasmagoria than novel, a sequence of branching variations on Holst's planetary orchestral themes. When read through, however, though time and place shift and elide, and though action may be realistic, fantastic or surreal, a plot-thread of the simplest and most universal kind emerges: a childhood/ adolescent love is lost and endlessly resought. The young characters are first found exploring environment, knowledge and sex in school, on North Sea beaches and riding the funfair's 'Voyage to Venus' cars. They are re-cast in various analogical roles, realistically in those of prosaic adulthood and fantastically as astronauts and generation pilots bringing back addictive flowers from Venus, xenophobia from Mars and being seduced by siren-like space nereids orbiting Neptune.

The main narrative comprises the memoirs of Simon Cooper or, alternatively, that fantastic ex-astronaut's log. At its most personal and intimate it is strangely affecting – beach parties, clandestine sex, cliff climbing, urban and spatial alienation. A constant motif is that of 'returning home' to the East Anglian coast at Shipsea (with Eliotian allusions to the circularity/identity of ends and beginnings, and with cosmic applications of the same concept). At one point, Simon says his memoirs are 'full of cod philosophy' – true,

but its 'codness' doesn't prevent it being provocative. The Holstian planetary interstices are occupied with ludic speculative ventures, the author using mouthpieces such as Dutch Uncle Nicholas, the maverick Professor of Astronomy, and Mr Holkham ('Hocus Pocus'), the White Knightish schoolmaster whose privately published anthropological investigations include a creation myth of the Narcissians of the Southern Delta. For them, time began when the huge inner-reflecting mirror that is the universe was smashed by their accident-prone god so that its multitudinous fragments ('everything that exists') move perpetually away from one another. Humankind's task then becomes to 'assist in the recombination of the perfect state'. Such beginning-and-end tropes pervade the novel and, embracing the fun, the satire and the correlatively disjointed human story, pull chaos towards a comprehensible ideative unity.

Dotty should entertain any topological/ philosophically-minded adult presenting it to some bright small child. It is a book of drawings of lines, entities seemingly unsure and suspicious of each other. Linus surveys the nature of Lionel, but whether Lionel exists continuously, is made up of dots, is curved or is straight, depends on the distance from which he is viewed. This gets Linus tied up in knots, until he comes to realise that his nature is actually just the same as Lionel's. John Light pursues these relativistic and fractal manoeuvres through a couple of dozen pages, teasing and puzzling but aiming, I would think with success, to entertain his very young readers while encouraging them to think and imagine playfully and experimentally.

TTA Press, 5 Martins Lane, Witcham, Ely, Cambs. CB6 2LB
Photon Press, 29 Longfield Road, Tring, Herts. HP23 4DG

A.A. Attanasio***The Dark Shore****New English Library, 1996, 300pp, \$5.99*

Reviewed by Chris Amies

You know the methods by now: ones sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic. Especially if, in the world you've created, the technology is now lost to the beings on the planet's surface and they have settled into a medieval way of life. This Gene Wolfe-ish style is often called 'Science Fantasy', as it takes from both sf and fantasy. Attanasio's *The Dark Shore* is nearer the fantasy end of the spectrum, with the semi-rationalisation of magic distinguishing it from the more general run of the genre.

On Irth, magic radiates from the Abiding Star, and an uneasy peace has ruled for some centuries. The Star's magic is a finite resource that can stave off sleep – which for some reason is to be feared – and, built into hex-gems, can be traded for food. But, as to all such societies, a dark lord arises who, maddened by his ill-treatment and humiliation, wants to rule an enslaved Irth. Hu'dre Vra lets the cademons into the world, and is opposed by a varied crew of seekers, some human, others hybrids of human and animal formed long ago: the noblewoman Jyoti, the dogman Dogbrick, and the Lord Drev who is searching for his anima-figure, the waif Tywi.

The Dark Shore is an engaging book largely on the basis of its picaresque characters, who maintain an interest for this reader even if there is a feeling of 'Not another Dark Lord threatening to destroy the world with bad magic!' The emerging-from-medieval society described is sufficiently detailed that its destruction can be made to matter to the reader, and Attanasio's visual descriptions of that world are apt and colourful. After the war with magic, we may see Irth's rebuilding and its troubled emergence into a new form.

Richard Bachman***The Regulators****Hodder & Stoughton, 1996, 334pp, £16.99**New English Library, 1997, 446pp, £6.99***Stephen King*****Desperation****Hodder & Stoughton, 1996, 545pp, £16.99*

Reviewed by Stephen Payne

The dust has barely settled on King's six-part serial *The Green Mile* and already we have two new novels, one under his own name and one under that of 'Richard Bachman'. These are not two distinct creations though: characters of the same name and with similar characteristics appear in both novels and there are concurring revolutions both thematically and in the plotting.

The Regulators begins in the suburbs of a sleepy American town. It's an everyday American scene: the sun is shining, dad is washing the car and the kids are playing in the street. Then out of nowhere a strange van appears and the driver proceeds to shoot a boy delivering newspapers. That's on page 17 and marks the beginning of a descent into hell for the inhabitants of Poplar Street – a large and varied coterie of King-type characters – that leads to many more deaths and much more suffering before it is eventually resolved. Their predicament is that they are trapped in a world crossed between 'The Regulators', a B-movie western so cleverly described by King that I had to confirm in Halliwell that it really doesn't exist, and 'Motokops', a range of violent plastic toys. It's the autistic child, Seth, you see, who is the key to all of this. The adults are trapped in a child's imagination or, as it turns out, in something that is controlling a child's imagination. Bits of the novel are an adventure story as the characters dodge through the back-alleys like urban guerrillas, bits of it are horror as we slowly discover the

disturbing secret of Seth at the nub of it all, but at the end the bits that King believes are important are the love between a mother and her child. Ultimately it is not guns or belief that redeem the disparate band of survivors, it is love – which is an honourable enough theme for a rather dull novel.

The town of Desperation figures briefly in a pivotal sequence in *The Regulators*. In the novel *Desperation*, Stephen King returns there so we can begin to understand the true nature of the place. *Desperation* has been touted in some quarters as a latterday reinvention of *The Stand*, and the religious undertones that were present in that earlier novel are certainly present and correct here. This is not a novel about love, it is about belief and our relationship with God. Yes, God is knocking around here, perhaps existing, perhaps not, but always questioning our faith as the characters – many of whom in a different universe would inhabit *The Regulators* – have to willingly take responsibility for what they believe.

The story is deceptively simple. Desperation is a small mining town in Nevada which has come under the control of an ancient force which, at the start of the novel, is controlling one of the town policemen who entices the different characters into the town. It is a place where 'evil' has been unleashed, a place where we must make our own choices. The writer, the alcoholic, the floozy; all the survivors of this evil must find it in themselves to do battle, to fight with no more than a child to lead them. For it is another young boy, David, who is the hand of God and who will lead them to their destiny. They must believe in this boy if they are to survive the plot and make it to the final stand where order is restored and everyone lives happily ever after.

In *The Regulators* we see a child who creates a world by his only terms of reference: a cheap, grotesque western with garish action figures. But there are other ways to mould the realm in which we live, and in *Desperation* the future is shown to be in the hands of our children – if only we will put our trust in them. Which one is it to be? Maybe neither. Maybe we don't have to make that decision. Maybe it's all about love really, and that's about as universal as it gets.

Paul Barnett***Strider's Galaxy****Legend, 1997, 369pp, £5.99*

Reviewed by Norman Beswick

If the name 'Strider' reminds you of a character from *Lord of the Rings*, forget it. Leonie Strider is a spaceship captain, picked out for a hazardous mission because of her particular personality characteristics as a loner. She and her crew set out from Jupiter orbit to claim humanity's first colony world in Tau Ceti. Unfortunately they encounter a space wormhole which flings them irrevocably into a far-off galaxy. As if that wasn't enough, although they make contact with intelligent entities, they find themselves almost at once in the middle of a galactic conflict.

This is space opera, book one of *The Strider Chronicles*, ambitious in scope and, if you like that sort of thing, full of violent action. Barnett is ingenious enough with the surprises and keeps things moving nicely, despite an occasional tendency to info-dump unnecessarily. Sensawunda is certainly not neglected: one moment, when a newly-encountered alien turns out to display unexpectedly beautiful wings, is particularly memorable. Strider is quirky and independent and lonely with it; where all her crew are pairing off and mating like rabbits, she allows herself sex only with a robot.

The jacket compares this novel with *Star Wars* and with Iain M. Banks's Culture novels; I was also reminded of 'Doc' Smith and the massive slaughterings initiated and glorified in *Grey Lensman*. The difference here is that Strider is allowed

to feel guilt and upset each time a species is wiped out, so that's all right then! We'll have to see when the Chronicles are complete; I get the feeling that Barnett is feeling his way

and still learning the job, but there are plenty of good moments and the novel kept me happily absorbed while reading.

Stephen Baxter

Voyage

Voyager, 1996, 595pp, £16.99

Reviewed by L. J. Hurst

Unless British television is even more chauvinistic than I had realised, aeronautical engineers have had almost no recognition in this century – after *The First Of The Few* and *The Dam Busters*, that's it. If there was a Mister Douglas behind the DC5 or a Professor Fortress behind the Flying Fortress, Hollywood has never had the time to commemorate him. When you think that in the twentieth century the frontier has been above us, this failure is remarkable. Throughout the fifty years that the frontier lay in the middle of America there were mythmakers enough in New York City inventing and commemorating the men making the frontier: farmers, miners, railway men with steel driving hammers. Where are the heroes on the high frontier? Why are there no mythical figures?

What happened to the Kings of Infinite Space, as J.G. Ballard ironically called them, 'dull men, living examples, incidentally, of that wooden characterization for which science fiction writers have always been criticized.' Did they feel nothing? I think it was Gus Grissom (who died in the Apollo fire) who was once asked how he felt, and replied 'How would you feel when you know you're sitting on the results of the lowest tender received by NASA?'

Stephen Baxter's *Voyage* brings all these together, re-writing history with a focus on the technology. After Kennedy (shot but not killed in 1963) retires, the same line of American presidents who have led the USA make a slightly different series of decisions about the space program: the Apollo program becomes not the space shuttle, but a journey to Mars. The departures of Mars explorers in late 1996 (or unfortunate non-departure in the case of the Russians) was a late attempt to use the 'Mars window' which aligns with Earth at long intervals. Far better would have been to launch in 1985. It was Richard Nixon who decided what would happen to Apollo (he needed the money to fight on in Vietnam),

and somehow in Baxter's timeline he manages to find the money for both: the ideal of the Mars voyage does little to inspire peace and both the Vietnam war and the Cold War go on as they really did. When Nixon wrote his fateful document in 1971 it ended the Mars program – in *Voyage* it begins it. NASA would have fourteen years to prepare for the three year journey. That is, would have only fourteen years.

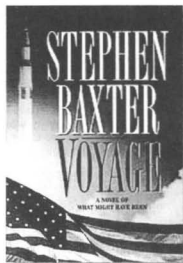
Voyage is a series of interlinked stories, cutting between the three astronauts on their journey out, telling their life stories in-between, and describing the history of NASA and the proving missions on the way. This third element of the story makes harrowing reading: the internal politics, the struggles of contractors and sub-contractors (not Rockwell or Martin or Grumman, but Columbia Aviation, a fiction). But Columbia can only put forward their idea – give NASA the simplest copy of what they've already had – after the failure of Apollo-Nerva. In reality Nerva

was the atomic powered rocket which never got off the test beds in the Nevada desert, but in test orbit in alternate December 1980, the reactor blows, three astronauts lying above it. One of those men, Jim Dana, knows he will die, but he has always wanted to be part of the space program, as his father has been a rocket scientist before him.

In Baxter's plotting, the Dana family are minor but essential, because it is Dana Senior who has recognised that the mission can slingshot off Venus on its way to Mars, and it is Columbia Aviation's recognition of this additional use of free energy that allows them to put in their lowest bid. It is a remarkable conception in the writing, that a scientific curiosity can

be used as an accountant's device to rig a bid, and yet sustain a major part of the plot. The character who uses it, J.K. Lee, is more dubious: a stereotypically driven business tycoon cracking up, but that should not detract from Stephen Baxter's skill in merging science and fiction here.

Remarkably, what I have not done is point out that the central character in *Voyage* is a woman. I will leave her discovery to you.



Stephen Baxter

Vacuum Diagrams

Voyager, 1997, 464pp, £16.99

Reviewed by Andy Mills

Ten years ago a certain S.M. Baxter had his first short story published in *Interzone*. It would be nice to report that this reviewer cast his trusty eye over the contents of said magazine for the BSFA's *Paperback Inferno* and immediately pronounced Baxter a potential new British star of hard sf. Alas, such perspicacity was beyond me: the story, I noted perfunctorily, was 'traditional space fiction' and 'nicely paced'.

Since 1987, of course, the author has metamorphosed into Stephen Baxter and has produced a very respectable body of work within the Xeelee Sequence. *Vacuum Diagrams* pulls together the short fiction in this series. In his foreword, Baxter describes this book as a novel: it isn't. It would even be difficult, despite the linking sections, to call it a fixup. Rather, what we have here is a collection of stories in sequential order, and placed into the context of Baxter's ambitious future history by a narrative framework. For the record, the amount of revision that the twenty-two stories have undergone has varied. For instance, 'The Sun Person' becomes here 'The Sun-People' but

otherwise emerges unscathed, while the central characters in 'Shell' (formerly 'The Bark Spaceship') all seem to have had a change of sex, and the novella, 'The Baryonic Lords', is split into two and has been heavily revised. (Happily for bibliographers, the publishing history of the stories is noted).

There can be few *Vector* readers who are unaware of the Xeelee sequence. In the tradition of Olaf Stapledon, it is nothing less than the life and death of a universe and the life-forms which inhabit it. Humanity expands into space, is conquered by the alien Squeem, shrugs off their occupation, expands again, is conquered by the Qax, overthrows them, and then wages a long war against the shadowy, powerful Xeelee. At the end, when all that is left of humankind is a pitiful band, unaware of their history, it is revealed that a greater war has been taking place, and that the timeline of the universe is not linear. Mapping such a history is indeed an audacious project.

Brian Aldiss has noted that sf is no more written for scientists than ghost stories are written for ghosts, but one cannot help but feel that mathematicians and physicists would comprehend the ideas (and these are indeed stories where the idea is king) in the Xeelee tales, and enjoy the speculation they contain, more than the average reader – certainly more than such as myself, who prefer Baxter's scientific romances and confess much of the text in *Vacuum Diagrams* passes them by. One example, taken more or less at random:

Stephen J. Cannell

Final Victim 

Michael Joseph, 1997, 377 pp, £9.99

Reviewed by Steve Palmer

I looked at the blurb for this novel, saw that it was written by a film and television producer who had previously worked on *The A-Team* and *The Rockford Files*, noticed that the main character was described as a maverick, noted that the author lived in Los Angeles, and finally spotted that the novel's hook was use of the Internet – and suddenly I acquired a mystical power to predict its exact contents!

'This book will be utter rubbish,' I prophesied. And I was right!

In a bog-standard America just like the one on TV, maverick customs officer John Lockwood (who is exactly the same as every other maverick enforcement officer you see on TV) breaks a legendary computer hacker from jail (hey! original!) and tries, with forensic criminologist Karen Dawson, to track down mysterious multi-personality maniac (great idea!) the Wind Minstrel. Amazingly, this maniac wants to kill seven victims, just like in the film *Seven*. Extraordinary. How could different people all have thought of such a terrifically original idea? Anyway, the cardboard trio track the Wind Minstrel through what is laughably described as the darkest recesses of cyberspace, to – and this is truly a fantastically original idea – the swamps of Florida!

Did I mention that the film rights have been sold for a million dollars, and that the author will write the screenplay and produce? You had already guessed? And if you have the same prophetic powers I have, you can imagine the cast. Karen will be a gorgeous leggy twiglet with unusually mobile lips, while John will be craggy – but with great hair. Everyone will speak bluntly in one-syllable words. There will be guns. Everybody will act terrified, except the audience.

This really is depressing stuff. Any hint of originality has been swept away by the antiseptic fluid of American television culture. The characters all say what you expect

'Susan, I've been studying those structures of light. I believe they are sentient. Living things – artificial – inhabiting the buckytube lattice, living and dying in that hemisphere of transmuted regolith.' ... 'I think I see where the metamathematical catalogue has come from. Hassan, I believe the creatures in there are creatures of mathematics – swimming in a Gödelian pool of logic, growing, splitting off from one another like amoebae as they absorb undecidable postulates.' ('The Logic Pool').

The stories in this collection I preferred were those, such as 'Lieserl' and 'Pilot', where Baxter touches on the resilience of humans under stress. In the former, a child is manufactured to undergo a scientific investigation: we share her horror at her aging a year for every day she lives. In the latter, a group of humans try to escape the Squeem-occupied solar system but are tracked by a missile which they surely cannot escape.

There is little doubt that the Xeelee stories benefit from a second reading and, more significantly perhaps as far as new readers are concerned, from being set in context. The framing narrative and the timeline included at the end of the book both serve to illuminate the stories within this collection. And whilst I am not the biggest fan of such science fiction, I cannot but help admire the fact that Baxter has drafted this body of stories to be so consistent with his grandiose vision.

them to say. The plot has that particular fake complexity you get in three-part television thrillers made in America, which means it was probably devised by a computer programme called 'Do Not Upset Our Advertisers'.

What is particularly irritating is that this heap of hack has a quite brilliant cover. What is not so brilliant is that the novel is described as 'in the tradition of *Silence of the Lambs*'.

We know what that means.

Arthur C. Clarke

The Snows of Olympus

Gollancz, 1996, 120pp, £12.99

Reviewed by John Newsinger

Arthur C. Clarke has many claims to be considered the father of contemporary British sf. His fiction has always been an encouragement and celebration of science rather than a social critique or an exploration of character and relationships. He is a man at the hard science end of the sf spectrum, though interestingly enough much of his work is informed by a transcendental, spiritual longing. As well as his fiction, though, Clarke has always been keenly, indeed intimately, concerned with current scientific developments, theories, hypotheses, innovations. This volume reflects that side of his work: here he is propagandising for expeditions to and settlement on Mars.

This handsomely produced volume was first published in 1994, so recent discussions of life on Mars do not figure, but it still has much of interest.

The first part of the book considers how our understanding of Mars has changed over the years, on the failure to send manned expeditions to the planet and on the problems to be confronted and overcome when humans do eventually make it. He discusses Percival Lowell's Mars of canals and oases, which fuelled the imaginations of such different writers as Edgar Rice Burroughs and H.G. Wells; such a romantic view is no longer tenable, though Clarke

makes the point that if you look hard enough it is still possible to see canals! Today we know Mars as a barren planet devoid of life but, by way of compensation, it has 'the most spectacular scenery ever discovered.' The planet's most awesome feature is Olympus Mons, the great volcano three times the height of Everest and 600 kilometres across; proof, for Clarke, that Mars is an exciting, dynamic planet. Her great volcanoes may be slumbering now, 'but not so very long ago in cosmic terms, they were blasting into the thin atmosphere all the chemicals of life, including water: there are dried-up river beds that give clear indication of recent flash floods...' The romantic Mars lives on.

More controversial, perhaps, are some of Clarke's political comments: if it hadn't been for the Vietnam War, Watergate and other American setbacks, there might well have been people on Mars by now. It would be nice to think so, but given the extent to which space exploration was militarily driven, it seems unreasonable to complain that actual wars get in the way.

This first section is interesting, but the second section really grabs the attention. Clarke recalls how, in early 1990, the Virtual Reality Laboratories of Ganador Court in California sent him the Vista 1.0 programme – he had been introduced to the possibility of what he calls 'Virtual Explorations'. The Martian landscape could be reconstructed in virtual reality. From Vista he progressed to Vistapro, which provided him with the ability to terraform Mars in virtuality. What follows is a series of reproductions detailing the creation of 'a garden on Mars'. From the appearance of the first lichen to the 'reappearance' (he insists) of oceans, Clarke's reconstructions show how terraforming could proceed. The trees on this new Eden would reach an astonishing quarter of a kilometre in height!

Throughout this second section, Clarke manages to convey his own excitement at what his virtuality package can accomplish and at what he sees as the Martian future. It is quite a change to read someone so optimistic about the future. One can only hope he is right.

Ellen Datlow (Ed.)

Lethal Kisses

Orion, 1996, 370pp, £16.99

Reviewed by Andy Mills

This is the companion volume to Ellen Datlow's 1995 anthology, *Little Deaths*, which dealt with tales of 'horror and sex'. *Lethal Kisses* adds revenge to the cocktail. In other hands this could have ended up as a batch of similar stories, but Datlow's selection is canny and, as Chris Amies remarked in his review (*Vector* 185) of the earlier volume, 'the variety of approaches is refreshing'. It has to be said that in part this is because some of the stories are not actually about sex, horror and revenge. Pat Murphy's exquisitely funny 'A Flock of Lawn Flamingos', about one remarkable woman's battle with a residents' association's tin pot dictator, features neither sex nor horror and only by stretching a point could it be said to contain revenge. The other humorous tale, Jonathan Lethem's 'Martyr and Pest', most definitely does meet Datlow's instruction to authors 'to employ intriguing motivations for their characters' furies'. In this wicked story one half of a comedy double act is finally revenged on his partner; all along you know what will happen but only in the final words do you find out why. A killer of a punchline...

The remaining treatments are darker. Some are marvellously crafted stories: Michael Swanwick and Jack Dann take us aboard a bizarre cyclical voyage through infinity on a ship from hell ('Ships'). Others are prosaic: 'Foreign Bodies' by Michael Marshall Smith is an examination of relationships in day-to-day London, where revenge is had both by the narrator and his former lover.

Relationships are also the theme of Simon Ings's 'Keeping Alice' (a son, his mother and lover) and Douglas Clegg's poetic 'O, Rare and Most Exquisite' (a gardener and his two lovers). If (yet again) I would be hesitant in describing the latter as a tale of revenge, there is no such uncertainty in David J. Schow's 'A Punch in the Doughnut', where a so-called friend with an evil tongue receives his just deserts. In M.M. O'Driscoll's dark story of a victim of sexual abuse ('Rare Promise') the revenge is inflicted tragically not on the dead perpetrator but on a fellow victim. Finally amongst the highlights, Roberta Lannes paints a picture of racism in America; 'Butcher's Logic' is a most subtle horror story.

Nine excellent short stories out of a total of nineteen is a pretty good innings, and I am sure that several of those remaining would be picked out by another reviewer: perhaps Joyce Carol Oates's disturbing piece, or those by Richard Christian Matheson and Thomas Tessier. It is interesting to note that of the nineteen stories, eighteen were commissioned; the nineteenth is a reprint and goes unmentioned by Datlow in her introduction. So could (the worthy but unremarkable) 'The Dreadful Day of Judgement' by one Ruth Rendell have been included by Orion in order to feature its author's name on the cover of *Lethal Kisses* and thus increase sales? Perish the thought!

Ellen Datlow & Terri Windling (Eds.)

Ruby Slippers, Golden Tears

Acorn Books, 1997, 416pp, \$5.99

Reviewed by K. V. Bailey

This is the third in a sequence of anthologies of original contemporary folk/fairy tales. As is pointed out in an historically-oriented Introduction, the variations that a handed-down plot can support are limited but the scope for interpretation is great. Many of the contributors find a fresh angle or a different shade of meaning to a traditional story by shifting the focus from a central character to a secondary one, or from 'hero' to 'villain'. Milbra Burch does the first in 'The Huntsman's Story', a macabre negative print of 'Snow White', and in the poem 'After Push Comes to Shove', which is the witch's commentary on 'Hansel and Gretel'. Garry Kilworth achieves a 'hero' to 'villain' reversal in 'Masterpiece' which, while not exactly earning sympathy for the Rumpelstiltskin counterpart, shows his Faustian victim in a poorish light. Another ambivalent myth-suffused (Beauty/Psyche) story is Tanith Lee's 'The Beast', where the masking of the noble by the ignoble is reversed.

All of those stories legitimately explore meanings and relativisms implicit in their originals; others, while ingenious, are more artificially contrived and have less impact. Susan Wade's 'Ruby Slippers' attempts a showbiz amalgam of Frank Baum and Hans Anderson; and Nancy Collins's 'Billy Fearless', while highly entertaining, does little more than translate Grimm to Kentucky. Some bits of scene-shifting, however, do produce new dimensions of fantasy, as do Farida Shapiro's beautiful underwater Briar Rose poem, 'This Century of Sleep', and Lisa Goldstein's 'Brother Bear', which takes Goldilocks into tribal hunting territory, skilfully relating human/animal encounters to totemistic practices.

Several of the best stories embroider a theme rather than a single prototype: Delia Sherman, with her imaginative golem-type alchemical tale, 'The Printer's Daughter', or Neil Gaiman and Ellen Streiber in, respectively, 'The White Road' (a long a brilliant poem) and 'The Fox Wife' (a novella of traditional Japan), both centred on the 'lady into fox' mode of animal possession and metamorphosis. The late John Brunner also contributes an effectively symbolic oriental story, 'The Emperor Who Had Never Seen a Dragon'. This enjoyable volume ends with a usefully-annotated list of recommended reading.

Encyclopaediae Galactica

John Clute & John Grant *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (Eds.)

Orbit, 1997, 1049pp, £50.00

Kim Newman (Ed.) *The BFI Companion to Horror*

Cassell, 1996, 352pp, £19.99

David Pringle (Ed.) *The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*

Carlton, 1996, 304pp, £19.99

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

The Encyclopedia of Fantasy edited by John Clute and John Grant (with, let's be absolutely fair in this, Contributing Editors Mike Ashley, Roz Kaveney, David Langford and Ron Tiner, and Consultant Editors David G. Hartwell and Gary Westfahl) is the companion to *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* edited by John Clute and Peter Nicholls and published in 1993. At least, it brings with it the same weight of authority (not to mention physical weight), but it might be fairer to compare it to the first edition of the Nicholls/Clute *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* which came out in 1979. It is, in other words, a book that is welcomed because it goes where none has gone before (other than David Pringle's *St James Guide to Fantasy Writers* (1996), there are no encyclopedic reference works on fantasy, and there are precious few serious and valuable critical studies) and which will inevitably be used as a standard source of information by all of us working in the field. Nevertheless, it lacks some of the completeness of the second edition of the SF *Encyclopedia*, largely because it is mapping entirely new territory.

Fantasy is a far older literature than science fiction, in fact you can make a case that all storytelling contains an element of fantasy. Out of that age has grown diffusion; if writers as diverse as Homer and Thomas Pynchon, Stephen King and J.R.R. Tolkien can be described as writing fantasy, what can the word mean? It is, as Clute describes it, 'an incredibly porous term'. The SF *Encyclopedia* contained no entry on science fiction, the entire work served in place of a definition, it both set the boundaries and covered the territory of its subject. The difference, and inherent difficulty, of the Fantasy *Encyclopedia* is shown by the fact that there is an entry on Fantasy, an article whose primary function is to draw in the bounds of fantasy to limits manageable within the space of one book. Thus: 'clearly to call so much of 20th-century literature fantasy is radically to misunderstand the enterprises of Modernism and Postmodernism, and thereby to strip the term "fantasy" of any specific meaning'. One might argue that, on the contrary, to so deny the fantasy in Modernism and, particularly, Postmodernism is radically to misunderstand the enterprise of fantasy – though such an argument is to play games with the potential scope of this book, and we do have to be realistic about what can be covered in one volume. However, one is still a little uneasy with such strictures

given that the specific meaning derived is: 'Fantasy is a way to tell stories about the fantastic'.

The trouble is that such arguments are an inevitable concomitant of this book (and are very possibly intended to be) because the editors and contributors were working against almost impossible odds. There is a huge arena of discussion and yet there is virtually no critical language. When the Bulgarian critic Todorov tried to draw up an analysis of the literary fantastic it ended up balancing so finely on the necessity for 'uncertainty' that he knew of only one work which actually fitted his definition: *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James. Against such a background, Clute and Grant and their associates have practically had to invent an entire critical language for fantasy, so massive an enterprise that one wonders that they ever had time to do anything else like write an *Encyclopedia* at the same time. In fact, the biggest criticism that can be laid against the Fantasy *Encyclopedia* (but it does have a crippling effect upon the book) is that it contains no index of theme entries in the way that the SF *Encyclopedia* did. Most of the terms and themes used in the SF *Encyclopedia* were already familiar, here we have to juggle with Taproot Tales and Wainscot and Instauration Fantasy, hardly instinctive terms that would be automatically understood or searched for by the book's natural audience. The most important of these innovations, however, the analysis of the shape of fantasy which is used throughout the work and which is represented by terms such as Wrongness, Thinning and Healing. Such an analysis would warrant a book in its own right, but as with so many other of the invented terms in the *Encyclopedia* we must now wait to see if they have a life outside the work, if they prove useful in future critical study of Fantasy. But an *Encyclopedia* should be a pulling together of existing knowledge, that it has, at the same time, to venture out into unknown territory itself is a handicap on its primary function as a reference.

There are, of course, other problems associated with the newness of this enterprise. Cross-references to Gwyneth Jones who turns out to be inexplicably absent from the book itself, other omissions, minor errors, and so forth. On the whole, though, such quibbles are of minimal impact upon the worth of the book as a whole, but further evidence that this will be a book whose worth will increase in future editions – which we can only and sincerely hope will follow.

How little these errors affect the usefulness of the Fantasy *Encyclopedia* is highlighted by the problems with the monumentally mistitled *The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. It seems there is a new *encyclopedia* of science fiction every year or so, and they all have their particular quirks or angles. The Clute/Nicholls work, which has the greatest claim to being definitive, is clearly weighted towards the literary genre, absence of any illustration in the book means that there is an inevitable failure to provide a full assessment of artists and film. This was slightly corrected in Clute's *Science Fiction: The Illustrated Encyclopedia* (1995) where decisions over what was to be included seemed to depend on the quality of the illustration available and a number of errors on written

sf crept into the text. The latest work seems to regard sf as primarily a dramatic medium, so by far the greater part of the book is given over to heavily illustrated coverage of movies, TV and the radio. Books and authors are covered in a rather haphazard manner, some entries (Paul McAuley, Kim Stanley Robinson) contain discussion of the content of certain books, others (Frederik Pohl, Keith Roberts) are no more than a very incomplete list of titles. The weighting of the entries is curious – I cannot understand why Paul Park, for instance, should be given twice the space that Frederik Pohl receives. Entries contain odd gaps – no mention of *The Affirmation* or *The Glamour* in the article on Christopher Priest, but *The Quiet Woman* is in there. Some entries come right up to date (*Blue Mars* (1996) is included in the Kim Stanley Robinson article) others don't (no mention of the Arthur C. Clarke Award-winning *Fairyland* (1995) in the article on Paul McAuley). Even in the section which is clearly of greatest interest to the packagers, that on movies, the information given is so minimal (an average entry

contains around 200 words, some are less than 50 words including credits) that it is hard to imagine anybody getting anything from it. And though it may be interesting to learn, for instance, in the entry on *The Bride of Frankenstein* that Universal 'degraded the whole concept during five further movies', I could have wished for at least a sentence telling me how they did so.

If you do want a reference book on film, far better to turn to *The BFI Companion to Horror* edited by Kim Newman. The entries are still short, but they are sharp and to the point, they give you everything you need to know and are balanced by a firm critical judgement which lets you know that the contributors really have seen all these movies and are writing from deep personal knowledge. It is also far more comprehensive, ranging from brief one-sentence acknowledgements of bit-part actors to long, critically valuable discussions of major themes and films, actors and directors from Witchcraft to *Cat People*, from Peter Cushing to David Lynch.

Neil Gaiman & Ed. Kramer (Eds.) *Sandman: Book of Dreams*

Voyager, 1997, 293pp, £5.99

Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

This is a shared-world/spin-off anthology. It is also *The Sandman*. Is the reviewer ideologically sound for pointing out that it's the one, or somehow making excuses for uncritical enthusiasm when pointing out that it's the other? The only excuse is that this is, in fact, one of the best such anthologies that I have read. Spin-offs from something critically acclaimed don't always work (witness the drab *Babylon 5* books) but most of the contributors to this collection have captured the atmosphere of Gaiman's enigmatic comics series.

In a sense, George Alec Effinger is covering obvious ground in 'Seven Nights in Slumberland'; but while it may be obvious to recall that much earlier this century another pioneering talent was, in comics form, exploring the Dreamworlds to chilling and exotic effect, obvious isn't the same thing as effective. Effinger fuses the realm of Morpheus with that of Windsor McKay's 'Little Nemo' strips so effectively that his story becomes more than an exercise in influences or parallels and develops its own unsettling autonomy. In contrast, Will Shetterley's 'Splatter' and Barbara Hambly's 'Each Damp Thing' are fully focussed on Gaiman's own creation. 'Splatter' revisits the 'Cereal Convention' and if, as Gaiman says in his introduction to the story, it's also an accurate picture of 'the whole signing tour thing' – well, don't become a best-selling author, kids! Hambly's story is set firmly in the Dreaming and illuminates the relationship between Cain and Abel; the last few sentences are quite heartbreaking.

Most stories have – as does the original series – something strange and memorial not exactly at their hearts but lurking somewhere slightly off-centre. Tad Williams's 'The Writer's Child', for example, gives us the souls of poets in unnerving incarnations. Many echo folktales as the Endless operate within other cultures or historical epochs, while Lisa Goldstein's 'Stronger Than Desire' explains a phenomenon which appeared seemingly out of nowhere in the south of Medieval France. If there is a 'best' story in this compendium of big names and award-winners, it has to be Susanna Clarke's 'Stopp't-Clock Yard', a splendid, elegant tale set in the location where Morpheus seems so uncannily at home: 17th Century London. More than any other story in the

collection it has the shiver of lucid dreams from beginning to end. This was, for my money, the story of 1996.

Occasionally, we get reminded too strongly that Morpheus – and his elder sister, Death – are cute style icons as well as anthropomorphic allegorical personifications. I have no idea what Tori Amos, in the piece reprinted from her introduction to *Death: The High Cost of Living* is actually saying, but it sounds really, y'know, cool. And there are probably a few too many references to streetwise babes in black or skinny neurotics with burning eyes scattered throughout. But that is a stylistic feature of this book as shared-world anthology and we'll overlook it, the quality of the rest is too high.

Jonathan Gems

Mars Attacks! #1

Signet, 1997, 283pp, £5.99

Reviewed by Gary Dalkin

Most novelisations suffer from being written by an author otherwise unconnected with the making of the film in question. Against a tight deadline, sometimes without even seeing the finished film, they struggle to write a book that will not contradict a movie which may still be in the editing stages. Jonathan Gems has the distinct advantage of being the co-author (with an uncredited Tim Burton) of the *Mars Attacks!* screenplay: he is therefore intimately acquainted with the material and presumably has a vested interest in making sure the novelisation reflects upon the film as well as possible.

The result is a book which is a mildly pleasurable read, which transcribes the events of the film faithfully into text, adds some background to the characters, provides much detailed scene-setting and a little discursive humour of the sort which can be achieved in print but not on film. What it doesn't do is greatly expand upon any of the events in the film or, more seriously, capture the bizarre experience that is watching *Mars Attacks!* in a good cinema. There is, after all, very little point in faithfully relaying in words the sequence of a visual joke, and *Mars Attacks!*, based upon visual images (the now-famous Topps trading cards) rather than a literary source, is nothing if not a fabulous visual joke. Also missing, of course, are the other elements which make the film such fun: the excellent performances, Danny Elfman's music and the remarkable spectacle – here recounted in very matter-of-fact prose indeed.

The moralising about the state of humanity which was implicit – near subliminal – in the movie is here elevated near to the fore. Each chapter is given a serious/ironic heading from literature or poetry, and Gems includes several passages of philosophical sermonising which are presumably meant to be taken seriously but risk being pompous for being so wildly out of context.

It takes about twice as long to read this book as to watch the movie, and it provides about a fifth of the enjoyment. All of which makes it a rather pointless endeavour. The pictures are nice, though: my advice is go and see the film again.

Steven Gould & Laura J. Mixon *Greenwar*
TOR Books, 1997, 384pp, \$24.95

Lincoln Preston *Mount Dragon* (h)
Bantam, 1997, 476pp, £5.99

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

Genre thrillers have always borrowed devices from science fiction in order to soup up the threatened holocausts which their heroes must fight to avert. Because the thriller formula requires a successful conclusion, however, the devices in question must in the end be subverted – thus relegating science to the status of a seedy manufacturer of damp squibs. The contemporary fashion in paranoia has, of course, advanced one step beyond the old adage that 'there are things man was not meant to know', so modern thrillers tend not to put science itself in the pillory, but the transition to an era of 'there are things men are not meant to do' has been plagued by the difficulty of figuring out who, exactly, might want to do the things in question. The conventional answer, for the moment, is lunatics and big business – but the argument sustaining that answer is so weak as to generate acute problems of plausibility.

Greenwar starts conventionally enough, with heroic terrorists launching a campaign of sabotage against plants which are carrying forward big business's customary hidden agenda (the destruction of the ecosphere by pollution). Unfortunately, the terrorists' green credentials make them ill-equipped to serve as outright villains, so their cell has to be taken over by a mysterious puppet-master of dubious sanity, whose morals are as murky as her motives. Her target is Gulfstream, a seemingly-virtuous enterprise involving the extraction of food and cheap energy from the sea – but the hero and heroine would be unable to drum up sufficient dramatic tension if all they had to guard against were a few mad bombers, so they too must be faced with a series of mysterious enemies within their own organization, who subvert the glorious achievements of their virtuous capitalism with the insidious threat of research grants!!! (Funny enough, no matter how hard I try to make that phrase look suitably menacing, I just can't quite manage it.) The inevitable result of all this desperation is that *Greenwar*, like most technothrillers, eventually slouches its way to a muddled anticlimax in which we never do figure out exactly who the villains were or why they were trying to do the crazy things they were eventually prevented from doing.

Lincoln Preston's *Mount Dragon* is clearly intended to follow *The Relic* into production as a Hollywood blockbuster, being carefully equipped with everything a high-powered movie needs nowadays: a secret research centre whose entire staff (bar the hero and the heroine) has been driven insane by dodgy blood transfusions; a Bill Gates clone; a legendary treasure trove; a genetically-engineered doomsday virus; and, of course, a countdown conclusion with a plot set amid spectacular scenery and a counterplot set in virtual reality. Compared with *Greenwar*, whose sole qualification for movie marketing is a part custom-designed for Sigourney

Weaver, *Mount Dragon* is really slick stuff – but it is preposterous for exactly the same reasons as its competitor.

Like Steven Gould and Laura Mixon – who couldn't concoct a plausible explanation of who was doing what and why, and thus were forced to prevaricate – the two collaborators who work as Lincoln Preston (Lincoln Child and Douglas Preston) couldn't quite make up their minds whether their villain would function more effectively if he were barking mad. Having decided at one point that he must be – else his behaviour could not be so blatantly self-contradictory – they carefully gave him an armful of the dodgy blood. Then they backtracked, presumably because the grand climax would have been even sillier than it is (not that there's much margin for error) and would have looked conspicuously second-hand if said villain were required to duplicate the spectacular collapse of the poor sap in the prelatory tesser. In the end, it is his embodiment of the big business outlook which is left to bear the moral burden unassisted – and the frank desperation of his attempts to explain why he was attempting to market his doomsday virus bear eloquent witness to the authors' own desperation in trying to make this farrago of nonsense hold together.

By virtue of their chosen subject-matter, both *Greenwar* and *Mount Dragon* are forced to raise significant ethical questions; by virtue of their chosen genre they are forced to address those questions with the moral intelligence and sensibility of an imbecile. But hey, guys, it's just business, okay – and if the writers get the movie deal, it'll be big business. They'd have to be mad not to go for it.

Jacqueline Harpman *The Mistress of Silence* (h)
Harvill Press, 1997, 184pp, £8.99

Reviewed by Barbara Davies

Translated from the French by Ros Schwartz and published with the financial support of the French Ministry of Culture and Communications, *The Mistress of Silence* comes bearing plaudits from *Le Monde* and *Figaro*. Clearly, this is a worthy book meant to be treated with respect; I doubt if it will be to the taste of the majority of sf readers, though.

Forty women are imprisoned in a cage in an underground bunker. The youngest, the unnamed narrator, has been locked up since she was a child, since 'the appalling catastrophe'. In the cage the lights are always on and the women eat and sleep when the male guards tell them to – they have no sense of time until the narrator devises a method of counting her own heartbeats. Food and clothing are in short supply, so the women learn to make most of what they have, patching clothes and using hair for thread. Rules about no touching and no hiding are enforced by the guards with whips. The narrator, who has always felt isolated among the older women, spends most of her time daydreaming.

One day a siren sounds and the guards rush off, by chance leaving the key in the cage door. The narrator seizes the chance to turn the key, and the women emerge timidly into a deserted landscape. At first fearful that the guards will return, they eventually gain confidence and start to make plans. Taking food from the bunker, they set out to look for other people. It is a strange world that may not even be Earth – the constellations are unfamiliar – and there are no birds or animals, few insects, and certainly no people. Then the women stumble across another bunker, identical to their own, and find in its depths a cage full of forty corpses. These women were not so lucky when the siren sounded; their cage remained locked and they starved to death. This pattern is soon repeated, though the next bunker contains the corpses of forty men.

The women continue their journey, finding more bunkers full of corpses as their hopes of finding anyone else alive gradually disappear. The urge to travel diminishes: they build themselves a makeshift settlement, with food no problem since there will always be supplies in the now-deserted bunkers. Memories of life before the cage haunt all except the narrator. Some women become lovers and as the years pass their numbers decrease until only the narrator is left. Once more, she sets out on her journey...

Though *The Mist of Silence* has science fictional trappings, it is not the usual sf. Genre considerations seem to have been irrelevant to Harpman: the ecology of her planet is unconvincing and she doesn't seem to have bothered imagining let alone providing the society and events which led to this bizarre situation. Neither the protagonist's nor the reader's many questions are ever answered, which makes for frustrating reading. This isn't a story but rather a thought experiment, an exploration of a specific situation: how someone is affected by lack of all cultural, emotional and physical contact. Unfortunately the end result is sometimes an interminable internal monologue. It is hard to know if something got lost in the translation or if I was simply the wrong reader for this book.

Harry Harrison *The Stainless Steel Rat Goes to Hell* (1)
Orion, 1997, 245pp, £16.99
The Stainless Steel Rat
Orion, 1997, 185pp, £4.99
The Stainless Steel Rat's Revenge
Orion, 1997, 199 pp, £4.99

Reviewed by Colin Bird

The release of a new Slippery Jim diGriz novel in hardback is accompanied by paperback reissue of the first two books in the series. By my count, this takes the tally to nine Stainless Steel Rat novels and it's interesting to see if the law of diminishing returns is having any effect on the lovable rogue's adventures.

Humphrey Hawksley & Simon Holberton *Dragon Strike: The Millennium War* (1)
Sidgwick & Jackson, 1997, 387pp, £16.99

Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

Near-future nuclear war speculations enjoyed a vogue during the 80s: Brigadier John Hackett's *The Third World War* set the template and legions of Cold Warriors latched on to the message of looming Soviet threat which only incinerating the Earth could prevent. With the fall of the USSR, the genre seemed to vanish too – but here it is again, with the venue switched from Europe to the Far East in an attempt to bring the warning up to date.

The warning here is that, mesmerised by the economic gains to be made from the emerging (and huge) Chinese market, the democratic West is ignoring China's ancient and unresolved territorial ambitions, particularly against its old enemy Vietnam and the 'splittists' of Taiwan. The authors, journalists specialising in Chinese and East Asian affairs, may have a point – one notes with glum despair how concerns about China's human rights record are routinely abandoned whenever they appear to threaten trade

The first book (*The Stainless Steel Rat*, 1961), was a fix-up of magazine stories which included the author's first ever professional sale. The Rat is a scheming criminal whose endearingly nefarious schemes quickly land him in the hands of the law. Our anti-hero finds himself press-ganged into service with the secretive Special Corps and sent on a spiralling series of fast-paced adventures. The novel has the raw energy of the best pulp fiction and the Rat's rampant individualism makes a change from more anodyne pulp heroes. Had Adam Smith met Slippery Jim diGriz I think most of his economic theories would have ended up in the shredder.

Revenge, the sequel, appeared in 1970 and found the Rat living in domestic (if illegal) bliss with Angelina – his arch enemy turned beloved wife. Soon The Special Corps have enlisted the Rat for another galaxy spanning mission. This time the novel contains one extended scenario and signs of flab begin to appear in the pacing. Also the Rat's penchant for causing explosions and running around a lot doesn't really jibe with the stealth required to carry out his mission.

And so *The Stainless Steel Rat Goes To Hell*: well, as you've probably guessed, not really. This is a science-fictional Hell involving parallel universes and trendily unconvincing String Theory. The book is still a nonsense adventure but the well of invention seems almost dry and it's hard to see any but the most hardcore Rat fans enjoying this effort. Contrast the wittily named 'Thing' that the Rat invents to disable a whole fleet of spacecruisers in *Revenge* with the laboured pages of discussion about interdimensional travel that bulk out *Hell*. Indeed, the *Star Trek* writers could learn a salutary lesson from the first two books which throw in techno-gewgaws aplenty with nary a jot of technobabble.

The best feature of the Rat; his low cunning, seems to get less of a workout as the series advances. In *Hell* he spends half of the novel rescuing his wife from the clutches of a mad scientist and the other half trying to save the universe. This altruistic heroism seems at odds with the initial appeal of diGriz as the poacher turned gamekeeper and erodes much of the fun of these books. But the first two novels are fine examples of light-hearted sf and we must be grateful to Orion for reissuing them with appropriately tongue in cheek covers by Walter Velez.

contracts – but the resulting 'novel', rather than the racy near-future techno-thriller one might expect, is instead a blow-by-blow diary-style account of the conflict, complete with dates and times and numbers of aircraft shot down and ground troops captured. One has the sense that the authors didn't so much write it as wargame it.

One has the impression, too, that to make their speculation more interesting the authors have concentrated on what it is *possible* for a nation-state to do, rather than what is *likely*. Thus, while it may be quite possible for China to launch unprovoked simultaneous attacks on a number of neighbouring states while threatening nuclear strikes on the Western powers to persuade them to keep their distance, the high political and strategic risks of such actions suggest that it would be much more likely to concentrate on achieving one objective before attempting the next. Even the most aggressive nations, acting in their perceived best interests, will exercise a modicum of caution – so that, for example, the real China would never dare sink a US naval ship, as this book's China does, because US public opinion would demand a disproportionate response which would, in turn (if, as here, nuclear weapons have been deployed), force it to

the brink, thus negating all its war aims and any war achievements.

In short, I am not convinced by the authors' scenario – not least because they seem to assume that the China of the very near future will be identical to the China of the 60s and 70s, a regimented peasant economy under the total control of an autocratic communist leadership. We know that Chinese society is

now changing fast and that the editorial rants which appear in the Beijing newspapers are increasingly unrepresentative of the emerging middle classes: they want Rollexes, fridge-freezers, video libraries, even foreign holidays. If China really did declare war against Vietnam and Taiwan, I suspect most of them would refuse to go.

Garry Jenkins *Empire Building: The Remarkable Real Life Story of Star Wars*
Simon & Schuster, 1997, 304pp, £12.99

Paul M. Sammon *Future Noir: The Making of Blade Runner*
Orion, 1997, 441pp, £17.99

Reviewed by Gary Dalkin

In 20 years of film-buffery I have never read, nor even heard of, such a comprehensive account of the making of a film as that presented by Paul M. Sammon in *Future Noir*. Like *Blade Runner* itself, the book is fantastically detailed, littered with small flaws and debatable points. It is unquestionably one of the finest film-related books ever written, a book which does justice to its inspiration, the benchmark for how this sort of book should be done. That it is about one of the half-dozen best films ever made is, in some ways, merely the icing on the cake.

So what do you get for your money? 441 pages which tell you virtually everything anyone but the most obsessive fan could want to know about how *Blade Runner* came to be made and why the film ended up on screen as it did. The author was involved with *Blade Runner* almost from the beginning, having been assigned by the US media magazine *Cinefantastique* to write a detailed article on the filming. His interest in the film remained long after the production, and *Future Noir* is the result. It is built around a core of over 100 hours of interviews with the film makers (the dustjacket claims 200 hours, one of the small flaws mentioned above).

Beginning with a young Hampton Francher deciding to break into the film business by cheaply acquiring the rights to a little-known novel he imagined would make a good chase movie, Sammon methodically takes us through the deal-making, the company politics, misunderstandings, financial pressures, technical limitations, personalities, dreams, script revisions and pragmatic compromises which resulted in the 1982 release. He recounts the tense and combative shoot, before explaining all the major special effects work, editing decisions, the music score and the late addition of the narration and 'happy ending'. Then we come to the release itself, the bad press and indifferent public. Next is the rediscovery of the film on rental video, the growing cult, the screenings of a 'workprint' which lead to the semi-restoration of *Blade Runner* in the so-called 'Director's Cut' and just why that Director's Cut still falls some way short of the film Ridley Scott intended to make.

Along the way, Sammon constantly illustrates the enormous attention to thematic and visual detail in the film, conclusively resolves the 'missing replicant' controversy and provides insights into several remarkable scenes which were never filmed due to budgetary reasons. These commercial pressures, plus the demand to make a film which everyone could understand – read this book and be astonished by the number of intelligent people who simply could not grasp something as simple as the meaning of the unicorn – fully explain why *Blade Runner* is about as good as movies ever get, and why we will never see the full complexity of the best written sf in the cinema.

Beyond all the above, the book provides a 20-page interview with Ridley Scott, plus appendices listing the differences between the various editions of the film on (US) laserdiscs and videotapes, the official and bootleg soundtrack albums, websites and a bibliography.

Future Noir isn't perfect: there are many minor flaws which I don't have the space to detail here, some typographical, others tiny errors of fact or semantics. Also, presumably for reasons of cost, the many photographs are reproduced in a grainy black-and-white which utterly fails to do justice to the magnificent visual detailing of the film to which the text constantly refers. What is needed is a deluxe edition with 100 full frame glossy reprints of the images under discussion, as it is you really need to read this book in front of a TV with a tape of the Director's Cut. Even so, if you've any interest in the film you should read this book; if you think *Blade Runner* is the most over-rated nonsense ever filmed, read this book – it will change your mind; if you just love cinema and want to know how much hard work and ingenuity goes into making a film, read this book; and if you have any dreams or aspirations to work in the film industry, read this book – I doubt you will ever find a better primer.

Empire Building attempts to do the same sort of thing for *Star Wars* but it is much more superficial. Still informative, it lacks the overwhelming detail of *Future Noir*, and while being very much centred on the one film, it goes further to include a brief biography of George Lucas and an account of his other pre- and post-*Star Wars* work. The book gains by having some well-reproduced behind-the-scenes photos, and loses with a very difficult to remove sticker bonded to the dustjacket. While we learn such remarkable things as several 20th Century Fox executives falling asleep at an early screening of the movie, the book clearly suffers from being 'unauthorised' and is only able to report Lucas's thoughts at second hand – though all sources are scrupulously acknowledged.

Unfortunately, unlike Sammon, Garry Jenkins is merely a man doing a competent job to a deadline. Several errors reveal he is not a genre movie fan, and as the book goes on the mistakes become increasingly frequent – sure evidence that the book was rushed to cash-in on the re-release of the *Star Wars* trilogy. For instance, Jenkins believes that the title, 'Episode IV: A New Hope' was present from the very first public screenings of *Star Wars*, not added for the 1979 re-release prints. Most amazing of all, though, is his notion that John Carpenter was responsible for making the *Nightmare On Elm Street* films!

While Jenkins has conducted several interviews for this book – notably with producer Gary Kurtz, Sir Alec Guinness, Dave Prowse, Peter Mayhew, Kenny Baker, Charles Lippincott and John Dykstra – a lot of the material will be familiar with dedicated fans. With no fresh comments from Lucas himself, the three main stars or composer John Williams, just to start at the top, *Empire Building* must remain a very long way from definitive. Set against *Future Noir*, a masterpiece of its kind, the feeling of bandwagon-jumping is only reinforced by the very unauthorised 'toy' rebel Y-Wing which (dis)graces the cover.

Diana Wynne Jones

Minor Arcana

Gollancz, 1996, 287 pp, £16.99

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

What is the difference between fiction for adults and for children – or at least that curious brand of children's literature known as teenage fiction? The question is relevant, because anyone, adult or child, with a taste for serious, quirky fantasy has been reading Diana Wynne Jones's novels for years, regardless of the fact that they are almost invariably marketed as being for children. Now comes what is puffed as her 'first adult collection of stories'. Yet what are probably the most 'adult' of the six stories and one novella gathered here, 'The Master', a story of dark sexual menace, and 'Dragon Reserve, Home Eight', a tale of loss of innocence and alien invasion, both first appeared in collections for children, *Hidden Turnings* and *Warlock at the Wheel* respectively. Meanwhile the two thinnest and most lightweight stories, 'The Sage of Theare', a slender fable of gods and order and human imperfection which reads like a Borges story rewritten for ten-year-olds and 'nad and Dan adn Quaffy', which, despite the occasional 'adult' word, is the sort of silly, predictable 'ghost in the wordprocessor' story that second-rate writers tend to aim at undemanding adolescent audiences, both first appeared in adult anthologies.

The truth is, probably, that apart from some overt references to sexuality and threat, there is absolutely no difference in content between stories aimed at adults and those aimed at children. The difference, so far as there is one, lies in the writing itself. Adults, in addition to a murky subject matter, are able to tolerate a murky prose style and a paucity of plot; children have little patience for such writing and demand therefore a clarity of writing and a strong spine of story running throughout the work. Diana Wynne Jones is one of those rare writers who has managed to achieve such

clarity without the simplicity that is normally its concomitant.

This is, perhaps, best demonstrated by the finest story in the collection, 'The True State of Affairs', actually an early story though it only surfaced in the NESFA Press collection, *Everard's Ride* [1995], and shows none of the characteristics usually associated with a journeyman work, in fact it is one of the most subtle novellas I have read for some time. It is a complex tale, concerning a war of liberation and betrayal in a distant land, a woman imprisoned for reasons she knows not, homosexuality and friendship, the philosophy of kingship, a relationship carried on at a distance and full of never-fully-understood implications. All this and more is going on throughout the story of Emily, a woman from our England who has been transported (we know not how or why) to another realm, one where she is imprisoned in a dank castle. There she glimpses in a distant courtyard another prisoner, Asgrim, a noble who is at the head of the rebellion now going on outside the castle walls. The two exchange notes, but the world is strange to Emily and she is never quite sure of meanings or implications. Her gaoler, meanwhile, the unloved and unlovely Wolfram, knows he is in love with Asgrim's son and imagines he is friends with Emily. A great weight of affairs hangs on this tightly circumscribed knot of relationships, though Emily can never be sure exactly how or why. This is a complex stew, more than enough to sustain many a longer novel, and since it is told through Emily's prison journal it must necessarily be full of ellipses and omissions, yet at any point in the tale we are always absolutely clear about what is happening, how much is known, what might be guessed; and despite a very narrow stage the development of events moves at a pace that keeps mystery and anticipation at a sustained high. This is not, and clearly was never intended to be, a story for children, yet it has the virtues of storytelling that marks out good children's fiction as much as it makes for welcome and enthralling fiction for adults.

Gwyneth Jones

Phoenix Cafe (1)

Gollancz, 1997, 298pp, £16.99

Reviewed by Chris Amies

'Now the Aleutians can go home. So here we are at the end of the story. An Aleutian and a human: maybe, at last, able to meet as equals.'

This, the third of Gwyneth Jones's 'Aleutians' novels, takes place in the decadence of the Aleutian residence on Earth. Humans have been seduced by the allure of the alien; for the last three hundred years, since the Aleutians announced their presence to a Women's Conference in Thailand in 2038, they have been making themselves over in the Aleutian way. This place of announcement says something of what the Aleutians represent, especially in this lush and nearly overwrought third volume, where the lines between human female and Aleutian are blurred.

Catherine, who annoys and delights the reader, and is no doubt supposed to, is a 'half-caste': a bodily-altered human who could pass for alien, who spends much of her time in the entourage of the Aleutian bigwig Maitri (the lead character of the previous volume, *North Wind*, was Maitri's librarian, a pretty boygirl alien called Bella). Catherine is either a

bit of a snob ('Youro [i.e. Europe] is huge, but the inner circle is tiny', that's to say, those who matter, don'tchaknow) or else she really is obsessed. Especially so when she starts an affair with Misha, who is human but equally entranced by the alien (and if he dies trying to love them, as in James Tiptree Jr's 'And I Awoke and Found Me Here...', he won't really mind). There is a Baudelairean decadence about, and Catherine flings herself into it wholeheartedly.

The Aleutians, noseless intersex space-nomads that they are, are surely some of the finest aliens yet created in SF. Their biology is humanoid but different: whereas humans spend much of their time keeping clean, Aleutians encourage symbiotes; they despair at the fragmentation of human society (how, one of them asks, can the poor not belong to somebody? With us, they would each belong to some clan, and so you wouldn't have outcasts). They also take up the arts of the world they have come to, especially gardening, though their choices of planting baffle some of the humans. But while their world continues almost serenely on with its biological computers and fog of information (it's a fog that provides information, not impedes it), the humans are going further and



further towards forsaking the real world for a virtuality, everything being run in virtual labs.

The Aleutians, however, cannot give up the real world and before they leave Earth forever will have helped maintain its reality and viability:

They passed into one of the neighbourhood's small stretches of cropland: beanfields in indigo leaf and flower that gave off a haze of sweet scent. They had been unable to tolerate the idea of ordinary people who could not feed themselves. Every inhabitant of an Aleutian city had to have a piece of earth...

If humanity is forgetting its roots (pun entirely intended: this is a book full of puns and jokes), the Aleutians haven't lost touch, and nurture when the lesser race is unwilling. It is perhaps this very fecundity, the fact that Aleutians cannot become sterile nor give their consciousness over to machines without actually dying, that attracts humans to them. The male-dominated / human society has failed, and the Aleutian / female points the way forward; but at the same time, it cannot entirely take over: too many have followed its

example. As Sidney Carton said in *North Wind*: 'race is bullshit, culture is everything'. It's a first contact that has lasted three hundred years and will leave both races involved utterly changed; unlike the standard cynical view seen in *Star Trek* and its contemporaries, where the humans learn absolutely nothing from any race they meet.

Aleutian and human, so, male and female; after the Gender Wars, which Lalith describes as 'male need versus female independence' (males need females desperately because otherwise they have no offspring), which begs a couple of questions right away: females presumably need males to have offspring – unless they use Artificial Insemination – and what of males who don't feel a need to reproduce themselves?, a kind of peace seems to have been achieved: "I'm not sure there's such a thing as 'being female'," Agathe shrugged. "Being female is being human, and able to bring up children. It's not a special state." Loving the alien – and making it alien no more – seems to be the only solution.

Paul Kearney

The Heretic Kings
Gollancz, 1996, 320pp, £16.99

Reviewed by Mark Plummer

The end of *Hawkwood's Voyage* (1995), volume 1 of this particular sequence, left the continent which we shall think of as Absolutely-Not-Late-Medieval-Europe-At-All-Good-Gracious-No in a state of uneasy balance. The Turks ... sorry, Merduks, whose armies were harrying the eastern borders, have gone into winter quarters but there is the threat of a further, stronger assault in the New Year. Meanwhile, the Church, in the guise of the militant Inceptine Order, seems less concerned with external threats to the western states than heresy within and seeks to persuade wrong thinkers back to the true path by the simple expedient of setting fire to them. Unsurprisingly, the eponymous Hawkwood sails away into the far west with a ship full of the Dweomer folk, people endowed with various magical skills which place them fairly high on the list for Inceptine incineration, where, to the surprise of absolutely nobody at all he discovers what seems to be the continent of Absolutely-Not-America.

This volume is divided into three sections: one in which Hawkwood explores the strange and no longer mythical far western land, sandwiched between a couple of updates on political goings-on back home. With no immediate threat of Merduk assault, the opportunities for the western kingdoms to squabble amongst themselves have increased dramatically. The church has a new leader – despite the fact that the old one is still alive and kicking – who has been busily excommunicating those rulers who don't support him (the 'Heretic Kings' of the title) and inspiring the Inceptines to still greater feats of pyromania. One such ruler, Abeleyn of Hebrion, is ambushed by corsairs on his way back to his capital where loyalist troops are squaring up to the military wing of the Inceptines. Meanwhile Corfe, veteran of the last Merduk assault in Book 1, gets wrapped up in all manner of court intrigues before being despatched with an army of galley slaves to suppress a rebellion in the south, and an inquisitive monk unearths some ancient documents which seem to undermine the very basis of his faith. Hawkwood finds an inhospitable tropical jungle, full of strange plants and wildlife. And, it seems, something else – for their are increasing signs that he and his crew are following in the footsteps of earlier travellers. Stirring stuff indeed.

While the parallels with our own history are obvious, there are sufficient fantastic elements to add variety. The Inceptines are doing their best to burn out the last traces of Dweomer magic but practitioners, particularly in the guise of shape-shifters, keep showing up in all sorts of unlikely places and this adds to the mix of war, religion, politics and intrigue. To a certain extent this is a typical middle volume, where its primary function is to bridge the gap between the first and third books of the series. However, there are sufficient plot developments and revelations, as well as teasers pointing to revelations ahead in the final volume, to keep the reader interested.

Katherine Kerr (ed)

Sorceries •

Voyager, 1997, 431pp, £5.99

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

This is a collection of short stories on the theme of magic and magicians. In her introduction, Katherine Kerr takes us from the tribal shaman depicted in the Lascaux caves to the New Age ideas of the present day. Though I feel she never quite gets to grips with the relationship between science, magic and religion, she defends the importance of the magical as a mode of thought and of fantasy literature. Unfortunately, the collection doesn't entirely live up to the claims made for it.

This may be personal prejudice: I admit to a preference for high fantasy while the stories in this collection tend more towards magic realism. If you like the kind of fantasy that lurks on the edges of everyday life, you might come away from this book with a very different impression. For myself, I felt there were too many stories which imply that enchanters are just plain folks and that to sort out our problems all we need is a good spell. Although there are stories here which confront the dangers and the cost of magic, there's not enough of the wild and the unpredictable.

The front cover speaks of 'an exciting new collection from today's most acclaimed fantasy writers'. This is a bit excessive: while there are many good and respected writers – the most 'acclaimed' are perhaps Charles De Lint and M. John Harrison – I felt that what the book needed was a few more big guns, outstanding writers or outstanding stories that leave you catching your breath and feeling that the world isn't quite how you thought it was.

I don't want anyone to think that I didn't enjoy this book – I did, and I'm sure there are people who will enjoy it even more. But having finished it I'm finding that a lot of the stories blur together in my mind. It's a nice meadow to go walking in, but where are the mountain peaks?

Mercedes Lackey

Storm Breaking

Orion, 1996, 436pp, £9.99

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

Storm Breaking is the third volume in Lackey's *Mage Storm* trilogy and picks up where the second volume left off. The previous book ended with a cataclysmic magical storm which was repelled by the good guys gathered together for just such a purpose. For the most part, this volume follows two groups of people; those left behind after combatting the storm, and those still seeking an explanation to prevent the next one (which will of course, be the final Storm to end all Storms). Large chunks of the novel are spent on the somewhat tiresome interactions between the characters; the long suffering Karal, recovering from apparently being used as a channel against the storm; the companions, Florian (a horse), Altra (a cat), and various sundry Gryphons who have an almost laughable speech impediment and regularly indulge in gryph-grins, gryph-smiles and gryph-frowns, whatever they may look like; and sundry folks representing the various races. Unfortunately for this reader, one of the companions happens to be the extremely petulant and sulky An'desha.

On the bright side, however, the book also follows the exploits of the Valdemaran's, Elspeth and Darkwind, who have arrived at Hardorn as Ambassadors for Valdemar. The renegade Duke Tremane, having escaped the clutches of the Emperor Charliss, has begun walking the road to power in his own right. Having abandoned Charliss and the Empire for reasons of self-preservation, he unwittingly (at first) begins to build a power-base to challenge the empire. Elspeth and Darkwind, the all-round good guys, begin to shape Tremane's destiny. Having battled to understand and accept the existence of magic, Tremane has to undergo an ancient rite in order to become King of Hardorn and thereby secure the support and loyalty of its people. This rite taps into unknown depths in the man, and has far-reaching consequences in the fight against the magical storms.

Storm Breaking is, on the whole, a slog of a read. Lackey's penchant for character-based novels may be a joy to many, but not to this reader. Long chapters of interaction between the myriad characters, both magical and non-magical, leads to long stodgy spells where absolutely nothing happens to advance the story. The saving grace of the book for me is the coming into power of Duke Tremane, and the mysterious rite of passage into that power. Tremane is the one truly interesting character in the whole book.

Lackey has a lot of fans, particularly of her created world of Valdemar, but I will not lose any sleep if I never read another.

Peter McGregor

The Retreat

Hinton Press, 1997, 351pp, £16.99

Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

The purpose of this badly-written novel is to counterpose a vision of national conformity with today's socio-cultural diversity. At any rate, I think so. The argument is so muffled, readers have to construct it for themselves from the half-formed clues left by the author.

In this near-future, a Conservative government introduces Danish-style proportional representation to keep itself in

power by fragmenting the Opposition – but the tactic fails because the new opposition parties still have more in common with each other and a succession of coalitions govern instead. Stability is ensured by the (unlikely) assumption of real (but hidden) power by a revamped Privy Council, which sets the limits within which democracy can operate.

Meanwhile, a group of so-called 'Native Britons', who can prove their ancestry and intellectual superiority, declare independence from a society they see as falling apart and withdraw into self-sufficient 'reservations', founded by rich people who drink whisky in Pall Mall clubs and complain about the country being taken over by militant dreadlocked lesbian vegetarians. One has to be careful not to confuse an author with his fiction, but it's difficult not to believe that this group's leader, railing against feminists, homosexuals, modern art, graffiti, drug taking, pornography and other 'filth' (a word which must appear over one hundred times) is not a manifestation of McGregor's own personality.

The leader is the only character who can be told apart. Everyone else is just a name; the women are invariably described as curved bodies visible through thin dresses. They all talk incessantly, often about things they already know (the reservation even has some visitors, so readers can be given a guided tour). Their arguments about whether to rejoin the outside world lack conviction, since the author himself seems to think that separation is undesirable and that society should be rebuilt by marginalising 'noisy pressure groups' whose influence allegedly distorts the political process. Yet he's wrong: separation is possible via the emerging paradigm of localism, through which we may reclaim our autonomy from the TNC-dominated world order; and without citizens' lobbies the political process would be more closed and alienating than it already is.

Julian May

Sky Trillium

Voyager, 1997, 300 pp, £16.99

Magnificat

Pan, 1997, 561pp, £5.99

Reviewed by Andrew Adams

Magnificat is the third and final book in May's Galactic Milieu Trilogy, itself part of the super-series that also comprises *The Saga of the Exiles* and *Intervention*. *Sky Trillium*, on the other hand, is the third and final part of the Trillium Trilogy, which began with *Black Trillium*, co-written with Marion Zimmer Bradley and Andre Norton, and continued with *Blood Trillium* by May alone.

Magnificat is about what you might expect; it finishes off the story of the Galactic Milieu quite well. Given the nature of the time travel and the fact that the main thrust of the trilogy had already been told in back story in *The Saga of the Exiles*, May has done tolerably well at keeping the interest up all the way through. This final part is probably the weakest of the three, with a slightly rushed ending, but it fills in the gaps in our knowledge quite well and brings a satisfying conclusion to the 'Fury' plotline which was not mentioned in *The Saga of the Exiles*. Not one to read on its own, but it doesn't drag the whole series down: if you like May's Galactic Milieu or *The Saga of the Exiles*, then this is definitely worth getting hold of.

The Trillium series has been very different from the Galactic Milieu stuff. The co-written first book is mostly held in low regard, despite the calibre of the three writers, and *Sky Trillium* also falls into this category. The world is vaguely interesting, but not well enough fleshed out to really catch the attention; the characters are plausible but somewhat shallow. One character is supposed to be torn in her love for

the main 'bad guy', but until the end he shows little worth being in love with, and the relationship lacks depth. You don't need to have read the first two to understand what's going on – the main plot line is adequately explained, as are the important events from the earlier books, but on the whole, I just don't care a great deal about who won. Too many stereotypes, too little real emotion. Not a bad read for a train journey or a Sunday afternoon, but nothing to run screaming through the streets about.

L.E. Modesitt, Jr

Fall of Angels [1]

Orbit, 1997, 560pp, £6.99

Reviewed by Graham Andrews

Fall Of Angels is a prequel to Modesitt's popular *Recluce* saga. Many people Out There know well of what I speak, but for new readers (such as myself): *The Magic Of Recluce* (1991) features a bored-to-the-bone teenager, Lerris, from the low-tech 'perfect continent' of Recluce, who gets sent on the 'danger-geld' quest/rite of passage which helps weed out those wimps who can't attain the requisite perfection. But – surprise! surprise! – this Recluce reject becomes a 'blackstaffer'; he can 'focus' Order and thus combat the Chaos-masters.

The second volume (there have been at least three more sequels to date), *The Towers Of The Sunset* (1992), told how Recluce was founded by the royal soulmates Creslin and Megaera. *Fall Of Angels* takes us even further back through the swirling temporal mists: 'On the highland plateau of Candor . . . a new world is being born' (back-cover blurb). We are provided with the now *de rigueur* drams, pers. and *Treasure Island*-type maps. Here are some (maybe) helpful extracts from the *Book of Ayrlyn*/Section I (Restricted Text):

In the time of that first summer came armsmen, inspired by the demons, and there were battles across the roof of the world, and blood . . .

Thus continued the conflict between order and chaos, between those who would force order and those who would not, and between those who followed the blade and those who followed the spirit.

Of the great ones were the angel Kyba, Nylan of the forge of order and the fires of Heaven, Saryn of the dark blades of death, and Ayrlyn of the songs . . .

For me, the very best bit in the book is this ditty sung by Ayrlyn (bent over her 'lutar'), no doubt to the tune of 'Old Smokey':

On the Roof of the World, all covered with white,
I took up my blade there, and I brought back the night.
With a blade in each hand, there, and the stars at my boots,
With the Legend in song, then, I set down my roots . . .

Spin in your grave, Burl Ives.

Seriously, though, L.E. Modesitt, Jr. is a far, far better writer than, say, Robert Jordan. I'm quite glad to have read *Fall Of Angels* – but not nearly glad enough to read another Recluce tome-stone.

**Michael Moorcock &
Langdon Jones (Eds.)**

**The New Nature of the
Catastrophe**

Orion, 1997, 500pp, £6.99

Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

Here's another volume in the 'Eternal Champion' series – or so it styles itself, and by this stage one begins to wonder whether the title isn't just a marketing device. By no stretch of the imagination can these stories about Jerry Cornelius be

subsumed into the overall mythos – especially not when several of them aren't written by Moorcock and their authors are thus pursuing concerns other than his.

The Nature of the Catastrophe originally appeared in 1971, collecting together stories about Cornelius that had appeared in *New Worlds*. Some were by Moorcock, but most were by other writers such as Brian Aldiss, M. John Harrison and James Sallis, using the character (with Moorcock's approval) to comment on the issues of the day. Re-reading them now, they seem very Sixties – a time when it was hip to sniff cocaine and when homosexuality, though recently legalised, was still rather furtive. On the other hand, flared trousers are back . . .

The New Nature of the Catastrophe reprints the material from the original volume, omits the comic strip which appeared in the trade paperback edition of this new volume, adds in all the stories from Moorcock's own *The Lives and Times of Jerry Cornelius*, and rounds the collection off with some additional stories by other hands written between 1969 and 1993. Some, such as Charles Partington's, were perhaps omitted from the original collection because they were not deemed good enough; others, such as Simon Ings's, are obviously more modern and for that reason somewhat out of keeping with the spirit of the original(s) (even though flared trousers are back). A reader's guide by John Davey which transpositionally lists the various editions of all the Cornelius books is appended.

The stories are, nevertheless, quite enjoyable, although one inevitably wonders whether the character of Jerry Cornelius has anything to say to the pre-millennial world of the late 1990s. Clothing fashions are one thing, but grasping the *zeitgeist* is something else.

Mark Pepper

The Short Cut

NEL, 1997, 291pp, £5.99

Reviewed by Stephen Payne

Nathan Lake is an actor between jobs, 'resting', waiting for the part that will jump-start his career towards his unfulfilled dreams of stardom. Then he changes theatrical agent to Conrad Dreave and offers of work start pouring in. Dreave is an odd cove and doesn't behave at all like a theatrical agent, his office is in a dark and gloomy basement where he always wears sunglasses and, stranger still, Lake is his only client.

But Lake doesn't see anything unusual in Dreave, even though his advice is, uh, unusual. He instructs Nathan to touch somebody who carries the relevant attributes for the part being cast: so he shakes the hand of his dad (a surgeon!) before being interviewed for the part of a doctor. Lake gets the job, but an operation that his father was performing at the time of the interview goes disastrously wrong. Lake finally realises the extent of his agreement with Dreave when a policeman, who's hand he shook the day before, takes his revolver and goes on a killing spree at exactly the time Lake is being cast in the part of a detective.

If Lake is guilty of a sin, it would be envy, and that's what it's all about really, the devil's due, the pound of flesh. This is more old horror dressed up as new horror, a moral tale for the nineties with lots of sex and violence and a little bit of humour. There is no short cut to the fulfilment of your aspirations, seems to be the gist of it all. If only it were so!

S.D. Perry

Aliens: The Labyrinth

Orion, 1996, 216pp, £14.99, £4.99pb

Reviewed by Jon Wallace

Ridley Scott's 1979 film, *Alien*, was a creation that scared the hell out of everyone who went to see it: the cramped confines of the *Nostromo* and the helpless inability of her crew to deal with the problem foisted upon them combined to create a dark ambience that filled audiences with dread. But the true star of the movie was the Alien, a frighteningly efficient killing machine, almost unstoppable, which carved its way through an unprepared freighter crew. In the 1986 sequel, *Aliens*, this myth was built upon as a platoon of crack Space Marines was all but wiped out in its bloody confrontation with an Alien nest.

The Dark Horse graphic novel series began after the second film. They portrayed a future where mankind was fighting a bitter undercover war against Alien nests spread throughout the galaxy. Now some of these graphic novels have been novelised and *Aliens: The Labyrinth* is the latest in the series. The gritty, business-driven society of *Aliens* is reflected in these novels: all is secondary to the scoring of advantage. Dr Paul Church on the research station Innominata is keenly aware of this and has become a past master at this game. When Colonel Doctor Tony Crespi arrives to take over as second-in-command and to investigate certain disquieting rumours about Church's experiments, then Church must act.

This novel is unremittingly dark. The future it portrays is bleak, the Universe unforgiving. These factors have shaped the characters, who are cold and humourless, some of them are utterly ruthless. Like Church, a flawed genius whose biological skills are unmatched, but who has a broad streak of insanity which has tainted all those who condone his experiments. All of which is handled convincingly enough by Perry: the setting is realistically grim, the characters enigmatic and secretive. But all the time we are aware that this is just scene-setting, sooner or later we are going to meet a live Alien and when we do all hell is going to break loose. And we do, and it does.

The bits with the Alien are perhaps the most convincing. Anyone who has seen one of the movies knows how dangerous these things are, and this sense of out-of-control malevolence feels real. But in the end this reality is also the book's Achilles heel. It is a grim, bloody book, lots of shock, lots of horror; the descriptions of the Alien's attacks, and of Dr Church's laboratory are graphic and repelling, gratuitously so, and only serve to make the book nasty and unpalatable. It may be that this sort of thing is more acceptable as a graphic novel, but in print, with the detail being supplied by the mind's eye, I found it unsatisfying and unacceptable.

Robert Silverberg

Sorcerers of Majipoor

Macmillan, 1997, 534pp, £16.99

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

Set one thousand years before *Lord Valentine's Castle* (the first novel in the series), this is a welcome return to Majipoor, the huge planet to which humans came eons past, and to which non-humans were later invited to follow. The sciences of those long-ago times have now been largely forgotten, so that despite this science fictional premise, *Sorcerers of Majipoor* has all the attributes of a first-rate fantasy.

Will Shetterly

Dogland

TOR Books, 1997, 448pp, \$25.95

Reviewed by L. J. Hurst

I read *Dogland* waiting for the fantasy to begin. The cover suggests that this tale of young Christopher Nix and his family opening a new theme park in Florida in the late 1950s will also pass on the stories of some of their new neighbours. These include Ethorne Hawkins, 'an ageless black man', and Mrs DeLyon, who is trying to save the Fountain of Youth. The Fountain of Youth, though, is another roadside attraction, and Ethorne is a hired-hand with a tendency to go off drinking.

Dogland is told through the eyes of Kit Nix, and as a child's view of the end of the old south and the last battles against integration, it shows another side of America. It also reverses the image of the outsider – this is Florida the holiday resort before Disney got there; say, a little like holidaying in Spain before Generalissimo Franco took to his bed. Kit's father wants to run his theme park – where every variety of dog in the world can be seen – but he is a Northerner, a liberal, and an opponent of church teaching in schools. Luke Nix, according to the good ole boys in the neighbourhood, is asking for a stomping, and though things end in a mess, Luke avoids having the boot put in. His son is there at his side when it happens. His son has let out the dogs, who help to keep things under control.

According to the author's biography 'Will Shetterly lived in Florida from the ages of four to seven, while his father and mother built and managed the real Dog Land'. In his novel Shetterly has taken the space out – in some places time shoots by, and we get info dumps of what is happening in the world. Oddly, though, Kit's eye remains neutral – his father never persuades him to be liberal, to be atheistic, to be like him. Even when the Klan come, Kit never breaks down: his camera eye is almost that of an alien.

I have had problems with children's eye books. I read *The Autobiography of Little Tree* when it was forced on me and, when I learned it had been written pseudonymously by a white supremacist, wondered how *Little Tree* proved the supremacy of the white race. As a story of a liberal in the face of intolerance, I had similar problems with *Dogland*; then I started to think of *Dogland* as an allegory. Here in the backwoods there was no introduction to a magical kingdom: Kit eats burgers and fries everywhere and never comments on the sameness, his mother serves up burgers to visitors from around the world who have just visited their exotic menagerie. The dog food is only a little different.

But then, can a dog theme park be exotic, no matter how inclusive it is? Florida was being opened up to the rest of the USA, but it was being opened up to become unimaginative. Christopher sees this and makes no comment on it: in the country of the bland the one eyed man is king. It is better to have some sort of record than nothing at all.

The Pontifex Prankipin is dying, a cause of much consternation on Majipoor for he has reigned so long that scarcely anyone can remember the last time there was a change of government. Surely the death of Prankipin can only herald turmoil, catastrophe even, for the whole planet? It is a superstitious age with a strong belief in magic, and alarm at what the future might hold grips every city.

In the underground palace known as the Labyrinth, the princes of Majipoor gather round the dying Pontifex. Soon, they know, the Coronal, Lord Confalume, will become Pontifex. By custom he can nominate anyone other than his own son to succeed him as Coronal, and it is widely believed that Prince

Prestimion will take up the reins of kingship while Confalume retires to the Labyrinth in Prankipin's place. There are those, however, who believe that Confalume's son, Korsibar, a handsome man renowned for his skills at hunting, would make a more fitting Coronal, and it has been prophesied that he is destined to shake the world.

Whether or not he has ever thought of himself as Coronal, Korsibar does yearn to be given some responsibility in government, while his sister, Thismet, sees this as her one opportunity to gain political power. Thismet conspires with an alien sorcerer to plant the idea in Korsibar's mind that he is more worthy to be Coronal than Prestimion, and when Prankipin eventually dies, Korsibar seizes the crown, literally placing it upon his own head. Prestimion bides his time, to ascertain how the populace of Majipoor views Korsibar's usurpation, but the enmity between the two

men and their adherents soon escalates. For the first time in a thousand years, Majipoor is plunged into civil war: Korsibar has shaken the world, but not in the way he imagined. He also discovers that to be Coronal is very different to what he expected, and it becomes obvious that while he has the appearance of a king he lacks the strength of character to be an effective ruler. Thismet, meanwhile, finds that although she drove Korsibar to seize the throne, she has no more power than before.

In *Sorcerers of Majipoor*, Robert Silverberg evokes the fantastical planet of Majipoor and its ornate denizens with all the attention to detail that brings an imaginary world to life. Although the proverbial 'cast of thousands' is a little confusing at first, the reader is soon engrossed in the struggle for power, the treachery and opportunism. Readers have waited ten years for another Majipoor novel, but the wait has been worthwhile.

J.R.R. Tolkien

Tales from the Perilous Realm

HarperCollins, 1997, 178pp, £12.99

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

This is a new collection of four previously published works, 'Farmer Giles of Ham', 'Leaf by Niggle', 'The Adventures of Tom Bombadil' and 'Smith of Wootton Major'. The connecting link is that all four are, in some sense, fairy tales, and Faerie is 'the perilous realm' of Tolkien's imagination.

'Fairy tale' might lead some people to think that these are stories for children, and many children will get a tremendous amount of enjoyment from them, but there's a lot here for adults too. 'Farmer Giles of Ham' is a marvellous example of the mock heroic, full of sneaky scholar's wit and gentle satire of those in power. Its dragon may not be the equal of Smaug the Magnificent, but the story is a delight.

Quite close in tone to this is 'Smith of Wootton Major' which also satirises authority to some extent, but in this story the dangers as well as the joys of Faerie appear and we can understand why Tolkien thought of it as perilous. There's a price to pay for those mortals who are privileged to enter Faerie, and a streak of bitterness in the story.

The other story, 'Leaf by Niggle', is less obviously a fairy tale, it is closer to allegory. It was first published in *Tree and Leaf*, in which Tolkien's essay 'On Fairy-stories' was followed by this, his own example of the genre. It's an odd story and not easily accessible, especially perhaps to readers who don't share Tolkien's philosophy. Though it might be out of place here, it's a pity not to have the essay too, as, in my view, it's the more considerable half of the original.

The fourth and perhaps least successful part of this collection, 'The Adventures of Tom Bombadil', is a group of poems. No-one would seriously make any claim for Tolkien as a poet; I'm always tempted to skip the Bombadil chapters when I re-read *The Lord of the Rings* because I find the bouncy rhythms of his verses off-putting. The other verses in this collection – some of which are taken from *The Lord of the Rings* – work rather better, but all the verses from the long work gain from their context and I'm not sure they stand up to being presented alone.

Any reader of Tolkien is bound to know that he took fairy tales seriously. In *Tree and Leaf* he says: 'The realm of fairy-story is wide and deep and high and filled with many things; all manner of beasts and birds are found there; shoreless seas and stars uncounted; beauty that is an enchantment, and an ever-present peril; both joy and sorrow as sharp as swords'. The stories in this book are perhaps only forays across the borders of that land; in his longer works he penetrated its heart.

If these four pieces are not still available in their original format, it's good to see them in print again. It's an attractive book and anyone who enjoys Tolkien should be pleased to have it.

Harry Turtledove

Worldwar: Striking the Balance

Hodder & Stoughton, 1996, 515pp, £16.99

Reviewed by Mark Plummer

You know how it is, you invade that primitive planet expecting a push-over yet your vastly superior military capability isn't enough to overcome the tenacious little buggers because they don't know when to quit; they keep coming back for more and, what's worse, they gradually get better at this fighting back lark. Happens all the time. And it's been happening here, across the preceding three volumes and nearly fifteen hundred pages of Harry Turtledove's *Worldwar* series (*Worldwar: In the Balance* (1994), *Worldwar: Tilting the Balance* (1995), *Worldwar: Upsetting the Balance* (1996)).

This is undoubtedly classic adventure science fiction of a kind which they don't make any more. It's also great fun, but it has to be said that the whole show has seemed to be running out of steam: things had ceased to move forward and, like the invasion of Earth, everything seemed to be bogging down in a military stalemate. Will there be a resolution in this, the (possibly) final volume?

By the tail end of *Upsetting the Balance*, some of the lizard-like alien Race had had enough of these pesky humans and their cold little planet and were in open revolt against their leadership. Elsewhere supplies were running low and the conquest was generally stampeding towards deadlock. Yet still the humans were finding it difficult to make common cause against the invaders: an invasion from Tau Ceti is undoubtedly a bad thing but for somebody like SS Officer Otto Skorzeny are the invaders any more of any enemy than the Jews and Poles in Lodz? And how about Liu Han, communist guerrilla in Peking, who has to considered the alternatives to lizard rule which include the Nationalists or the Japanese?

In common with the previous volumes, this latest book examines the conflict from a large number of human and alien perspectives. This time the focal points are Poland, where Pole and Jew, German and Lizard, all fight each other with varying degrees of enthusiasm, and China where Communist guerrillas and Lizards struggle to win new propaganda coups. Perhaps the most interesting character is that of Liu Han, a peasant in the first volume who has been

used and abused by humans and Lizards alike but who has now risen to a position of power and influence in the Chinese guerrilla movement, influence that she uses to retrieve her kidnapped daughter from the Lizard scientist who has taken her to study. But there is also Colonel Heinrich Jäger, a German panzer officer struggling to reconcile his loyalty to the Fatherland with the best interests of the anti-Lizard fight and also with his curious semi-relationship with a Jewish fighter leader and more-than-friendship with a female Russian pilot.

With Lizard offensives stalling everywhere but human military capability still lagging many decades behind that of the invaders, the prospect of an outright victory for either side – at least within a reasonably short timescale – seems increasingly unlikely. Maybe it is time to seek a compromise. Germany, the USSR and the USA are all nuclear powers and thus pose the greatest military threat: would it be possible for The Race to make a deal with these nations? Even from their position of relative weakness, would a compromise be acceptable to the likes of Stalin or Hitler?

Kevin Warwick *March of the Machines: Why the New Race of Robots Will Rule the World*
Century, 1997, 263pp, £16.99

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

Kevin Warwick points out in *March of the Machines* that a high public profile is nowadays a tremendous advantage to a man in his position (professor of cybernetics at Reading University), because it acts as a magnet for research funding. The slightly doleful passage in question refers to the necessity of maintaining a showcase website, but the argument could easily be extrapolated to the publication of books which endeavour to 'popularise' science and technology. Once upon a time a man who had dedicated his life to the production of cute robots could have published a modest and earnest treatise outlining exactly what he had done, how and why – and would probably have resisted attempts by his editors to make the text more sensational by explaining that a serious scientist had a duty to refrain from tabloid-style scaremongering. Not any more; nowadays, the pressure to go for the widest possible audience is as much push as pull, and the only serious science is the science that pulls in the serious money.

Kevin Warwick must have been under very heavy pressure to maximise the shock value of *March of the*

Machines, and one can hardly blame him for responding to it, but I cannot help wondering whether the book might actually constitute a shotgun blast aimed squarely at the author's right foot. When I read the opening chapter, 'In the Year 2050', which describes a world whose last few human inhabitants are enslaved by machines, dumbed-down males labouring on awkward terrain while the lobotomised breeding-stock is kept in factory farms, I assumed that it was only there to hook the punters and that by the time the book had carefully worked its way through the real argument it would be relegated to the status of an easily-avoidable 'worst case scenario'. In much the same forgiving spirit, I was prepared to overlook the fact that the very first reference – to a prediction made 'in the late 1960s' on the basis of trend analysis – is to a book published in 1991, which thus leaves us ignorant of who actually made the prediction. I was even prepared to overlook the stupidity of the argument following on from this prediction, which is that because that prediction turned out to be wrong no one could have good grounds for doubting Warwick's 2050 scenario.

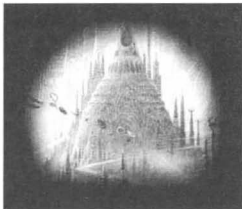
It was not until I reached the end of the book that I realised the awful truth: that Warwick really is asserting that machines will enslave or exterminate humankind within the lifetime of his two children. In spite of holding fast to this belief – which appears to be based on a trend analysis similar in essence to the improperly-referenced example which he earlier dismissed with scorn – it seems that he is not merely prepared but avidly enthusiastic to dedicate the rest of his life to the enhancement of machine capability. It does not seem to have occurred to him that anyone who actually took the argument of this book seriously would be more likely to hire a hit man to assassinate him than to give him a research grant. Nor does it seem to have crossed his mind that even if the people who give out research grants will know better, *March of the Machines* will be a godsend to all the knee-jerk technophobes who think that scientists in general are mad, bad and dangerous to know. This mind-boggling failure of the imagination lends an entirely new dimension of meaning to the phrase 'absent-minded professor'.

It might, of course, be a bluff. As C. E. M. Joad pointed out in his classic essay 'Is Civilization Doomed?', although accurate prediction is logically impossible a man concerned for the future might feel a moral duty to predict as often and as loudly as possible that civilization is doomed, in the faint hope of persuading his fellow men to take whatever action may be necessary to save it. Given that he is smiling so broadly in the photograph on the back flap, this might be the kind of game that Warwick is playing. At least, we must hope so.

Tad Williams *Otherland: City of Golden Shadows*
Legend, 1996, 770pp, £16.99

Reviewed by Barbara Davies

Tad Williams once called his massive *Memory, Sorrow and Thorn* trilogy 'The Story That Ate My Life'; God knows what he'll call his ambitious new series, *Otherland*. *Otherland: City of Golden Shadows* is but the first volume of four! Whereas the trilogy was out-and-out fantasy, *Otherland* looks like sf, specifically virtual reality: in fact, the VR is a Trojan Horse inside which Williams smuggles sf, fantasy, fairy tales and more. At a time when, for marketing reasons, sf is often disguised as fantasy, Williams seems to be doing the opposite.



In the 21st Century, the Net is more widespread than its present-day equivalent, its VR simulations more realistic. With a 'sim' you can be anything, and children can pretend to be adults. Eleven-year-old Stephen Sulaweyo sneaks into a VR nightclub called Mister J's; shortly after, he falls into a coma that baffles the medics. His sister, Renie, an instructor at Durban Polytechnic, tries to retrace his last steps in VR, accompanied by her pupil, !Xabbu, an African Bushman with a very different world-view.

Renie and !Xabbu's false

identities are penetrated and Mister J's turns suddenly nasty, but they find themselves mysteriously unable to escape by the usual method of logging off. Eventually, Renie triggers her emergency exit routine by inducing a heart attack, while it is only with the aid of a stranger that IXabba makes it back to the real world. They find they have somehow acquired a chip containing the image of a fascinating golden city. Could this be a clue to Stephen's strange illness? While following up this lead, Renie's old friend Susan is killed, then Renie's flat is bombed and she is suspended from her teaching job. She and IXabba go on the run and, with the help of unorthodox contacts from Susan's past, learn of the existence of Otherland: 'the world's largest and most powerful simulation network'. Its builders, a consortium of wealthy and powerful men and women calling themselves The Grail Brotherhood, seem unusually interested in children.

Thargor the Barbarian is actually Orlando Gardiner, a terminally ill fourteen-year-old boy and a regular gameplayer on the Net. While using his Thargor sim he, too, sees the image of the golden city, but his search for it leads him into conflict with a ferocious red gryphon. Meanwhile, Paul Jonas wakes up, apparently in No Man's Land in First World War France, with no memory of who he is or how he got there. Two sinister, barely human creatures seem to be after him so he flees, climbing an impossible tree to a giant castle in the clouds, a place straight out of *Jack and the Beanstalk*. It is the first of many strange environments Paul will

travel through, including the world of *Alice Through the Looking Glass* and a Victorian Mars crisscrossed by canals. Who is Gally, the young boy he meets along the way, and who is the oddly familiar winged woman he keeps encountering in different guises?

Other plot threads involve Christabel Sorensen and the mysterious Mister Sellars, various members (past and present) of the Grail Brotherhood, and a psychopath called Dread. Eventually the threads combine: Renie, Orlando and the others reach the Golden City of Temilún – but since this only the first volume of the series, most plot threads are left dangling.

It is interesting to contrast the different style and vocabulary Williams uses when writing about the near future and about, for example, Thargor the Barbarian: he handles both with ease. His characters (which seem to include a large number of teenagers) are for the most part well-rounded; the ambivalent relationship between Renie and her drunkard father, Joseph, is particularly convincing. The complex plot and viewpoint switching keep the pages turning: the reader's attention is more likely to wander from sheer exhaustion than anything else – this book is *long*!

I get the impression that Williams feels released from the constraints of traditional fantasy and is having a whale of a time. The possibilities available in *Otherland* are infinite and he clearly intends to use every one – let's hope his energy and enthusiasm can stay the course.

N. Lee Wood

Faraday's Orphans

Gollancz, 1996, 351pp, £16.99

Reviewed by John Newsinger

Post-holocaust fiction is one of the mainstays of the genre. Civilization as we know it has collapsed, the remnants of humanity are struggling to survive, perhaps the first steps are taken along the road to rebuilding society. Writers as varied as Larry Niven and Kim Stanley Robinson have trodden this path and it is very easy for any new journey along it to remain trapped within a familiar landscape. Sometimes it seems as if the worst effect of societal collapse has been the triumph of cliché: but this is not necessarily the case.

One exception is N. Lee Wood's *Faraday's Orphans*, a strongly written tale that kept this reader turning the pages with keen anticipation. Civilization has been destroyed by 'the Shift', a reversal of magnetic poles and the consequent loss of the ozone layer; the planet has been cooked, with most of the population killed off by the sun's radiation. Only scattered human communities have managed to survive amid the barren, scorched wastelands; some, the Rangers, have reverted to an animalistic barbarism, some scratch a precarious living as farmers or herders, but the hope for the future resides in the domed cities that were able to protect themselves from the worst of the catastrophe.

Pittsburgh is one city that survived, safe inside its dome, and now its inhabitants are beginning to take steps to regain the outside. Among the inhabitants of the dome is a young pilot, Berk Neilsen, a committed individualist who lives only to fly his helicopter in the outdoors. His father, eaten up by cancer, disappeared on a routine flight but Berk is determined to carry on the family tradition regardless of the risk. But Berk is coming under pressure: increasingly the independent flyers are being forced to work for the city and pilot after pilot is going onto the city payroll. Berk's hopes of retaining his independence and of keeping his wife reside in

discovering a cache of oil that has survived untouched since the Shift and that no-one has yet pillaged. He gets his chance.

The conflict between Berk's frontier individualism and the conformity imposed by the city council is the theme around which the novel is structured. Berk's individualism is valued but at the same time there is no sense that his philosophy offers any means for humanity to regain the world; the future, at least as far as this volume is concerned, seems to lie with city hall and the bureaucrats. Berk, crushed by petty restrictions and red tape, bureaucratic harassment and the need to kiss arse, has to escape. The great strength of the novel, however, is not the account of bureaucratic politics and of Berk's dissidence in Pittsburgh, but his experiences outside. Berk is allowed to fly an exploratory mission, searching out oil supplies. His need coincides with Councilman Cormack's need for a success to ensure his reelection! He finds an immense cache that can keep the city supplied for years, a find that promises him a hero's welcome on his return and that will safeguard his independent status. But it is not to be.

Berk lands in Philadelphia to spend the night before flying home. His helicopter is destroyed by feral children who inhabit the tower blocks and tenements, and who are only prevented from beating him to death by the arrival of a young girl, Sadonya, who rescues him. This is a mixed blessing as Berk finds himself her slave. He is introduced to city politics of a different kind, where rival teenage warlords rule and life is short and violent. Sadonya maintains an uneasy independence balanced between two rival warlords, Mouse and Squeeze, who both want her special skills – Sadonya is a natural chemist:

A taste, a smell, she could read the chemicals intuitively. A lick of sweat off the forehead and she could taste the poisons excreted through the pores. A whiff of anonymous liquid in any one of the hundreds of bottles she kept stocked near her table, and she could see the chemical structures in her mind's eye.

Like Berk, she is determined to keep her independence and is finding it increasingly difficult. When Squeeze dies, she is forced to accept Berk as a partner rather than a slave and together they flee the city and undertake the dangerous return journey to Pittsburgh.

The journey is superbly told. They are sheltered by goat herders, the descendants of the Amish, who believe that the scorched desert is the recreation of Biblical Palestine and call it Paradise. They are captured by Rangers, whose monstrous leader plans to eat Berk and marry Sadonya. At last, they make it back to Pittsburgh and Berk finds himself a hero; but life in the city is not for him and he has to escape back outside, Sadonya going with him.



- Philing

N.E. Genge	<i>The Lexicon: Anti-Waltons to Zumis, an Unofficial X-Files Guide to People, Places and Proprietary Phrases</i> Pan, 1997, 177pp, £7.99
Les Martin	<i>Fear</i> (1) Voyager, 1997, 100 pp, £3.99
	<i>E.B.E.</i> (1) Voyager, 1997, 100pp, £3.99
	<i>Die, Bug, Die!</i> (1) Voyager, 1997, 102 pp, £3.99

Reviewed by John D. Oram

I started with the novelizations at 12.45. By four o'clock I'd finished all three and done the shopping. I'm a fast reader, but not exactly a speed reader. It wasn't that I felt gripped by the narrative, wonderful characterisation, or the beauty of the prose; nothing could be further from the truth. They were just easy to read: nothing to stimulate the brain, nothing challenging. Novelizations such as this are the Mills and Boon of science fiction.

The X Files has become a phenomenon, and publishers want to get in on the act. But do they really have to show such contempt for their customers? They seem to assume that *X Files* fans have a reading age of 10, which is probably why a children's author was chosen to write these books. Even children deserve better than this. It is obvious that the books were written to order, and no care has been taken with them. Two, *Fear* and *Die, Bug, Die!*, have been given different titles to the television episodes which were, respectively, *Blood*, and *The War of the Coprophages*. The only reason I can see for these changes is to fool possible readers that they are buying something not seen on TV.

In *Fear*, respectable people have become killers. Mulder confesses himself nonplussed until Scully provides the first clue: one of the killers has 200 times the normal amount of adrenalin in his bloodstream. The second clue is that in all the cases the murderers have smashed digital display units. Somebody has been spraying the local crops with an illegal pesticide, a form of LSD. The machines have been used to send subliminal messages to those in a heightened sense of

This all sounds very trite, but Wood writes with great skill. Her devastated Earth is well-drawn and her characters are convincing, none of them perfect (far from it) and their relationships are portrayed without any false sentiment. The relationship that develops between Berk and Sadonya is particularly interesting: they exploit each other, they don't like each other, indeed on occasion Berk is consumed by hatred and considers killing her, but in the end they both want their independence.

Faraday's Orphans is certainly not a great book, but it is a worthy contribution to the genre. An enjoyable read by an author worth watching out for.

fear. It is, of course, another dastardly plot by those in power to test whether fear can be induced and used as a weapon.

In *E. B. E.*, our intrepid agents are involved in a case of alien abduction. But this time it is the alien which has been kidnapped. Mulder and Scully are sent on wild goose chases, trying to track down the van transporting the alien body. Nobody can be trusted; not even Mulder's sources. The final revelation is intended to be a surprise.

In *Die, Bug, Die!* cockroaches are killing people in Miller's Grove. Or are they? Every time Mulder finds a corpse, the reason for the death is logically explained away by Scully. For once Mulder listens to her. Then he finds that there is a secret establishment in town. Could this be another conspiracy at work? Alas, no, the secret establishment belongs to the department of agriculture, and is being used by a very attractive scientist named Bambi to study cockroaches. It turns out that the bugs in question are not normal cockroaches, but alien robots; once Mulder and Scully are on the case, they disappear. At least the book reveals a warped sense of humour in the mind of Darin Morgan, who wrote the teleplay. Here is a man who knows his science fiction: Miller's Grove is an anagram of Grover's Mill, where the alien invasion took place in the film of *The War of the Worlds*.

The Lexicon is a different kettle of fish. This has obviously been written by a fan, albeit one who has her tongue firmly in her cheek. Here are a few examples:

147. Number of stars decorating one of Scully's less 'power suited' blouses. (Roland)

'Adult magazines'. The reading material most likely to be found under Mulder's mattress or lurking in the bottom drawer of his desk. (*The Jersey Devil*)

Agape. The condition in which Scully's jaw is often found.

Oxford. Where Phoebe Green claims Mulder left his sense of humour. (Fire)

There is more information in this book than an entire set of novelizations. It's amusing, informative, everything I look for in a book. Apart from the writing, there are photographs, episode listings, and even phone numbers/addresses used in the programme. I wouldn't mind betting that some people will try to get through on them. Perhaps the kind of people who buy novelizations?

PARTICLES

These are some of the other books we have seen recently. A mention here does not necessarily preclude a review in a later issue of *Vector*.

Clive Barker

Weaveworld

HarperCollins, 1997, 722pp, £6.99

First published in 1987, this is a new, '10th Anniversary Edition' of the fantasy set in a carpet. 'Weaveworld is a better than average horror story – it holds the attention throughout; I felt for the heroes and I feared their opponents – but no more than that.' – David V. Barrett, V143.

Clive Barker

Sacrament

HarperCollins, 1997, 595pp, £5.99

'If *Sacrament* lacks the scale of event and imagination we have come to expect from Barker, and if some elements do, in passing, recall his previous books a little too closely, then at least the writing is as fine as we expect, and the characterisations are superb.' – Gary Dalkin, V190.

James Bibby

Ronan's Rescue

Orion, 1997, 261pp, £4.99

'I like a good pun as much as the next person, but enough is enough. Once it clicked that just about everything had another meaning it became intrusive. Everytime I was introduced to a new character or place everything stopped until I'd either worked out the joke, or I skipped forward to the punchline. This doesn't help the smooth narrative flow.' – Jon Wallace, V191.

Martin Booth

Adrift in the Oceans of Mercy

Pocket Books, 1997, 292pp, £5.99

A mainstream novel set aboard an abandoned Russian space station: 'It seems foolish to write such a thing, but here I get the feeling that, three or four decades on, the mainstream is finally catching up with science fiction.' – Andrew Butler, V188.

Ben Bova

Moonrise

New English Library, 1997, 613pp, £6.99

Reviewing Bova's story of the first permanent settlement on the Moon, Gary Dalkin said: 'quite apart from the fact that the writing is poor, the characters badly drawn and much of the action painfully contrived. There is the sheer length: rarely have I read a book so obviously padded out to "blockbuster" proportions.' – V192.

Terry Brooks

First King of Shannara

Legend, 1997, 490pp, £5.99

'Terry Brooks tries his hand at continuing his Shannara series ... backwards,' Vikki Le declared when reviewing this prequel to the bestselling series. She went on to describe it as 'vintage, rather than modern Brooks.' – V188.

Stephen Bury

Interface

Signet, 1997, 583pp, £5.99

Neal Stephenson co-wrote this pseudonymous novel which Andrew Butler described thus: 'Despite its length, this novel is never less than compulsive reading. The plot's disparate elements weave together satisfyingly, and ultimate fates are sealed with relish, and even with justice.' – V189.

Stephen Donaldson

This Day All Gods Die

Voyager, 1997, 749pp, £6.99

The fifth and final volume in *The Gap into Ruin* was hailed by Andrew Adams: 'doesn't disappoint as the culmination of such a long and complex story, the only problem is Donaldson's attempts to make it hard science fiction rather than allowing it to be Space Opera at its best and grandest.' – V189.

Barbara Hambly

Planet of Twilight

Bantam, 1997, 312pp, £12.99

A *Star Wars* novel by the highly acclaimed fantasy writer and author of *Children of the Jedi*, this latest episode in the continuing series concerns an attempt by warlord Sati Draconis to trap Leia and Luke on a backwater planet.

Peter F. Hamilton

The Reality Dysfunction

Pan, 1997, 1225pp, £5.99

The first volume in *The Night's Dawn* trilogy. 'Appearances deceive ... what looks like the latest contender in the epic space opera stakes is also modern horror epic. *The Reality Dysfunction* has as much in common with similarly sized volumes from Stephen King and Clive Barker as anything from Banks, Baxter or Bear.' – Gary Dalkin, V188.

Harry Harrison & John Holm

King and Emperor

Legend, 1997, 452pp, £5.99

The third and final volume in Harrison and Holm's trilogy, *The Hammer and the Cross*, which Vikki Le found: 'a rivetting novel set in the late 9th century.' – V192.

K.W. Jeter

Blade Runner 3: Replicant Night

Orion, 1997, 309pp, £5.99

'Throughout the book, Jeter maintains, with great aplomb, a brooding, claustrophobic atmosphere: this is *film noir*; the novel writ large. People, replicants and things die violently and – invariably – with utter pointlessness: do not read *Replicant Night* if you need a quick chortle before bed.' – Andy Mills, V193.

Robert Jordan

Conan the Magnificent

Legend, 1997, 286pp, £4.99

Conan the Triumphant

Legend, 1997, 314pp, £4.99

Conan the Destroyer

Legend, 1997, 271pp, £4.99

Before he embarked on his bestselling fantasy series, *The Wheel of Time*, Robert Jordan wrote a number of novels about Robert E. Howard's barbarian hero, Conan. These three were first published in 1984, and *Conan the Triumphant* also includes 'Conan the Indestructible', a history of Conan and his times by L. Sprague de Camp.

Mercedes Lackey & Larry Dixon

The Silver Gryphon

Orion, 1997, 322pp, £5.99

The third volume in the *Mage Wars* series was considered by Lynne Bisham: 'rather an oddity among fantasy novels in that it concentrates on the relationships between a few characters and one particular incident, rather than the usual action-packed scenario with a cast of thousands. So, if you are looking for a respite from the battle between the forces of good and evil, but still need your input of fantasy, this book could be worth looking at.' – V188.

Ursula K. Le Guin

Four Ways to Forgiveness

Vista, 1997, 253pp, £5.99

Reviewing this collection of four linked novellas, Brian Stableford said: 'It hardly needs saying that *Four Ways to Forgiveness* is an excellent book... There are few writers who measure the emotional responses of their characters quite as minutely as [Le Guin] does, thus claiming for her work an objectivity which gives it a gloss of authority even when it is not comfortable reading.' – V189

Anne McCaffrey

Freedom's Choice

Bantam, 1997, 304pp, £15.99

The second volume in the Catteni Sequence, the sequel to *Freedom's Landing* reviewed by Helen Gould in V185: 'The pacing was pedestrian for much of the novel and the world building sketchy ... There are no surprises.'

Phillip Mann

The Burning Forest

Vista, 1997, 255pp, £5.99


The fourth and final volume in the series *A Land Fit for Heroes*, in which the Roman Empire still rules Britain, was described as being 'decidedly underplotted' and 'very sub-Holdstock' by Gary Dalkin in V190.

Michael Moorcock

The Prince with the Silver Hand
Orion, 1997, 440pp, £6.99

The tenth omnibus volume in the series that is intended to bring together all of Moorcock's novels. This volume contains *The Bull and the Spear* (1973), *The Oak and the Ram* (1973) and *The Sword and the Stallion* (1974).

Yvonne Navarro

Aliens: Music of the Spears 
Orion, 1997, 310pp, £16.99

Continuing the series inspired by the films, this is a novelisation of the Dark Horse graphic novel by Chet Williamson, Tim Hamilton and Timothy Bradstreet, set among the Alien Jelly addicts of New York City, 2124.

Kim Newman

The Bloody Red Baron
Pocket Books, 1997, 358 pp, £5.99

Kim Newman's vampire epic, *Anno Dracula*, continues into the First World War in this sequel. 'The world is recognisable but with suitable changes, which Newman portrays with a lot of attention to detail: it is not just a rewrite of the first decades of the century from a cinematic viewpoint but a considerable feat of worldbuilding in the great sf-nal tradition.' - Chris Amies, V190.

Kim Newman

Jago
Pocket Books, 1997, 537 pp, £6.99

Newman's huge horror novel was first published in 1991. 'There's something for everyone in this book: there's sex 'n' drugs 'n' rock and roll... There's seances and time travel, cannibalism and government agents with psychokinetic powers... There's punks, goths, hippies, ritual murder, and some of the most disgusting jokes ever told. And to top it all off, there's the end of the world.' - Molly Brown, V165.

Terry Pratchett

Johnny and the Bomb
Corgi, 1997, 238pp, £3.99

More adventures for Johnny Maxwell and friends, this time set during the blitz. 'Terry Pratchett has a keen eye for people, although most of the ones that he writes about are the - not losers - the ordinary people who are not really winners. In Johnny Maxwell and his mates, he has created the sort of kids that we were (well, I was anyway). Instant empathy.' - Jon Wallace, V188.

Lincoln Preston

Relic
Bantam, 1997, 442pp, £5.99

Since there is now a film of *Relic* it has been re-issued as a novelisation. When it first appeared in 1996 Liam Proven lamented: 'Oh, dear. There's a terrible monster, hiding in the dark, hunting down unsuspecting people and eating their brains.

No, really - this is actually the story of *Relic*. What's more, it's the plot, too.' - V188.

Melanie Rawn

The Ruins of Ambrai
Pan, 1997, 922pp, £7.99


Book One of Exiles is: 'an enjoyable and inventive fantasy, a real page-turner, with believable characters whom the reader is sorry to leave at the close of the novel. *The Ruins of Ambrai* has swords, magic, desperate flights, romance, pathos, humour and even a touch of feminist social comment - what more could any reasonable fantasy reader ask for?' - Lynne Bispham, V188.

Marc Shapiro

The Anderson Files
Warner Books, 1997, 226pp, £5.99

The 'Unauthorised Biography' of Gillian Anderson is described as 'The star of *The X-Files*: X-posed' and 'With sizzling, never-before-seen photos!', though there is little that really sizzles in this routine hackwork.

Michael A. Stackpole

The Bacta War 
Bantam, 1997, 349pp, £4.99

The fourth book in the *Star Wars: X-Wing* series. The first three volumes scored 'few points for originality' when reviewed by Mark Plummer in V191.

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