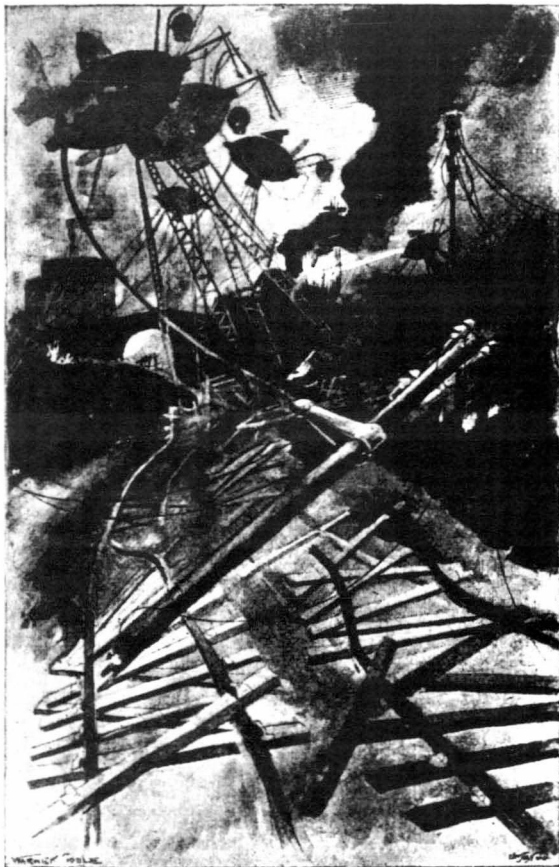


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## Mars Attacks!

The Centenary of H.G. Wells' *The War of The Worlds*

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# Vector

## 202

The Critical  
Journal of  
the BSFA

# Vector

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THE CRITICAL JOURNAL OF THE BSFA

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**COVER:** The image on the cover and those accompanying the article on *The War of the Worlds* come from a book published in the USA in 1978 by Castle books. They come originally from the Pearson's Magazine version of *The War of the Worlds*, serialised between April and December 1897. The artist was Warwick Goble.

## 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.



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## Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial

No one has complained, but I have a nagging feeling that some readers may have written to me, or sent contributions for the magazine, which I have not received. I know of several items of post unrelated to *Vector* which have gone missing, and can only wonder about what else I might have lost. So, please accept my apologies if you have written and not had a reply. I promise that I do reply to all correspondence that I receive, and try to do so quickly. Though if a deadline is approaching it may take me longer than I would really like. That said, if you have written and not had a reply, I'd be most grateful if you would take the trouble to write again. I will answer, and only by knowing what I should have received can I chase the Post Office to do the job we all pay them to do.

Still on the subject of post, this issue has a bumper crop of letters. Andrew and myself have frequently lamented how back in the good old days the letters page(s) would be bulging with informed comment and debate, while since we have been editing the front-half of *Vector* we have considered ourselves to be doing well to have a single page of mail. Now the letters have begun flooding in, with the pieces in issue 200 on media tie-in novels provoking the most comment we have ever had.

Now *Vector* is effectively a club journal, and its content is very largely defined by you, the membership of the BSFA, because you write the articles inspired by your own particular enthusiasms. I've said this before, but it may be timely to repeat it. Andrew and I are largely facilitators. Sometimes we have an idea for an article and we think about who we can talk into writing it. But we can only do that when deep-down the writer was really only waiting to be asked. We can't pay anyone to write about things they have no interest in, or even things they are passionate about. We can only publish what our contributors want to write. So if you want to write about any aspect of sf or fantasy, no matter how far off the beaten track, just let one of us know. Alternatively, get in touch if you would like to write about new Scottish SF, up-and-coming SF and Fantasy writers, or the following authors: Michael Coney, D.G. Compton, Richard Cowper, Christopher Priest. Since the last time we appealed for new writers we have found several members who have made valuable contributions to *Vector*, and whom I hope will continue to do so. We aim to be inclusive and always look seriously at all ideas and submissions.

This summer gone I read two books which made me to consider the similarities and the differences between them. One was a stand-alone novel of less than 200 pages, the other a 667 page behemoth, itself the latest volume in an on-going series, each volume of which has been significantly longer than its predecessor. So far so different, but both books tell passionate stories of first love, war and betrayal. The first book was written over 20 years ago, in the mid-seventies, while the origins of the ongoing series were first set-down at almost the same time – though the first volume would not see mass-market publication until 1982.

For me reading them both books marked a return. With the stand-alone novel it was a re-reading of a book which had remained powerfully in my memory since I first read it in 1978, with the second it was a return to following the adventures of characters I have been reading about on and off for the best part of a decade.

*Hello Summer, Goodbye*, I was pleased and somewhat relieved to discover, is as fine a novel as I remembered. I read it again because I was thinking about nominating it for the BSFA Best SF Novels Poll. In the end I didn't, but was still

gratified to see it emerge as the favourite novel of the 1970s. It is almost certainly Michael Coney's best work, and deserves to be much better known. I therefore have mixed feelings about my discovery of the author's web page, from which I learnt that Mr Coney is currently working on a sequel, provisionally entitled *Ice Age*. I can only hope that this does not mark the start of his slim, haunting novel becoming the source material for an increasingly lukewarm franchise.

I rather miss the days when *Hells Summer, Goodbye* was written. A decade when it was possible to start reading a book, and by the time you put it down to make a cup of tea be halfway through. The pleasure of the 180 page novel is that it can be read in a couple of afternoons and still leave time for real life. Stephen King's increasingly massive *Dark Tower* books do though interest me for the most unusual way in which they are being written.

By itself *Wizard and Glass* is a good, solid Stephen King novel, but it is also part of a sequence which is slowly becoming much more than the sum of its parts. The books have developed virtually throughout King's entire writing career, and King seems to be pacing the series to the end of his career. So it is that the books have changed as King has changed, the volumes growing ever larger as they not only chart King's progress as a novelist, but increasingly coming to encompass his other novels. Here King is successfully managing that which has defeated other talents.

As they get older sf and fantasy writers often seem driven to link their works into grand histories. Sometimes, as with Isaac Asimov, the contrivances are painful and the books wretched. Happily the current generation of writers seem to understand the perils which lie down this road, so that, for example, Peter F. Hamilton, in his new collection of stories set in the same universe as his *Night's Dawn Trilogy* (*A Second Chance at Eden*) is already reworking his earlier material into a coherent future history. Thirty years from now his future will not require torturous reworking.

Stephen King has against the odds managed to rewire his oeuvre, and amazingly the lights still work and the roof doesn't leak. *Wizard and Glass* plausibly incorporates King's previous magnum opus *The Stand* into the rich tapestry of *The Dark Tower* mythology, and hints that eventually all King's fictional worlds will exist within the sequence – he even ties in *The Wizard of Oz* and gets away with it.

The third of the new chapters of that other endlessly ongoing saga, *Star Wars*, may come and go before another *Dark Tower* book arrives. I just hope that Stephen King remembers to live long enough to finally get Roland to his destination.

**AMB adds:** *Traditions are for breaking, and one of them is Gary and I alternating writing editorials solo.*

My sympathies lie with Gary's mail troubles, since the same thing happened to me during the first six months of 1997. So if anyone wrote then and didn't hear from me, it wasn't personal. I eventually retrieved an essay from behind my neighbour's cooker, three copies of *Foundation* (the Mars issue I co-edited – tasteful thieves) from under her bed and my wheelie bin (full) from her bathroom. God knows what I lost; I felt entirely violated.

On the other hand, by the time you read this I'll be a month into a four-way commute (Mondays Loughborough, Wednesdays Hull, Fridays Northampton, whilst still living in Nottingham) so I might not be as rapid at replying to letters, emails or phone calls as I'd like. But letters make our day, and articles our month! See you in 1999.



## LETTERS TO VECTOR

Firstly, Stephen Baxter sends thanks to those who took part in the Best of British SF Poll published in V201:

### From Stephen Baxter, via email:

I'm writing to say how moved I was to get such a high placing in the 'most popular authors' poll results, and particularly to see my book *The Time Ships* come in at no. 4 in the top ten novels.

*Time Ships* was indeed a breakthrough book for me. At the time it was published I was overwhelmed by the warmth, enthusiasm and generosity with which it was received. Since then it has gone through several paperback printings, the book won awards in Britain, America and Germany, copies of the hardback first edition have been sold for hundreds of pounds to collectors, and the book has been (or will be) translated and published in America, Germany, Japan, Spain, Bulgaria, Poland, the Czech Republic, Italy, Estonia, France and Croatia.

The most meaningful poll of all, of course, is readers parting with hard-earned cash for books. The second best is a test of popularity with genuine readers – like the BSFA awards, and your recent poll. These results mean a lot. I can only say thanks to all who took the trouble to vote, and here's to the next fifty years of British sf. ☐✉

We've had a gratifying amount of feedback about Vector 200. Firstly, Joseph Nicholas goes some way to clearly up a mystery.

### From Joseph Nicholas, London:

Thanks for Vector 200 (the standard courtesy opening, although I of course know that neither you nor Gary sent it to me personally)...

In your introduction to Maureen Kincaid Speller's interview with Norman Spinrad, you refer to 'questions being asked in the House of Commons over what the Arts Council were doing supporting such material' as Michael Moorcock's *New Worlds*, and add that 'none of the places which we've seen recount this anecdote give chapter and verse of who asked the question and what the answer was'. Unfortunately, the anecdote has grown in the telling, and the reality is much more humdrum.

Twenty years ago, when I was working in the Department of Trade and Industry, I did some research in the back issues of *House of Commons Hansard* in the main library at 1 Victoria Street. The photocopies I took of the relevant pages have long since vanished, but my clear recollection is that the question was not asked on the floor of the House; instead, it arose in an exchange over Arts Council spending priorities during an enquiry into this then relatively new body by one of the then select committees (or whatever they were then called). *New Worlds* was mentioned as an example of the sort of magazine about which the questioner had doubts; but no specific story was mentioned, and indeed the questioner might not even have had a specific story in mind (just a vague prejudice against sci-fi mind-rot). I regret that memory does not disclose who the MP was – but we can be sure that even if he has not since died, gone bonkers or been translated to the Lords (assuming the third of these is not a synonym for the first two), the chances of him remembering the issue are remote. ☐

So another myth bites the dust... Be interesting to know who the Member was though. Joseph also offers a correction to the David

Wingrove chronology – see Red Shift below. ✉

Stan Nicholls also offers a correction, as well as some praise:

### From Stan Nicholls, via email:

Congratulations on Vector 200 – a well put together, absorbing issue. Here's to issue 400... ☐✉

In a letter published in V201, Mike Brain noted that he 'find[s] that many readers of historical novels, also equally enjoy F&SF, particularly those who take the Whispering Gallery letterzine (aka M&K in the USA) for fans of Dorothy Dunnett.' This formed a pleasing synchronicity with a comment by Mary Doria Russell in her interview (V200) – which he would not have seen when he wrote his letter. Now Mike writes again:

### From Mike Brain, Higher Kinnerton, Flintshire:

Thanks for the interview with Mary Doria Russell. In view of her mentioning the influence of historical novelist Dorothy Dunnett, I hope you won't mind that I have passed on that portion of her comments to the Dunnett fanzine *Whispering Gallery*, citing Vector and the BSFA. Any idea when *Children of God* will be out in paperback, and will she be coming over to Britain for any book-signing sessions?

More thanks for the item on Paul McAuley; I enjoyed *Child of the River* partly because it reminded me strongly of *The Book of the New Sun* series by Gene Wolfe.

Reading the review of *The Paladin* by Adam Nichols, the plot seems to have some origin in the Scottish folk song 'Annachie Gordon', wherein Jeannie is in love with Annachie, but destined for an arranged marriage with Lord Sultan, but she chooses to die. The song is on *Parallel Dreams* QR103 by Loreena McKennitt. Would Adam Nichols care to comment?

Apologies other story antecedents, it wasn't until I read *The Tower of Beowulf* by Parke Godwin that I realised that the story of Beowulf and the palace of Heorot had been used by Larry Niven in *The Dragons of Heorot*, the aliens being a version of Grendel. ☐

**AMB replies:** We'll see if we can track Nichols down and ask. Glad you enjoyed the interviews. Mary Doria Russell did a couple of signings after the Clarke Award so there may well be signed copies of both her titles still floating around at Forbidden Planet in London or Andromeda in Birmingham. The British paperback apparently has to come out after the American one, the latter being due in February / March 1999. ✉

But lest we get complacent, a writer from north of the border chides us for being Anglo-centric in the A to Z:

### From Jack D. Stephen, via email:

Vector should get out more. They say travel broadens the mind. Menzies, a bookshop! Which often only exists at railway stations! Take a stroll down any Scottish – and some northern English – high street and you will come across the eponymous store masquerading as a newsagent/stationer/confectioner/tobacconist cum record/CD store which only secondarily (in some cases as a very minor sideline indeed and in others not at all) dabbles in books. Their main business is in fact in magazine and newspaper distribution – with a stranglehold in Scotland – and they perform the more often than not malign function vis-à-vis book selling that W H Smiths does (in the rest of England. Please try to remember we are the British Science Fiction Association.

Now that I've got that off my chest, congratulations on reaching 200. Vector is always a worthwhile read – the odd bit of (southern) English parochialism notwithstanding. ☐

**AMB responds:** Since the piece was written in Hull and Leeds, I think the accusation of southern is a bit below the belt. Yes, it's all south to Scotland, unless you're in Iceland. I have happy memories of the John Menzies in Nottingham, where I bought some of my first Heinlein and Bradbury. In those dim and distant days, it did offer competition to Smith's, along with Sissons and Parker's which I remember as Huntley and Palmer's, but surely couldn't, until it became the waste of space that Dillons is.



These days the only Menzies I come across are at stations, hence 'The name of a bookshop which seems often only to exist at train stations' (emphasis added). Indeed there is one with a large number of books at King's Cross Station, you know, gateway to the East Coast Edinburgh line. To prepare us southrons for culture oop north or to let Scots gently into the Great Metropolis? To be honest, the M was an excuse to bring in Banks, who wouldn't have fitted elsewhere, as well as bookshops.

Jack adds a postscript:

P.S. Is there an article somewhere on the recent burgeoning of sf by Scottish writers? By my count there are now four or five such beasts active in the field, an unparalleled number in my experience. The usual has been none, or one at best. But up to five! ☺

**AMB responds:** somewhere, probably. About eighteen months ago Chris Terran and I discussed the issue, mooted a special issue. I suspect it's got lost in Chris worrying that Vector was doing one and my worrying that Matrix is doing it, as we try not to tread on each others' toes. Watch this space – or better still, submit one yourself. Let's see, the multi-talented Iain Banks, the Clarke Award-shortlisted MacLeod and the BSFA Award-shortlisted Jack Deighton. Anyone we've missed? And where, beyond Steve Palmer (and Dave Langford) are the Welsh sf writers? \*

A few issues back there was some debate over the balance of reviews to articles, and what we can review. A dissatisfied customer revives the issue:

**From Martin Clarke**

I agree wholeheartedly with the sentiments you express in the editorial of Vector #200 regarding the need to provide information about good written science fiction to its potential readership, thus increasing its sales. As you point-out, Vector is one of the few sources of such information. It is therefore especially ironic that Vector #200 has what can only be described as an inadequate review section, or perhaps I should say the most inadequate yet since the announcement that review space was being scaled down.

Can you explain to me how anyone is supposed to make even the most preliminary of judgements about Susan R. Matthews's *Prisoner of Conscience* on the basis of: 'It's a shame then that the only book in this batch which dares to imagine a fully-adult protagonist [...] is also the most disappointing. The clarity of the author's imagination is lost in slippery, anonymous prose: there are no obvious hooks.'

The above is the review of this book essentially quoted in full. Am I alone in thinking that it is necessary to say at least something about what sort of novel is being reviewed, and to give at least an inkling as to the content of the plot if the review is not to be a complete farce? (Which the above is.)

I couldn't help comparing and contrasting the current attitude to review space with the policy described by Chris Fowler – also rather ironically, under the circumstances, in Vector #200 – as being the one applied by himself when editor of the magazine.

He says: 'Another thing people didn't like was the very small print used so as to cram in a big book review section, as I tried to cover everything possible.'

I would humbly suggest that returning to a policy of having a big book review section would be the best way of ensuring that Vector provides the information necessary to promote sales of non spin-off and Fantasy amongst its potential readership. Given that most sf is bought in paperback this should include the return of a good-quality paperback review section. ☺

**GSD replies:** I agree that the review section was disappointingly small in issue 200. However, this is not part of the policy of reducing the length of certain reviews, but as a result of having so many extra articles to fit into what was a special edition designed to celebrate both 200 issues of the magazine and 40 years of the BSFA simultaneously. We wanted to make the issue as 'special' as possible by fitting in as many interviews and features relating to past and present sf concerns as we could. Even with the four extra

pages something had to give, and unfortunately it was the review section. Personally I would like to see Vector at 52 pages or more every issue, but economics dictates against it. If we can increase membership we can increase the page count of all the BSFA magazines. The alternative would be to increase the cost of subscription, but this could well lose some members in the process. Getting the content right will therefore always be a balancing act. I also agree with you that some of the reviews, including the one you cite, seem too short. I can't comment beyond this, as these matters are entirely between Paul Kincaid, who has complete editorial control over the book reviews, and the reviewer in question.

**Paul Kincaid replies:** Editing a review column is, as much as anything, a matter of juggling. With the best will in the world, there is only a limited amount of space available. I would love to be able to give every work of science fiction and fantasy published in this country a review of a length the reviewer felt was appropriate to the book. Unfortunately, even if we took out every article, letter and editorial from Vector and devoted the whole of each issue to reviews, we wouldn't be able to do that (I have, on occasion, written a 6,000 word review of one book, and still felt I was short of space to do it full justice). Therefore, I have to juggle number of reviews, length and space for every issue.

In the past, we have solved the problem by holding reviews over until the next issue. But this is not a good solution given that Vector is only published every two months, since reviews might then appear long after new books have disappeared from bookshop shelves.

Nevertheless, we persist in our aim of trying to provide review coverage of every new work of science fiction and fantasy published in this country, every new work about science fiction and fantasy, significant related works (such as mainstream novels with a fantastic element, or non-genre works by widely recognised genre writers), a representative number of paperback reprints, and an increasing number of new American publications (since these are increasingly available in this country through specialist bookshops, mail order and the Internet).

That is a tall order. There has to be some compromise on space and coverage. Although it is impossible to be absolutely rigid on this, I try to follow this pattern in assigning reviews. The most significant new books are reviewed on their own, usually receiving between 400-600 words though it can go higher. If more than one book by the same author comes out at the same time, they tend to be reviewed together. Where a number of books are linked by a perceived theme, they will generally be reviewed together (though I cannot read every book as it comes in for review, therefore this linkage may be more perceived than real, in these circumstances we are reliant on the reviewer and if no actual link is found I tend to receive short solus reviews). Paperback reprints of books recently reviewed, along with books of marginal interest, are given notice in the Particles. From time to time I will commission round-up reviews of books that deserve notice but which we cannot afford to give full reviews of their own. These might, for instance, be a group of genre fantasy novels, of Dr Who novelisations, of American debut novels. In these cases, the word length will tend to average out at around 100 words per book, though of course some will receive more and some less than that. The Susan Matthews novel (a book by a new American writer that is not, so far, available in any British edition) was covered in one such review. Of course it is unsatisfactory, but if I gave Susan Matthews the length of review she deserves it would be at the expense of coverage we might give, for instance, to the new British books by, for instance, Iain Banks, Gwyneth Jones, Ian McDonald, Robert Holdstock, Christopher Priest, Pat Cadigan, David Gemmell and a host of others. As I say, we have to juggle these things, and I would be amazed if we got it right every time. But at least this way we were able to mention her book and, hopefully, give some sort of flavour of it.

**AMB:** The reviewer, Daniel O'Mahony, does go on to note 'of all the writers here Matthews seems most likely to really shake the world.' Quite how, we're not told. \*

The two articles on Wookie Books drew much comment. First from Gary Wilkinson, via a response to Brian Stableford's survey of the seventies in Vector 200:

**From Gary Wilkinson, Grantham**

Congratulations on your double centenary.

I cannot quite agree with Brian Stableford's assertion that Spielberg and Lucas smothered proper sf at the end of the 70s. Although they have made it more likely that film finances are diverted into bloated block-busters rather than smaller, more intelligent films, and led to a general 'dumbing-down' of the cinema audience, it could also be argued that they led to the saving of the movie industry when audiences were already starting to decline. Also the sci-fi Star Wars juggernaut carried in a lot of people in its wake, myself included, into a greater interest in the genre.

With regards to wookie books – In the later half of this century, the trend has been for companies to heavily market 'brand' images in the consumer's mind (Nike, MacDonalds etc.). This has led to a loss of diversity, and in publishing has had the effect of producing genres and sub-genres. Within those fields certain authors tend to become brand names in their own right. Horror in particular seems to be dominated by a few names – King, Rice, Barker etc. each with their own fans who read little else. I know people who will devour every Pratchett book as it is released, but would not read any other sf or fantasy no matter how hard I try to persuade them. The wookie books have the advantage of having built-in brand loyalty crossing over from their associated films or TV series. It is, however, heartening to see a writer like Iain Banks regularly topping in the best-seller charts (with or without the 'M') and overall, I think, sf remains healthy.

Here's to the next two hundred. ☐

**Response by GSD:** Many thanks for your kind comments. I couldn't agree with you more regarding Lucas and Spielberg, in fact I already have, in my editorial for Vector 194. The blame for idiotic films must fall squarely upon the audiences which continually flock to see them. The sad truth appears to be that the mass audience has entirely different idea of what constitutes a good sf film to the average BSFA member. Unfortunately, many readers remain as conservatively unadventurous as multiplex patrons. There seems to be an especial irony in any fan of Clive Barker's writing having no interest in what else might be out there. Surely much of what Barker is about is the exploration of the unknown, which must by implication include the work of other writers. \*

A veteran reader joins the chorus:

**From Roy Gray, via email:**

A good issue well done.

Daniel O'Mahony argued his end very well. I think all sf, especially the hard stuff or predictive work, is ephemeral because technical advances and social change makes it unintelligible to anyone not of its time. I'm sure you are young, compared with me, so try reading Heinlein's *The Door Into Summer* to see what I mean.

I liked the reminiscences as I was a reader for most of this time. (since '65). Keep up the good work. ☐\*

**From Steve Jeffery, via email:**

I found Daniel O'Mahony's 'Defence of Wookies' article fascinating, particularly for a sub genre (Whodunnit) that I have no great interest in or experience of. As both a reply to your case for the prosecution and as an article on the nature of tie-ins and a disentangling of 'shared world' novelisations from commercial sharecropping, there were a number of interesting points raised. The one that struck me was the notion of a body of such shared world novelisations as 'apocryphal discourses' around an original ur-text (film or TV series). And is there not a view of the larger body of sf as a genre being, in part, just that: themes and variations, expansions and alternative takes on previous notions? Take, as a couple of examples, Harlan Ellison's 'Prowler in the City at the Edge of the World' an almost direct variation and commentary on Robert Bloch's 'A Toy for Juliette' (both

*Dangerous Visions* 1, 1967) and both drawing on the theme of Jack the Ripper and a classic time travel abduction sf theme, or the early career of Ian McDonald, and especially *Hearts, Hands and Voices* as a reworking of Geoff Ryman's *The Child Garden*. This, in part, is why we read science fiction, or read it as a genre rather than a series of isolated works, and O'Mahony's view of Whodunnit makes far more sense (to an outsider) seen in this light.

I find the bare economic argument more problematic. Mere sharecropping by publishers doesn't expand the genre in any meaningful way, apart from numerically (most have a long way to go before they get into Perry Rhodan territory), but on the other hand a writer's gotta eat, and is it any better or worse that they do this by writing series books to order to put bread on the table than by writing advertising copy, car manuals or stacking boxes in a warehouse? We don't disparage advertising and copy illustrators that they are somehow lowering the field for doing what they do instead of painting fine art for the National Portrait Gallery. These are different jobs, different expectations (and different risks and rewards) regardless of a superficial similarity of the medium (paint on paper, or words on a page). It's the same argument (and rejected more than 20 years ago) that holds that fanzines are no more than failed pro- or semi-pro-magazines. Again, same medium, but entirely different expectations, rewards and audience. ☐\*

And now, so to speak, the wookie strikes back.

**From Sue Christian, Ellesmere, Shropshire:**

Although I've been reading sf for over forty years now, I've only been a member of the BSFA for a couple of years. I have greatly enjoyed reading *Focus*, *Matrix* and *Vector*, but this is the first time I have been sufficiently stirred by an article to write a letter about it. The article in question is Andrew M. Butler's 'Watered-Down Worlds' in Vector 200, regarding wookie books – a term new to me. I scribbled all over my copy of Vector while I was reading the piece and have finally got round to sitting at the keyboard to try and decipher the hieroglyphics.

I know, having read numerous editorials, articles and letters in *Interzone* over the years, that wookie books are, in some circles, a hated phenomenon and that defending them is probably a lost cause, but hey, sf (or at least fantasy) is full of lost causes, improbable quests, etc. I am, I confess, a long-term reader of wookie books. I bought (and still have) the James Bligh *Star Trek* short stories in the 1960s and over the years have amassed quite a collection of *Star Trek: The Original Series* and *Star Trek: Voyager* books. (Not *The Next Generation* or *Deep Space Nine*, however, as neither series has characters who capture my imagination in the same way.) The wookie collection, mind you, is nowhere near as extensive as the collections on the other bookcases of literature, crime, historical, reference and Proper sf. So I'm going to take your various headings and argue the toss about the conclusions you draw.

First a comment on the paragraph in your introduction regarding how it can 'damage our notions of authorship'. I find it difficult to believe than any author, other than a self-publisher, has ever been God in the sense of being in total control of his work. Other people, editors, publishers etc., have always stuck their oar in and many authors over the years have had to work within parameters strictly controlled by others. Corporate bodies do not pre-empt the copyright of wookie books authors; they buy it. They may insist on buying complete control, but the author can always say no and leave the work unpublished.

### 1. The proliferation of wookie books is driving out Proper sf

Living in the wilds of deepest Shropshire I can't claim to have any really local bookshops, but there are six I use fairly regularly in Shrewsbury, Chester and Liverpool. None of those devote what I would consider to be a sufficient proportion of their space to sf. That said, neither do any of them devote an inordinate amount of their sf space to wookie books, 5-10% on average I'd guess. At least one has far more space devoted to Pratchettalia. I have to agree with you about *Forbidden Planet*, though. I was deeply disappointed when the Liverpool branch opened to find that they stocked almost no Proper sf – however, they are an excellent source for wookie addict! My main complaint against bookshops

is not that they stock too much wookiee stuff, but that the range of their Proper sf is so limited and unadventurous. Even in the space they have, they could do so much better.

## 2. They are at best pale imitations of their movie [or tv] counterparts

I think I know what you mean here, but you don't really make your point very well do you? I would agree that imagination provides the best special effects. It may well be nonsense to say *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* has an extra dimension over *Blade Runner*, but the book and the film are very different, Deckard's character is different. I enjoyed them both, but for different reasons. What I think the film does better, particularly in a cinema (large screen, darkness, surroundsound, etc.) is let you immerse yourself completely in the thing. I know you can lose yourself in a good book and that on some levels that's better than a film, it has more depth but it doesn't have the immediacy, the thrill, somehow. As far as the business of splitting the protagonists into small groups is concerned, it's not just films and TV that do that. Tolkien did it in *The Lord of the Rings* and Brian Stableford does it in the *Book of Genesis* series. They may present us with a better thought out rationalism for the split, but they still do it. It's a very good way of moving the plot along.

That said, I think we're both wandering from the subject a bit on this one. Most wookiee books are related to TV series not films and are meant to extend their subject, not imitate it.

Gary Dalkin comments that wookiee books 'dumbs down Proper Writing'. I would actually argue that it's not the writing that's dumbed down but the imagination, and that it's often not the books that do that but the original film/TV series from which they're taken. If you've got a nasty formulaic starting point you're going to get a nasty formulaic follow up.

## 3. Their formulaic nature means that even in original adventures, the main characters cannot develop or they will not fit in with other books in the series.

I feel it's a bit ingenuous of you to use the behaviour of Kirk, Spock and Scotty in a series over thirty years old to illustrate this point. I agree that as far as that series went they hardly developed at all. By the time the movies came around, however, they had all grown considerably (and not just around the waist!) and these changes had largely taken place in the wookiee books that had helped keep *Star Trek* alive in the intervening years. Once the series novelisations had been exhausted, the books, which were in the main written by people who were fans of the show, concentrated almost entirely on exploring and expanding the characters of Kirk and Co. In published wookiee books (as opposed to fan fiction) you're not allowed to kill off main characters, all must end happily and the status quo must be returned, so character growth and development through the plot is basically the only way they can go. The poor books (and certainly there is some dross out there) don't do this, but the good ones do – that's one of the things which makes them good.

By the time the later series of *Star Trek* were made, TV had changed and more emphasis was put on characterisation, characters were allowed to grow and change throughout the series. (Yes, there is still huge emphasis put on special effects and the overall 'look' of the show – no one fat, old or ugly etc. – but that's American TV for you).

Continuity is an inescapable part of any TV series, space opera, soap opera, drama, whatever. If you're going to use your world for more than one story you're going to have to check the continuity, as I dare say Terry Pratchett, Anne McCaffrey, et al can testify. When there are a lot of stories, checking can be hard work – tough. Research is often hard and boring, it's a dirty job, but...

## 4. They are by nature ephemeral and not worth attention.

This is really a rather silly, and not necessarily accurate, argument, as Gary Dalkin points out.

You manage to make reading sound like a hated chore, rather than something you choose to do for pleasure! It shouldn't be a matter of keeping up but of enjoyment. Do you actually read every sf novel that's published each year? At a rough count, so far

this year I've read thirteen novels (admittedly not all sf), all the short fiction in *Interzone* and the odd short story from my older books, and that doesn't count the various practical craft/cookery/gardening books. Of all this lot I think four were *Star Trek* novels, and I had to go to Forbidden Planet or Virgin Records to get two of them, because they weren't available in the bookshops!

## 5. They're written for money, as quickly as possible and thus are unlikely to have any literary merit

So writing's just a hobby now is it, a way for 'ladies and gentlemen of leisure' to pass the time while they're not busy counting their money? Don't all writers write for money? They may not get as much as they'd like and may have to have other sources of income as well, but I don't see many authors giving their novels to publishers for free just for the joy of seeing it in print.

Is the speed at which a piece is written really any indication of its literary merit? Does the fact that a work has been years in writing mean it's automatically better than a work of comparable length completed in weeks? While it may well be true that the work of some hack writers leaves a lot to be desired in terms of both craft and imagination you can not honestly use speed of completion as a criterion for condemnation.

I can't comment on the quality of *Doctor Who* books as I've never read any, but I do know that most of the *Star Trek* books are written by fans (some of whom may be professional authors, but many of whom are definitely not) and they've certainly had a lot of time and effort expended on them. They're not all well written, the 'amateur' status of some of the authors is painfully obviously and several would benefit greatly from the attentions of a good editor, but where the plot is good I can usually cope with the odd spot of purple prose. Some are dreadful and there are a couple where I haven't got past the first chapter, but, as with all fan fiction, and to a certain extent all professional fiction, you pays your money and you takes your chances.

The novels are merchandising? Well, yes they are, but it that necessarily a bad thing? How?

## 6. None of these writers is likely to progress to writing Proper Books anyway, and many writers get trapped by them once they've started writing them.

Trapped? Doesn't that suggest they're trying to break out? Maybe they are. On the other hand maybe they're enjoying writing wookiee books. Maybe it's an easy way of making the money which allows them to spend time doing what they really enjoy. Maybe Shekley didn't really enjoy writing sf and only did it because sf was a popular money-spinner at the time – hack work which supported him while he concentrated on the crime/thriller which he enjoyed. I don't know, do you?

You obviously think that writing wookiee books is somehow easier than writing Proper Books. I've not (yet) tried to write a wookiee novel, but it seems to me that to do it well would actually be quite a difficult task. You've already highlighted the problem of continuity. Surely to write well within the confines of an established universe requires almost as much work, and possibly greater discipline, than making your own universe up from scratch? To write a good story that will grab the imagination of the reader and keep him reading even though he knows the status quo will be restored at the end of the book surely takes talent? The main problem that some tyro *Star Trek* writers seem to have is one of characterisation. Not that they can't do characterisation *per se*, but that they can only do it really well for their favourite character and tend to portray everyone else rather shallowly. This is just bad (or inexperienced) writing and is by no means confined to wookiee books.

Whose Alien is it, anyway? I'm not sure that the argument about whether actor, producer, scriptwriter or director should get credit for a film is part of this discussion. As far as reading the novel is concerned, I don't know whether the tie-in *Blade Runner* novel differed from *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* or not, as I've only read *Androids*, but does it matter whose Deckard we are looking for? If you get the Deckard you're looking for presumably you're satisfied. If you don't then, like him or not,

your understanding of the character has been stretched. If you don't like him at least you're made to think about why not; what was missing, what would make him better? Your imagination has been brought into play.

If someone reads all of Jane Austen because she (or he) thought Mr Darcy in the TV adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* was drop dead gorgeous, is that a Bad Thing? Might they not find that they enjoyed reading the books and go on to read something in a similar vein, *Walden* or the Brontës for instance. Can the same thing not happen in sf? I watched *Star Trek* because I was already reading sf, but it must be the case that the reverse has happened sometimes.

How is a novelisation different from pyjamas, board games, wall paper and models? Isn't this just a question of whatever turns you on? Board games and models fire some people's imaginations just as books fire mine and, presumably, yours. I'm not sure about pyjamas, but I know I loved my Biggles wallpaper when I was a child! If the book is just a re-writing of the screenplay with a few 'he said's' added, the you're probably right and there's not much merit in it and not worth spending your money on. If it doesn't stand alone from the film or TV show, doesn't add something, then that's the author's fault. Bad writing makes bad books, whether they're wookie books or Proper Books.

In the same issue of *Vector* there is your interview with Mary Doria Russell in which she says that she wrote her two books because she 'fell in love with my characters'. Isn't that why people read wookie books – because they love the characters in a particular film or TV series and want more of them? (And before you bring up the rest of her sentence – 'and because I wanted to spend time thinking very hard about some very difficult theological and cultural problems' – proportionately, there are as many wookie books that do that too as there are Proper sf! ☐)

**AMB:** All I want to say for now is, I'm flattered that I've generated such a long letter. \*

Kevin J. Anderson, best-selling author of tie-ins and original fiction, also responded, necessitating a quick re-read of 'Watered-Down Worlds' to see how rude I had been about him:

**From Kevin J. Anderson, Colorado:**

I read with interest the article on 'Watered-Down Worlds' in the recent issue of *Vector*. Though I had heard most of the arguments before, these were rather well-reasoned and well-balanced.

However, some of the statements seem to have been observations made without supporting data. Since I have worked extensively both in media-based science fiction as well as original novels, I would like to add some comments and some hard data.

Referring to me: 'In *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, Kevin J. Anderson is described as having verve. This verve produced best-selling novels based on *The X-Files*, but I wonder how many of his other books will sell more copies as a result?' Actually, quite a substantial number of them. As a specific example, my British publisher HarperCollins have recently released three of my best original sf novels (*Climbing Olympus*, *Resurrection, Inc.* and *Blindfold* [forthcoming]), solely on the basis of my X-Files success; before that, no UK publisher had expressed any interest. My German publisher of *Star Wars* and *X-Files* has now translated seven of my original works and has released them with significant fanfare to ride the coattails of my media best-sellers. Same for Polish edition, Japanese, Hebrew, and other. In the US, the sales figures and advances for my original novels have increased dramatically since I started writing media books; I have received hundreds of letters from fans who grabbed my tie-ins, liked them, and then sought out my other titles. There is indeed a crossover audience who would never otherwise have read my original novels. We need to get new readerships any way we can.

Every single year since I started publishing *Star Wars* books, I have made it a point to write at least one 'damn the sales figures, I want to write this!' book. I don't believe anyone can read *Blindfold* or *Climbing Olympus*, for example, and honestly say that media fiction has adversely affected my writing ability.

In *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, if you flip a few pages beyond ANDERSON to ASIMOV, you will find the curious statement that: 'A film tie, *Fantastic Voyage* \* (1966) [...] did his name no good'! It seems an odd thing to say, considering this was Asimov's

best-selling title in his entire career. The copy on my shelf is the 51st printing. I remember reading and enjoying that novel when I was much younger; it was always checked out of the library, and many of my friends also talked about it. From there I went on to read Asimov's other books. *Did his name no good?* I beg to differ.

One point the article fails to address is that an author who writes tie-in novels might actually enjoy doing them. Personally, I love *Star Wars* and *X-Files*. I also enjoy writing original fiction – so I do both. A good author knows how to be creative and can find room to tell an interesting, original story even in a pre-established universe. The article states: 'Their formulaic nature means that even in original adventures, the main characters cannot develop or they will not fit in with other books in the series' – this, plus the succeeding paragraphs, leads me to wonder just how many of these books were actually read by the 'prosecution'? In the *Star Wars* novels, for example, the main characters have grown older, gotten married, had children; one hero has changed to a villain and returned with severe emotional scars; one character from the films has even been killed (and stayed dead). Exactly how much more character change could a reader want?

Finally, the statement we've heard so many times before: 'There are only so many shelves that can be devoted to sf in even the biggest bookstore and much of this is taken by *Star Trek*, *Star Wars* [etc.]'. I can only speak to examples I have seen on this side of the ocean, but because the so-called 'wookie books' sell so well, I have seen many bookstores dramatically expand the size of their entire sf section. Whereas before, science fiction might have been relegated to a few small racks in the back of the store, now the sf sections are three or four times their former size. Sure, there are a lot of *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* books on the shelves, but there are also a lot more shelves! I certainly don't see any less room for Iain M Banks or Dan Simmons or Greg Bear.

The universe is expanding, the audience is growing, and there will be different types of books for different readers. Some of them will like media books, some of them will like so-called 'Proper SF', and some of them will read both.

It's better than playing video games, is it not?

Much has been made in recent years of the 'graying of the science fiction readership.' But is this really true, or is it a 'graying of the people who fill out the *Locus* annual survey'? If one attends Dragon\*Con, which is (I believe) the largest regular sf convention in the world – 25,000 attendees, as opposed to around 5000 for the average WorldCon – you see a vast array of young readers.

The best part about media tie-in books for the genre in general is that *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *X-Files*, etc. bring in readers from outside the core readership. Anybody reading *Vector* has probably been into science fiction for a long time and doesn't need any convincing... but the average person who goes into the bookstore to pick up a *Star Wars* novel has to go into the science fiction section to get it. Some of them look up the shelves and pick up *Ender's Game* next, or *Dune*. We are expanding our readership base from people who would never have gone there in the first place. We should take new readers wherever we can get them, and stop complaining about success. ☐

**AMB:** Perhaps the situation is better than I fear, then. But I've watched an sf section in one shop for over ten years which has kept the same footage of shelving although the number of books has varied. Certainly the amount of tie-in novels of various kinds has taken up an increasing percentage – alongside, it has to be said, increasing numbers of Pratchetts. Forbidden Planet is supposedly an sf shop, although comics in all their forms dominate. I just think it's a shame that in the branches outside of London I've visited, it's easier to pick up (say) fetish magazines, gay porn and re-prints of 1950s beefcake pictures (you can tell I pay attention, can't you...) than any original, non-tied, science fiction whatsoever.

Rather than responding in any more depth to Ms Christian or Mr Anderson's letters, we leave it to the readership to respond. \*

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

# Red Shift

## Corrections and Clarifications

Stan Nicholls rightly draws our attention to a slip in the bibliography to Stephen Baxter piece 'Exotic Luna: Alien Moons in Science Fiction' (V200):

One small correction. Stephen Baxter's excellent piece gave a fair assessment of Gerry Anderson's *Space 1999* (one I don't think Gerry would argue with himself). But the biography written by the late Simon Archer and myself wasn't 'unauthorised' – it was very much hands-on as far as Gerry was concerned!

Our apologies for not catching the mistake as we amplified the publication details in the editing process.

We try to double check bibliographies and append fuller details where possible, and add bibliographies where one is

needed and lacking, but this is a minefield. For example, a bibliography was prepared for the Stephen Lawhead interview in V199, but it inexplicably got lost in some kind of transmission error between Hull, Nottingham and Camden and, unable to be squeezed into V200, it has since shown up in *Matrix* 133.

Joseph Nicholas notes an odd omission from the 'Chronological Bibliography' which we as editors (specifically AMB) appended to K V Bailey's article on David Wingrove's *Chung Kuo* sequence: 'Letter response to Brian Griffith and Susan Oudot, Vector 172, April / May 1993'. As Joseph rightly surmises, the letter was his, although there was another letter from former Vector editor Kevin Smith. I can only blame the earliness of the hour (3 am), the crampedness of the notes and the size of the pile of back issues for the omission. As far as we can tell, that was the last mention of the *Chung Kuo* debate in Vector.

Please let us know of any factual errors or misrepresentations in Vector: email [ambutler@enterprise.net](mailto:ambutler@enterprise.net) or write to Andrew M Butler, 33 Brookview Drive Keyworth, Nottingham, NG12 5JN or Gary Dalkin, 5 Lydford Road, Bournemouth, BN11 8SN

IN VECTOR 201 **LJ HURST** RETURNED TO AN EXPLORATION OF TWO CLASSIC NOVELS, WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF TIME AND DURATION. NOW HE OFFERS AN EXAMINATION OF THE ALTERNATE HISTORY

## What if – Or Worse: Alternate History in Context

In the article 'Remembrance of Things to Come?' I showed that the smallest units of meaning within a story, units as small as the individual word or tense of verb, and then the individual sentences within which those words are used (such as the first sentence of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*), contribute more than might be supposed to the effect of the whole story. Now I want to explore the opposite – that certain types of texts gain their effect, indeed, could not exist, without the whole text being able to call on the existence of other works, the existence of complete genres. The best example of this is sf's sub-genre, Alternate History.

This article came to mind when I was fortunate enough to be invited to join the 1998 Eastercon panel discussing Alternate History. My ideas have been tempered by the presence of John Whitbourn on the stage, as an author of Alternate Histories, along with Tony Cullen and myself as readers and critics of the subgenre. Whitbourn is knowledgeable about the genre he writes; he was interested in history and the theory of history and he brings these interests to his writing Alternate History. We did not cover the field, though, and one of the points we did not mention, is that Alternate History is one of sf's sub-genres where 'the idea as hero' is seminal. We did agree, though, that Alternate History sometimes moves sf close to academia (as the recent collection of essays *Virtual History*, edited by Niall Ferguson, suggests) because it is, or can be, an intellectual exercise, both in writing and reading.

Most significantly, though, none of us (nor any member of the audience – I have only found a mention by Brian Aldiss to show that this has been realised before) mentioned the single underpinning fact of Alternate History: every Alternate History actually has another genre

as its skeleton. It is a genre like a disembodied spirit that has to steal some other flesh in order to appear on Earth.<sup>1</sup>

Let me prove it, by examining as wide a range of Alternate Histories as I can.

Most obviously, there are Alternate Histories written as detective stories. These are the kind which tend to become cross-over best-sellers, with examples including Len Deighton's *SS-GB* (1978), Robert Harris's *Fatherland* (1992), and Richard Dreyfus and Harry Turtledove's *The Two Georges* (1996). An Alternate History exists to describe its alternate world and a detective hero, of course, goes everywhere. From the days of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler the private eye has moved from the bedrooms of the rich to the gutters of the poor, which makes the detective story an ideal genre for the Alternate Historian to co-opt, allowing suspects to exist in every new cranny of civilization and getting in everything an author could want to describe in his or her alternate world. Critics have pointed out how *Fatherland* can be read in parallel with Philip Kerr's *A German Requiem*, a historical thriller set in 1946, featuring the same historical characters.

Dystopias, too, are very popular. In fact, one of the first, Sarban's *The Sound of his Horn* (1952) falls into this category, based on the common premise that the Nazis won the Second World War. One of the latest, Eugene Byrne and Kim Newman's *Back In The USSA* (1997), supposes that it was the USA which went communist in 1917, so that today capitalist Britain is allied with the Tsar. And the classic, Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) belongs in this group.

<sup>1</sup> Brian Aldiss's notes on genres occurs in his essay 'Judgement at Jonbar' in S. F. Horizons # 1 (1964): '[T]here is no sf novel that is purely an sf novel. At some stage all sf novels turn into something else' (p. 22).

Utopias are much rarer – Brian Stableford has suggested that Harry Harrison's *A Transatlantic Tunnel, Hurrah* (1972) is one such, if a trifle ironic, and taking Donald Tucker's description of *The Two Georges* ('the American revolution didn't happen. The sun never sets on the British Empire [...] No large scale wars at all since the late 18th century') some might regard that as a world to be longed for, as well.

Then there are the historical novels – Harry Turtledove's *Guns of the South* (1992) is a good example, which scarcely moves out of its Civil War setting. *Guns of the South* must belong to an enormous genre mostly read in the USA – the civil war novel, which has almost no British equivalent except the Napoleonic sea-stories of Hornblower, Ramage and so on. *Guns of the South* revolves around Afrikaners smuggling AK47s through a time machine to the Confederates. The advantage of this to Turtledove's story is that the AK47 remains a small arm which cannot end the war immediately so that the battlefields, skirmishes and firefights of the Civil War remain open to him to describe in detail. Tedious detail.

Harry Harrison and John Holmes's *The Hammer and the Cross* (1993) is set in the wars between the Saxons and the Viking invaders, which includes a homage to a true historical novel set in the same period, Henry Treece's *The Green Man* (which recounts the events that were re-told as *Hamlet*). And some of the British one-offs such as Kingsley Amis's *The Alteration* (1976) and Keith Robert's *Pavane* (1968) are historical too, able to answer questions such as how did a semaphore station work or how did the Roman Catholic Church supply and treat its castrati. Answering questions is not necessarily the first purpose of these authors, but in practice that is what happens. In his autobiography L. Sprague De Camp describes how he came to write the classic *Lest Darkness Fall* (1939), by reading Robert Graves's *Count Belisarius* (a straight-forward historical chronicle of the sixth century Roman empire published the year before) and then allowing for the effect of small changes. Juveniles will have been reading the novels of Joan Aiken for years without realising that they too were reading Alternate History.

At the opposite end of the space-time continuum come the works which exploit space opera, sci-fi and the 'sensawunda', which would include (the near-ubiquitous) Harry Turtledove's World War quartet of the early 1990s. And I would put Harry Harrison's earlier *Eden* trilogy (1984-1988) here, too, as Harrison explores a world of dinosaurs who escaped extinction millions of years ago and evolved into sentience and a bizarrely different technology.

When Stephen Baxter wrote the much more realistic *Voyage* (1996), in which Richard Nixon allows NASA to send a manned vessel to Mars, he chose to write a blockbuster. His models, I guess, were Tom Wolfe's *The Right Stuff* and Norman Mailer's *A Fire On The Moon*, mixed with Arthur Hailey's *Wheels* and perhaps even Harold Robbins's *The Betsy*, both of them best-sellers set in the boardrooms and bedrooms of powerful industrialists. At least some of Baxter's heroes are accountants.

Now these genres are skeletons, and few of the titles use them pure. For instance, Sarban includes a bit of soft porn, *Story of O* style as I recall, while Harrison and Holmes's inclusion of the historical detail of the tortures inflicted by the Viking puts part of their book into a field close to gore and slasher horror. And Amis's *The Alteration* has bits of comedy of manners in the style of Benson's *Mapp and Lucia*. A list like this one also has to make room for one-offs and works otherwise incapable of categorization such as Norman Spinrad's *The Iron Dream* (1972), a heroic fantasy novel written by an Adolf Hitler who emigrated to the USA after World War One and became a pulp author. But the text of Hitler's novel is actually only a part (though the largest part) of Spinrad's novel, so it is not a pure fantasy as such, and the text with its commentary by 'Homer Whipple' actually appears just as other unattractive texts are published with explanations by academic publishers (Zone Books now publish Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs* with a commentary by Felix Guattari longer than the fiction). Other works such as Gibson and Sterling's *The Difference Engine* (1990) must be included here, too, as works which almost consciously categorize themselves as being outside of a category, so that works under this penultimate heading might be called Challenging Russell's Paradox.<sup>2</sup>

And finally there is a small, exceptional group of works whose skeleton is phantasy, such as Ford's *The Dragon Waiting*, and the novels of John Whitbourn. Whitbourn, who has been writing since the early 1990s, chooses to suppose both that some historical incident happened otherwise, but also that some scientific standard is not fixed: in John Whitbourn's world magic works. (Magic is not such a problem, Byrne and Newman use a different kind of magic glass in a long chapter in which James Bolam and Rodney Bewes meet Likely Lads Terry Collier and Bob Ferris after Bob and Terry return from duty in Vietnam). So this world can react with both the magical and the fictional in Alternate History.

I may not have listed all the genres inhabited by Alternate History above, but the list must come close. Obviously, there are very few titles which challenge my thesis.

Most Alternate Histories are based on the premise that there is only one time stream and that, in the world of their fictions, there was a single Point of Divergence. That is, that the Armada succeeded, or that the Wobblies came to power in America, or that one man could introduce double entry book-keeping to the Romans. Other novels move into other theories of time – that there are parallel time lines in each of which each possibility of what might happen does happen, for instance (see the entries on 'Alternate Worlds' and 'Time Paradoxes' in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*) and some authors have been troubled by the theory underlying their divergence. For instance, Philip K. Dick

## At least some of Baxter's heroes are accountants.

<sup>1</sup> Donald Tucker is quoted from his website 'Pteranodon's View' ([www.geocities.com/Athens/Forum/4123/ah.htm](http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Forum/4123/ah.htm)).

<sup>2</sup> Bertrand Russell's Paradox asks whether something which defines a group also defines or excludes itself. For instance, should a library catalogue which is a book be included in itself since it is a book? or should the catalogue list all books in the library except itself, even though it is a book physically in the library?

started a sequel to *The Man in the High Castle*, and wrote two chapters before he gave up. In the original novel his characters are helped in their opposition to the Nazi/Japanese Axis by reading a samizdat novel, *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, which is an alternate history in which the Allies won, but the characters do not suppose that the Allied had won somewhere. In his sequel, though, Dick has Goering and Goebbels discovering 'the parallel universe, which we then called *die Nebenwelt* [...] an alternate Earth to ours in which the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis mishandled the war and allowed the Allied Nations of Communism and Plutocracy a victory by default.'<sup>1</sup> Dick apparently could not maintain a theory of alternate and simultaneous worlds and abandoned the project.

If parallel worlds do not exist the responsibility on an author to work with historical realism increases. John Whitbourn, for instance, looked at the world of today and asked, 'What more than anything else has given it to us and decided that it was the victory of William III over James II. Often presented in the history books as the victory of Protestant liberalism over Catholic authoritarianism (what is sometimes called the Whig Theory of History), Whitbourn thought it was actually the opportunity of some proto-capitalists to use a Dutchman with a nominal claim to the throne to give their *coup d'état* an air of respectability as they set up the Bank of England, took over the financial control of the country and introduced capitalism. *The Royal Changeling* (1998) was the result of Whitbourn's historical re-consideration.'<sup>2</sup>

When Whitbourn mentioned this on stage, others recalled the words of the eighteenth-century historian Edward Gibbon, when Gibbon mentioned in passing what might have happened in 732CE, if the Arab invaders had won the Battle of Tours, and not the French leader Charles Martel. Whitbourn quoted the passage verbatim: 'Perhaps the interpretation of the *Koran* would now be taught in the schools of Oxford, and her pulpits might demonstrate to a circumcised people the sanctity and truth of the revelations of Mahomet'. Truth, like the Whig truth challenged by Whitbourn, might be no more than the winning orthodoxy, as the cynical Gibbon recognised two hundred years ago.

There are some areas of sf where what is meant by 'science' is actually 'logic' and in the construction of Alternate Histories, logic matters. Whitbourn's logic is good, demonstrating that a Point of Divergence does not have to be a major battle – in *Last Darkness Fall* de Camp saw that it could be something as simple as the introduction of distillation, the flat-bed printing press or training Roman merchants in Double Entry Book-keeping.

To change from a list of genres, to a list of problems threatening Alternate History, I can identify three.

Firstly, Alternate History is about providing what did not happen, and using this opportunity some Alternate

Histories run close to becoming defences of the unreasonable (and the risk of neo-Nazis using this as a means of advancing their cause has meant that the internet news-group soc.history.what-if has strong rules on posting). Discussing Nazi dystopias, after listing works such as those of Sarban, Brian Stableford says, 'An interesting exception is *Budspy* (1987) by David Dvorkin, where a successful Third Reich is presented more evenhandedly',<sup>3</sup> which seems a strange suggestion, for apart from trains running on time, I am not sure what else there might be to present more evenhandedly about the Third Reich. Other authors go through stranger hoops to avoid defending the indefensible and giving offence. A minor example of this is Turtledove's *Guns of the South*, where Robert E Lee wins the war with the aid of his AK47 rifles, becomes President of the Confederate States but is troubled with the 'peculiar institution', eventually turning on his AWB allies in another civil war, winning and manumitting the slaves – this seems unhealthily close to a desire to have one's cake and eat it too.

Secondly, the rate of production threatens quality, if only because authors deny themselves time to think. After his *World War* quartet Harry Turtledove has now started on a new series set in the First World War. That is a subject which has tended to be ignored, but as *Interzone* has pointed out Turtledove's rate of production is so high one cannot help feeling he will not do justice to the subject. Similarly, Harry Harrison has now started a new series with *Stars and Stripes Forever*, based on the premise that the Britain invades the USA during the Civil War of the

### **'Perhaps the interpretation of the *Koran* would now be taught in the schools of Oxford, and her pulpits might demonstrate to a circumcised people the sanctity and truth of the revelations of Mahomet'**

1860s, to fight major land wars. Britain and the Union, of course, faced tension during the war over the *Alabama* Incident, but the whole series is based on a premise that Britain would fight a major land war, which is not historically accurate. National policy, what the military historian Basil Liddell-Hart called 'The British Way in Warfare', was to control the seas and allow allies to provide the mass armies. Harrison has to do more than suppose that army X rather than army Y won the Battle of Facticum, or suppose that inventor A invented the Pesudophone in year Z and got his invention mass produced, he has to suppose that the years before his Point of Divergence had been different, too.

There is a third possible problem area, too, which is only appearing in recent fiction. In *Back in the USSA* Byrne and Newman, like many writers (not limited to sf), have a mingling of the real and fictional (Bewes and Bolam meeting Bob and Terry, for instance, rather as BBC TV's *Goodnight Sweetheart* has had Nicholas Lyndhurst travelling back to World War II Britain and meeting Mr Mainwaring and Frank Pike from *Dad's Army* in their bank). This is reasonable, but Byrne and Newman's characters also meet both William Randolph Hearst and Charles Foster 'Citizen' Kane – one Orson Welles's portrait of the other – and Hearst's and Kane's co-existence seems

<sup>1</sup> Philip K. Dick's abandoned chapters appear in *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick: Selected Literary and Philosophical Writings*. Edited and introduced by Lawrence Sutin. (New York: Pantheon 1995).

<sup>2</sup> *Interzone* has now published a long interview with John Whitbourn, which does not seem to contradict the views I attribute to him here.

<sup>3</sup> Brian Stableford is quoted from *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. Edited by John Clute and Peter Nicholls. (London: Orbit, 1993)

impossible. (Since the characters are mentioned only in passing I take the continued existence of one or the other as a slip in the sub-editing that should have ensured better consistency).

Kingsley Amis, editor, critic and author, years before he wrote his one Alternate History saw the promise and the threat of this over production, when he wrote about the prospects for sf in *New Maps of Hell* (1960):

The economics of science-fiction writing are obviously important here, demanding as they do a huge output in a medium that calls for a sustained flow of novelties; it is no wonder that some of these get inflated to book-length. One hopes that as the audience for science fiction increases, and with it the author's remuneration, there will be less of this forced expansion, but I cannot foresee any change in the basic fact that this is a short-story or at any rate a long-story mode, with hundreds of successes in these forms against a bare couple of dozen in the novel. These are commonly the result of the a writer having to come up with an idea, in my special sense [KA means Ideas as Hero], that is not exhausted in a single demonstration; one thinks, for instance, of Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee*, which takes us on a tour of a powerful and prosperous Confederate States of America and a penurious, backward, agricultural United States. The hero, a military historian, gets a time-machine built and goes back to check on his theories about the Southern victory at Gettysburg. His appearance on the field disconcerts an advanced element of General Lee's troops to the point where they refuse to advance and occupy a vital height. Thus the world we know is set in train, with the hero trapped in its 1860's, for the scuffle his presence precipitates leads to the death of a Confederate officer who was later to have fathered the men who put up the money for the time-machine.

Kingsley Amis, *New Maps of Hell*  
(London: NEL, 1969 edn), pp 119-20.

Amis was too prescient – the world did not diverge as we might have hoped and we did not escape the forced

expansions, as Turtledove unfortunately proves.

Fortunately, there are enough of the other kind. Among others, Byrne and Newman have shown that works can be constructed that are not exhausted in a single demonstration – that stand, like *The Man in the High Castle*, repeated reading. And writers have realised, too, that novelty does not lie just in identifying a historical period previously avoided by Alternate Historians and annexing it. The divergence that occurs has to have an underlying rationale, which implies that the authors have reasoned what might happen, and more importantly can produce justifications for their reasoning. Now each of those authors' initial premises might be peculiar (that magic works, say), but their logic in following its conclusions must be good. Which means that when readers finds a new, good Alternate Historian that writer is likely to be not just a good sf author but a good historian as well. However, no matter what Divergence occurs and at what Point of Divergence on the calendar a book is supposed to take its driving power, an author still has a story to tell, and that story will take the form of another genre. Whether it is a historical novel of what England would have been like if the Vikings had been even more successfully rapacious, or a detective story investigating the disappearance of Nazi insiders, authors must find a way in which readers can explore the *Nebenwelt*. It is as they read a history or a detective story or a dystopia or whatever that readers discover that this fictional world is not congruent with their own. Readers know the premises of genre – they are unsettled by the history within it, which is why they chose to read Alternate History. Still, readers will recognise good invention and will search for it. Writers have to satisfy that demand.

If they can be found. If, as John Whitbourn (and Byrne and Newman) have shown, new authors can develop new and rewarding explorations of possible worlds.

If. Or in this genre:

What if.

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LJ Hurst has reviewed for Vector for many years, and his most recent articles for us are a controversial appreciation of Mark Adlard (V195) and 'Remembrance of Things to Come' Nineteen Eighty-Four and The Day of the Triffids Again' (V201) – Eds.

## Keep Watching the Skies: The Legacy of *The War of the Worlds*

by Gary S. Dalkin

*The War of the Worlds* by H.G. Wells was first published in *Pearson's Magazine* between April and December 1897. The following year the story was republished in book form. In this centenary year it remains among the most influential sf novels ever written, producing a continual stream of reinterpretations in other media. Great literature is great because it remains relevant to succeeding generations. Other works, equally well written, equally as entertaining, slip away. It is the purpose of this article, accompanied by Goble's original artwork, to chronicle a centuries' fascination with reinventing H.G. Wells' *Invaders From Mars*.

It may be so obvious as to be constantly overlooked, but *The War of the Worlds* invented the alien invasion story. As such the novel is antecedent of an entire subgenre of sf. The sf of the decade preceding Wells' novel saw the publication of many 'future war' stories, but until Wells these wars had been conventional, albeit with advanced weaponry. Wells offered the world a first vision of the horrors of total war.

It is important to remember – and almost impossible for us to imagine – that until just over a century ago, war was a limited activity, the province of professional armies and navies. Armies retired to the countryside to resolve the disagreements between nations in bloody but isolated



conflict. Most often women, children, the elderly and the ill were not directly involved. There was not the indiscriminate bombardment of cities. There was not the technology of mass destruction.

Seventeen years before The Great War, Wells' serial introduced apocalyptic, all out war which would be fought without let or hindrance, without mercy, without humanity.

The enemy was not human.

In *Amazing Stories* No. 5 (August 1926) Hugo Gernsback reprinted *The War of the Worlds* for the vast American pulp market. A vigorous cover by Paul shows three Martian war machines putting a Mexican village to the flame. The success of this introduction of Wells' Martians to the American mass audience can be seen in the influence upon hundreds of old pulp covers. There they are in any pile of old *Amazings*, *Astoundings*, *Wonder*...mechanical city-levelling insectoid killing machines, slimy tentacled alien abductors and valiant, besieged defenders.

The 1930s were not a great time for cinematic sf; the only important sf movie was made by William Cameron Menzies in 1936. *Things to Come* was adapted by H.G. Wells from his own novel *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933). Like *The War of the Worlds*, *Things to Come* details a titanic global war, predating the Second World War by three years.

### Debunking a myth

On CBS radio in America, on Halloween night, 31st of October 1938, an announcer began, 'Ladies and Gentlemen, the Director of the Mercury Theatre and star of these broadcasts, Orson Welles'. Welles delivered an introduction adapted from the opening passage of *The War of the Worlds*, ending with:

'In the 39th year of the 20th century came the great disillusionment. Near the end of October business was better, the war scare was over, more men were back at work, sales were picking up. On this particular evening, October 30th, the Crosley Service estimated that 32 million people were listening in on radios...'

What followed for the next hour was a pseudo-documentary dramatisation of the H.G. Wells novel transported to contemporary America. The documentary form came from the device of using fictionalised radio broadcasts to 'document' the Martian invasion in pseudo 'real time'.

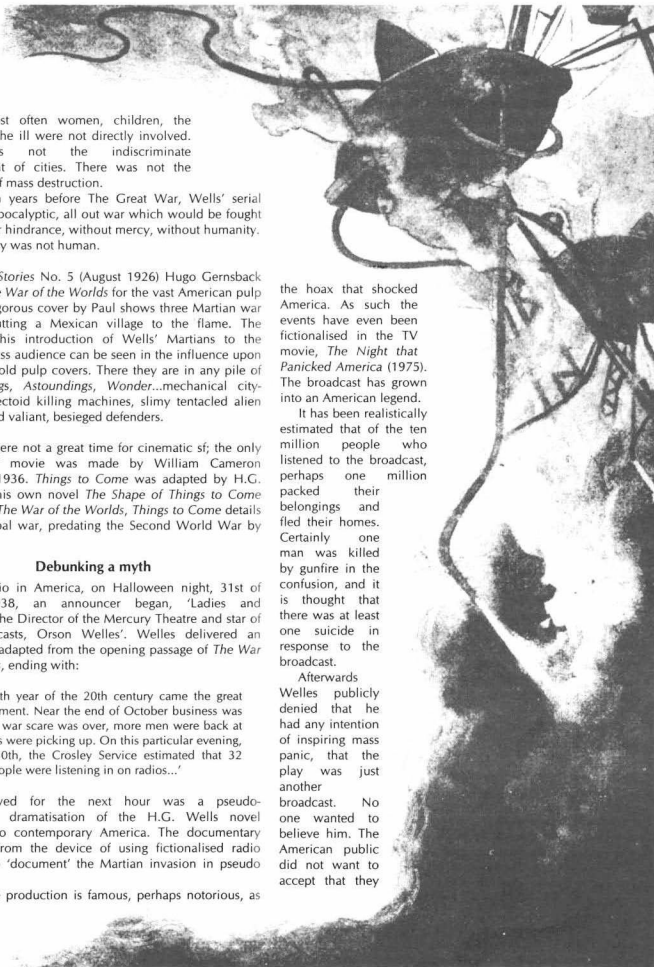
Today the production is famous, perhaps notorious, as

the hoax that shocked America. As such the events have even been fictionalised in the TV movie, *The Night that Panicked America* (1975). The broadcast has grown into an American legend.

It has been realistically estimated that of the ten million people who listened to the broadcast, perhaps one million packed their belongings and fled their homes. Certainly one man was killed by gunfire in the confusion, and it is thought that there was at least one suicide in response to the broadcast.

### Afterwards

Welles publicly denied that he had any intention of inspiring mass panic, that the play was just another broadcast. No one wanted to believe him. The American public did not want to accept that they





had been so stupid as to panic over what was obviously a radio play, so the legend grew that they had been the victims of a calculated hoax. The fact that for many years afterwards it was all but

impossible to hear the broadcast only helped the legend grow. In later years, Welles, ever the

showman, played up to the legend, implying that perhaps he really was due credit for the hoax that never was.

As the CBS announcer makes abundantly clear at the beginning, the play was part of a regular series of broadcasts starring Orson Welles. It was not the one-off special later commentators have assumed in the light of Welles becoming much better known for his later film career. Welles had no intention of causing deliberate chaos and panic, and thereby losing his job and regular work for his theatre company. If this had been his intention an outraged CBS would certainly have made a public show of sacking him following the panic. In the event Welles's Mercury Theatre broadcast dozens of plays on CBS, beginning in 1934 and continuing until 1941.

No, to his regular listeners, the 90% of the 10 million listeners who did not panic, the by then familiar voice of Mr Welles was merely taking the lead role in another of his ingenious radio adaptations of famous novels. Had there been an intention to hoax Welles would not have chosen either such a famous book, nor used his own familiar voice. Nor would he have accompanied supposedly 'live' news reports with a tension building musical score by his regular composer, Bernard Herrmann, or taken the usual dramatic licence of compressing the events of days into an hour of air time.

With the Mercury Theatre, as with his film work, Wells frequently experimented with style and presentation, seeking imaginatively appropriate ways in which to tell each tale. As a restless innovator in a rapidly developing medium it was inevitable that he would one day broadcast a play as if it were 'actuality'. In a very real sense in which it just happened to *The War of the Worlds*, though no doubt this title was chosen for being more appropriate to the technique than other books and plays which were transformed or adapted around the time.

Welles deliberately placed his scenario a year ahead, not exactly a year, but one day less, thus avoiding Halloween night. The implication is obvious. Though the actual broadcast took place on Halloween night 1938, the night for scary fantasy stories, Welles is suggesting that this horror belongs in the real world. The inhuman evil is real, as was proven when, less than a year later, a dreadful war such as no one had ever imagined would engulf the planet.

But why did Wells feel the need to offer America such an allegory? Because the United States had

slipped into inward-looking isolationism. Even into 1940 the Hollywood studios were forbidden by the Hays Office to depict Nazi Germany in an unfavourable or critical light. A blind eye was turned to the increasing brutality and anti-Semitism in Europe, and as so often under artistically limiting systems a creative artist turned to the fantastic as a means of slipping through the censor's prosaic net. Probably Welles would have been aware of Cameron Menzies' film, adapting his near namesake's work must have seemed too good an opportunity to miss.

Orson Welles's *The War of the Worlds* broadcast was not the irresponsible hoax legend would have us believe, but an alarm call to a morally complacent nation which would not be prepared to listen until after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941. H.G. Wells in his novel, and Orson Welles in his adaptation, depicted an apocalyptic war sweeping all civilisation before it, as the Nazis had already swept through Europe. America did not want to face the coming storm, so in the guise of popular entertainment, Welles brought a potent allegory of that nightmare into homes across the nation. The Martian war machines are the Nazi war machine and the whole human race is Jewish.

The Second World War ended, and the Cold War began. Soviet Russia and its communist ideology was the new enemy. The resulting tension would be brilliantly chronicled in the most influential British sf novel since *The War of the Worlds*, George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Two years before *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the 'flying saucer' craze had begun when American businessman Kenneth Arnold reported seeing nine flying disc-like objects while piloting his private plane near Mount Rainier, Washington State. It was also the year of the Roswell Incident, in which something – probably a US military weather balloon – crashed in a remote part of New Mexico, inspiring tales of a downed alien space craft and alien autopsies. Flying Saucers became headline news, making film appearances in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *The Thing [From Another World]* (both 1951). Something was coming, and no one expected it to be friendly.

George Pal was one of the very few Hollywood producers to work exclusively in fantasy and sf. He produced one of the first serious Hollywood sf movies, Heinlein's *Destination Moon* (1950), and he recognised the contemporary relevance of Wells' story. As Orson Welles had done, Pal, with director Byron Haskin, transferred *The War of the Worlds* to modern day America. At the height of the McCarthy hearings 'The Reds were under the Beds', and on cinema screens across America in 1953 red Martian war machines came from the Red Planet to destroy civilisation as America knew it.

While the contemporary American setting saved the expensive of recreating Victorian London, and then destroying it, and can also be criticised as an example of Hollywood pillaging the world for source material to shape to American pop-culture ends, Pal's film works because by 1953 war had become universal. What can happen in California can happen in London, and vice versa. We can watch here and empathise there. The script tells us, though the camera never shows us, that parallel events are happening around the globe.

As a Hollywood genre sf was still in its infancy in 1953,

and Pal's film was like nothing seen before. The performances from Gene Barry, Ann Robinson and Lee Tremayne were good and the screenplay by Barré Lyndon solid in its development of the escalating terror. But what made the film stand apart was the fact that Pal had the budget for lavish and plentiful special effects, and, in an era when most films were still in black and white, to shoot in Technicolor. It was one of the very first sf films shot in colour, though that same year William Cameron Menzies, director of *Things to Come*, made the similarly themed *Invasion From Mars* in the inferior Cinecolor process. Today we take colour film for granted as the norm, but we should not overlook the tremendous impact colour had in *The War of the Worlds* in 1953. The process was certainly instrumental in turning the film into a major hit, and thus adding significant impetus to the cycle of alien invasion movies produced in the following years.

Pal's Martians were not the tripods of the book, though Wells' tripod motif remained in so much as the Martian ships hunted in threes, and the Martians had three tentacles and three eyes. The film though began the fusion of three mythologies: the Martian machines retain the menace of Wells' aliens, but had adopted the outward form of the flying saucer. It is a line of popular mythology which would eventually cross-fertilise with *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to produce the political-paranoia of global conspiracies and alien invasions that propel *The X-Files*.

The spectacular production retains tremendous dramatic power, though the film deviates from Wells in one important respect. Wells, the scientific atheist proposed that the Martians would be defeated by our germs. This is actually a most unlikely outcome, and Wells presumably was thinking of how diseases have decimated populations when introduced by explorers to people with no communal immunity. It is far less likely that the common cold would transfer from human to Martian. While the film still has the Martians falling victim to earthly infection, the script suggests divine intervention, with the exciting climax taking place in a besieged cathedral, followed by world-wide thanksgiving. It is not the great film the book deserves, but to date it is the best we have.

Aliens would come and go throughout the era of the Korean War and the Cold War, with Wells' invaders finding echoes in many films, books and TV shows and comics. Examples range from the prehistoric Martians of *Quatermass and the Pit* (1958) to Marvel Comics *Killraven: Warrior of the Worlds* in the 1970s. The bio-mechanical alien invaders the Daleks and Cybermen, chief enemies of Doctor Who in the most popular British sf series ever made, are clearly descendants of the cool, dispassionate intellectuals from Mars. John Christopher would closely rework Wells material in his childrens Tripods trilogy: *The White Mountains* (1967), *The City of Lead and Gold* (1967) and *The Pool of Fire* (1968), the first two adapted by BBC television in the 1980s. Christopher Priest would provide a characteristically ingenious conflation of the plots of *The War of the Worlds* and *The Time Machine* in his marvellous homage to Wells, *The Space Machine* (1976).

During the 1960s a real war of the worlds, between the first and third worlds, unfolded nightly on Western TV screens, and advanced alien invaders faded from American movie theatres. Instead, on TV, *Star Trek* offered the comforting

notion that in the future disputes might be resolved by goodwill and diplomacy. Alien invaders razing US cities were too close to the real devastation Americans were wreaking with their own alien killing machines upon the less technologically developed populations of Vietnam and Cambodia. It was well and good to masochistically cast ones own nation as innocent victims of implacably superior aggressive forces at the height of the cold war terror of Soviet Russia, and then to congratulate oneself for having the innate moral superiority to defeat the foe. It was something altogether less palatable to revel in the wanton destruction the nation visited upon South East Asia. The bitterly ironic outcome from an American point of view was that ultimately, just like in every sf tale of alien invasion, it was the aggressed against race which triumphed against overwhelming odds.

It is probably no coincidence that the year the Vietnam War ended a new version of *The War of the Worlds* went into production. Released in 1978, the full title on the sleeve of the gatefold double LP read 'Jeff Wayne's Musical Version of *The War of the Worlds*'. Released by CBS records, 40 years after Orson Welles CBS broadcast, Wayne's *Worlds* is a hybrid pitched, tripod-like, between at least three stools: the stage musical, the rock opera and the 'progressive rock' 'concept album'.

This *War of the Worlds* resembles a cast album to a Rice-Webber era musical, in that it features David Essex, from *Godspell* and *That'll Be the Day*, and Julie Covington, who had also starred in *Godspell*, *Rock Follies* and sang the title role on the original *Evita* album. The difference was that *The War of the Worlds* was a 'cast album' without a musical, having been conceived as a record release sans show. Here the Rice-Webber influence is most obvious, for *Evita* had debuted as an album, Covington managing a world-wide number one hit record with 'Don't Cry for me Argentina' before there had been a single stage performance of the

work. This recording first, stage later if successful, was a reversal of all theatrical practice, akin to showing a film on TV before releasing it in the cinemas.

However, *The War of the Worlds* is more 'rocky' than anything the theatre was used to in the 1970s, and in this

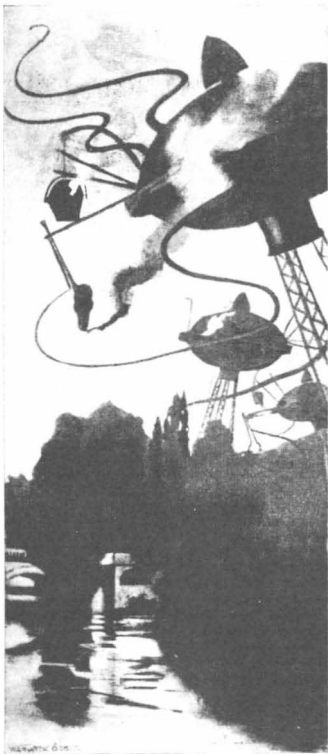
respect it was closer to the 'rock opera' tradition begun in 1969 by The Who's double-album *Tommy*. That *Tommy* had been turned into both a profitable rock stage show and, in 1975, a hit Ken Russell film, could not have been lost on CBS. Thus the involvement of Phil Lynott of *Thin Lizzy*, and Jo Partridge and Chris Thomson, who had both played with Elton John and Steve Harley's *Cockney Rebel*.

The 'progressive' side of the triangle arose from the presence of Justin Hayward, singer-songwriter and guitarist with The Moody Blues, a band with then a decade's worth of popular sf concept albums behind them. The arrangements themselves included instrumental sections in line with those found on progressive rock albums of the time.

Gluing all this together into something between a radio play, a rock album and the electronic soundscapes of Jean-Michael Jarre was Jeff Wayne. Wayne was a New Yorker with a background in classical piano and jazz, had studied at the Julliard School of Music in America, and Trinity College here in the UK, and composed, produced and recorded for various bands, as well as working in documentary and feature films.

The result reflects the title of the TV series Julie Covington made immediately prior to this album: *Rock Follies*. It is grandly pretentious, with little idea of

its purpose. Parts work very well, and as a lavishly produced play some sections are impressive. As an album aimed at the rock market it is difficult to imagine quite what the point was, as the lengthy passages of narration, and dramatically realised scenes, mean that frequent replaying is not an appealing prospect. For a double LP, with its commensurably high retail price, this would have appeared to be a disadvantage when targeted at the teenage rock



market.

It is actually those parts which would have least appeal for replaying by the rock audience that work the best, those narrated by Richard Burton. Without the weight and authority Burton lends to the project, the album would be an over-extended sequence of polished rock instrumentals and songs. Too little musical material is stretched close to breaking point, though Wayne's background does mean that the arrangements are more inventive and complex than might be expected, and the production values are high for the genre at that time: this was year zero for popular music, with musical and social nihilistic alien invasion of punk

attempting to destroy all that stood before it. The songs are adequately performed, but let down by trite lyrics. Even so, passages such as the instrumental 'The Eve of the War' and the sea battle between HMS Thunderchild and the Martian War Machines have the power to chill.

David Essex's visionary dreamer, The Artillery Man, imagines rebuilding a brave new world underground in a sequence drawing on ideas found in *The Time Machine*, *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899) and *In the Days of the Comet*. Wayne adds a parson, sung by Phil Lynott, who has been driven mad by the trauma of losing his wife, and then lost his faith. This seems to be an attempt to portray some of Wells' antipathy to organised religion, but is let down by some particularly banal lyrics.

One final aspect of the work which must be mentioned is the packaging. The album came in a fold-out sleeve with a 16 page illustrated booklet. The booklet consists of a series of superb, and superbly reproduced, paintings illustrating scenes from the drama, two of which also appear on the album cover. The paintings are mainly by Geoff Taylor and Peter Goodfellow, though Michael Trim provides the exceptional outer cover image of a war

machine attacking HMS Thunderchild. The paintings resemble pre-production, storyboard paintings for a great, never-made film of the book, and the album is worth buying for the artwork alone. (In this respect the CD version will not do, offering as pale a reduced impression of the original packaging as a video transfer does of a cinema film).

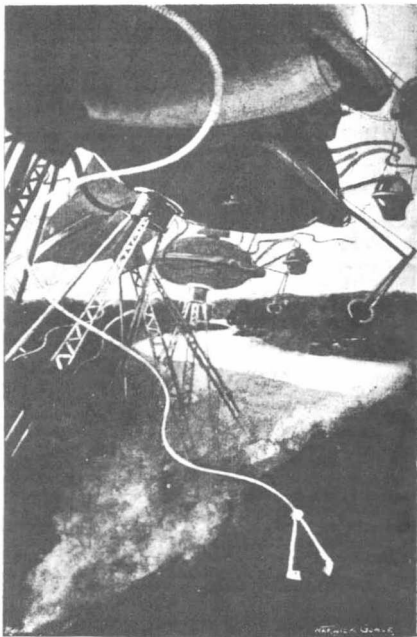
Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) inverts *The War of the Worlds* and the alien invasion pictures of the 1950s, offering America redemption for the sins of Vietnam. The US military are the villains, while benevolent alien invaders with a technology vastly superior

to our own render all our machines powerless, but do not destroy. Rather they offer the possibility of friendship and hope for the future. It is a pseudo-religious vision, with the God-like aliens offering unconditional love to a warlike, undeserving humanity.

Wells' Martian War Machines finally arrived on the cinema screen in 1980, in the second of the *Star Wars* films, *The Empire Strikes Back*. They have four legs, but the Imperial All Terrain Armoured Transports which assault the rebel base on the ice planet Hoth are in almost every respect Wells invaders. The occupants are men, but shorn of all compassion, soldiers of an empire as cold and inhuman as the snow-field across which they march. The battle possesses a relentless mechanical savagery which captures much of the terror of Wells

invading Martians, and is among the finest of set-pieces in sf cinema.

In 1988 *The War of the Worlds* returned as an American TV series starring Jared Martin. The series purported to be a direct sequel to the 1953 film, giving the producers the option of cheap special effects by reusing stock footage. It also managed one of the most contrived premises for a TV show yet. According to the series the events depicted in the 1953 film really happened, but were so traumatic that the



entire population of the Earth forgot all them. A few surviving aliens remained in storage on an American military base.

The premise begs the questions: why had no one forgotten about the Great War and the Second World War? And, perhaps this is the biggest plot hole in sf history, how did everyone explain the ruined remains of the world's great cities, then to rebuild them exactly as they had been before the invasion? Starting from such a fatally flawed base, the series was hackneyed TV sci-fi of a low order, lacking imagination, intelligence and showing no respect for its source material.

The tripods have now been abandoned, the enemy's outward form replaced in the popular imagination with the UFO/flying saucer, but the alien invaders keep on coming. They no longer come from Mars, because we now know that Mars is a dead world, but still they come, and their malevolence remains the same. So long as nation wages war on nation, and ordinary men and women feel themselves hopelessly caught-up in technological chaos beyond their control, the alien invader will remain a relevant science fiction symbol.

Most recently the aliens have returned in the BBC serial *Invasion: Earth* (1998), *Mars Attacks!* (1997) Tim Burton's kitsch homage to the 1950s sf invasion movie, and *Independence Day* (1996), Roland Emmerich and Dean Devlin's rather more straight-faced homage to *The War of the Worlds* and *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*. *Invasion: Earth*, the BBC's alternative to a definitive classical serial version in celebration of the centenary of *The War of the Worlds*, was simply misjudged, so much so that the most effective parts were those that in flashback detailed the real horrors of the Second World War. Burton offered a series of in-jokes which found little resonance with the mainstream audience. The massively popular of *Independence Day*, which still did not take itself entirely seriously, fused Wells, the Roswell mythology and Pal into a blockbuster movie which began to crystallise a nascent American sense of pre-millennial tension. Something bad but indefinable, for no clear enemy remained to point a finger at, was going to happen. What better symbol for millennial angst than

unprovoked wrath from the heavens falling to devastate the world, so that a better world can be rebuilt from the ashes. Other movies have recently attempted the same, in lieu of a genuine foe, drawing inspiration on 'Acts of God' and the 1970s disaster film cycle. Currently the *X-Files* feature film speculates that the aliens are already here, and that the date for the invasion has been set.

Undoubtedly Wells' Martians will return, in both original and mutant strains. They are too versatile not to be endlessly reused to fit the specific concerns of each new generation. As the narrator at the end of *The Thing [From another World]* urgently commanded, 'Keep watching the skies.'

## Bibliography

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Orson Welles's Mercury Theatre radio production of *The War of the Worlds* is available as a Hodder Headline audiobook.

*The War of the Worlds*, 1953 (Paramount) – Directed by Byron Haskin. Produced by George Pal. Written by Barré Lyndon. Cinematography by George Barnes. Original music by Leith Stevens. Costume Design by Edith Head. Film Editing by Everett Douglas. Sound Mix: Stereo (Western Electric Multi-Track Magnetic Stereophonic). Length: 85 minutes. Principal cast: Gene Barry (Clayton Forrester), Ann Robinson (Sylvia Van Buren) and Les Tremayne (General Mann).

Jeff Wayne's Musical Version of *The War of the Worlds* is currently available as both a double CD, and (highlights) on a single disc.

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WE'VE EXAMINED THE ALIEN SEQUENCE A NUMBER OF TIMES: LOOKING FORWARD (HOWEVER MISGUIDEDLY) TO THE FOURTH FILM (COLIN ODELL AND MITCH LE BLANC ON JEUNET AND CARO IN V194) OR DEFENDING ALIEN<sup>3</sup> (GARY DALKIN IN V198). NOW GARY WILKINSON TAKES A LOOK AT THE ALIEN FILM THAT NEVER WAS, AND OFFERS AN APPRAISAL OF THE COMICS.

# Alien Influences

I want to start with a true story. Many years ago, I think I was about ten years old, I suffered from a virus which left me delirious for several days. One night I had a nightmare so extreme that when I woke I not only sat bolt-upright, like the movie cliché, but I flung myself from my bed and ran screaming out of the room. Memories have faded with age and I have never really been able to describe to people why it provoked such an extreme reaction. In fact only twice since then that I have

encountered something approaching that experience – when I first saw *Eraserhead*, and the first time I saw the art of H. R. Giger.

A few weeks ago I walked into a Virgin Megastore to be confronted by a seven-foot model of Giger's Alien, towering over me. It was part of the promotion for the release of the latest Alien boxed-set of videos. It struck me then that although the Alien has been with us for nearly twenty years, it still has an impact few movie monsters have

ever had. The *Alien* series – *Alien* (1979), *Aliens* (1986), *Alien³* (1992), *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) – has been unusual in that, unlike most horror film series, in which the subsequent films become virtual clones of each other, the makers of each of the *Alien* films have all tried to do something different, whilst still keeping the two key elements: the alien itself, and Ellen Ripley, as played by Sigourney Weaver.

The *Alien* movies have been extensively covered, both in *Vector/Matrix* and elsewhere. Therefore, in the aftermath of the disappointment that was *Alien: Resurrection*, I intend to concentrate on two lesser-known aspects of the series – the script for *Alien 3* by William Gibson and the early instalments of the comic-strip spin-off – and a small but significant feature of the original alien creature design. Both Gibson's script and the comic-strip produced interesting ideas, indicating directions the film series could have followed. Indeed, ideas from both were subsequently included in the fourth film: *Alien: Resurrection*. However, the material could have been better used, and may yet still point the way for future film instalments.

### William Gibson's *Alien 3*

The development of the third *Alien* film, eventually titled *Alien³*, was a long and tortuous process, with many names attached to the project, including at one point Vincent Ward, New Zealand director of the fantasy film *The Navigator* (1990). During development several draft scripts were written by William Gibson; one of which is available on the Internet. As with many such documents on the World Wide Web it is hard to be totally certain of its authenticity, however it does correspond closely to a synopsis of Gibson's script published in an officially licensed *Alien* book. So without evidence to the contrary, I presume that the script to be found on the World Wide Web is a reasonably accurate transcription of Gibson's work.

One of the main new ideas that Gibson introduces, and also presumably one of the reasons why his script was jettisoned, is that of the Union of Progressive Peoples, a communist grouping of Vietnamese and Russians which are contrasted with the ultra-capitalist Americans – though there seems to have been a switch from the 'Company' to the 'Government', the though the oily, heartless employees are the same. The result is a melding of USA vs. Russia/Viet-Cong, cold-war politics, arms limitation treaties and border violations with themes previously established in the first two films – a few marines and plucky civilians cut-off and racing against time to escape the spreading aliens.

Gibson switches between two space stations: the capitalist 'Anchorpoint' – a larger, more developed version of the colony seen in *Aliens*, and the rather utilitarian communist 'Rodina'. Most of the action takes place on Anchorpoint, with the Russian storyline being poorly developed and suffering from having virtually no sympathetic characters. The theme of which is worst, man or alien remains but is not developed. Unfortunately for Gibson, not long after his script was written the Berlin Wall came down, signifying the end of this particular story, and providing a demonstration of how quickly sf can date. (A similar problem with regard to Cold War politics now confronts any audience of Peter Hyam's 2010: *Odyssey*

Two).

A further problem is that Ripley spends half the action in a coma, before leaving the events completely, being blasted into space and safety in a life-support capsule. Apparently there was some intention that Ripley would be revived in *Alien 4*, facing an invasion of Earth, and following directly from *Alien 3* in which Corporal Hicks, again played by Michael Biehn, would take the lead. At this stage *Alien 3* and 4 were to have been shot back-to-back (like *Superman – The Movie* and parts of *Superman II* or *Back to the Future III/II*). Considering how much the two existing films revolved around Ripley, this would have been a fatal mistake. This is especially so as Gibson's Hicks is a weak, bland retread of the standard action hero. The eventual decision taken for *Alien³* to kill off any non-continuing characters proves a better, if brave and controversial decision.

Gibson uses the idea (inherited from previous scripts) of cloning alien genetic material. This produces both improved 'super' aliens on Rodina and alien/human hybrids on Anchorpoint. Alien/human hybrids finally reached the screen in *Alien: Resurrection*, though Gibson's script has a slightly better scientific explanation than the one eventually used on screen: microscopic cloned-alien DNA spores infect the human host and combine with the human DNA. The resulting mutant bursts out of the human's skin like the shape-changing aliens in John Carpenter's 1982 version of *The Thing*.

Much of the resulting development and action is very similar to Carpenter's film, playing on the paranoia of which characters are infected, and who is going to be revealed as an alien next. However, the idea is not exploited to the same degree as in *The Thing*. There are no tension building scenes of testing to see who is human, just all hell breaking loose as Anchorpoint is rather too quickly taken-over. Similarly, Rodina goes from having no alien presence to being completely swarming with aliens in what seems like no time at all. This is 'explained' with throwaway lines using nonsensical terms such as 'speeded growth factors'. The reality is a case of loose plotting.

Gibson is rightly acknowledged as one of the most influential sf writers of the 1980s – the 'Godfather of Cyberpunk'. However, a good novelist does not automatically make a good screen-writer. Whilst able to create a fantastic vision of the future in his novels and short stories, he is rather weak when it comes to plotting. *Johnny Mnemonic*, which he scripted, was a disappointing film, though not all the blame can be attached to Gibson. Likewise, in his *Alien 3* script there are many logically inconsistencies, while the second half is far too similar to *Aliens* – with alien ambushes, the characters needing to escape before an imposed time limit (caused by the air running out due to blocked air filters rather than an unstable reactor core), a long chase and evacuation sequence and last stand against an Alien Queen. Some of set pieces do seem as if they would work on screen, but the tension and excitement is much more diffused in comparison to the first two films.

The ending is particularly weak. Climaxing with a confrontation against an Alien Queen on the exterior of Anchorpoint, Hick is sidelined while the android Bishop – who refused to carry a gun in *Aliens* – shoots the Queen. A further let down comes when the last surviving communist

appears out of nowhere, rather like the cavalry in an old western, in a space ship to pluck the survivors from a radar mast surrounded by swarming aliens. This is derivative of both the rescue of Luke Skywalker at the end of *The Empire Strikes Back* and Bishop's saving Ripley and Newt on the balcony towards the end of *Aliens*. It is also cheats slightly as it fails to give any previous indication that help was on the way.

A rather trite final point is made that we are all human, both Communist and Capitalist, compared to the Alien. 'According to Darwin it's them or us,' says Bishop, and a further sequel on the alien's home world is obviously foreshadowed. One interesting point is made which has not yet picked up by any of the subsequent films. In a dialogue between two Russian scientists, it is speculated that the original alien may itself be the result of a genetic experiment, possibly the end point of a destructive arms race.

For all its occasional interesting detail, Gibson's script is essentially hybrid of *Alien* and *Aliens*, with ideas appropriated from several other sf films, most notably *The Thing*. The script lacks the essential bleakness and nihilism of the earlier films, and reads as just another bland sf film. Rather as, unfortunately, *Alien: Resurrection* turned out. Whilst the eventually produced *Alien<sup>3</sup>* was far from perfect and far too bleak for most people, it is certainly more interesting than Gibson's version. However, it is worth contrasting *Alien<sup>3</sup>* with Ridley Scott's original ending for *Alien*: the alien was to have bitten Ripley's head off in the escape craft and then radioed Earth using Ripley's voice. One wonders how successful that film would have been, and how any resultant series might have developed.

## Aliens: The Comics

The first *Aliens* comic strip series ran for six episodes, and was published in 1988 by the independent comic company Dark Horse. It was written by Mark Verheiden (as were its immediate successors, which I will also be discussing) and featured interesting black and white art by Mark A. Nelson. The result is superior to most similar spin-offs in comics or other media.

Several years after the events depicted in *Aliens*, Newt is now a young woman, but is plagued by terrible nightmares and confined to a sinister psychiatric hospital. (This may have influenced *Aliens* director James Cameron in his depiction of Sarah Connor in *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*.) Hick's life has also collapsed. Ostracised by his fellow marines, he has spent most of the intervening years in a military prison. Ripley is absent; referred to only in an aside: 'You know what happened to her.'

The story begins when an alien is discovered onboard a corpse-laden ship abandoned in Earth orbit. Analysis of the ship's navigational records provides a path back to the aliens' home world, and Hicks is despatched by the government to bring back specimens. He breaks regulations by first rescuing Newt from an imminent lobotomy, then smuggling her on-board his ship. Unknown to Hicks, he is being closely followed by a corporation rival. Meanwhile the same corporation obtains an impregnated survivor from the abandoned ship. This survivor 'births' a queen and 'The Company' starts a breeding program. The situation escalates out of control when a group of alien-worshipping religious

fanatics launch a 'rescue' attempt to liberate the aliens.

In this version Hicks is a more interesting character than in Gibson's script. He is forever brooding over the loss of his fellow marines in *Aliens*, and thus very protective of Newt. Meanwhile an adult Newt makes a fine substitute for Ripley.

The change in medium allows a broader canvas. An expansion of the available background material from the first two films to produce a realistic depiction of Earth and its subsequent invasion. The effects of multi-channel television on society is explored. One question becomes how to attract audience attention – to alert them to the alien threat – when that audience is almost continually scanning the hundreds of channels available? It is postulated that the alien queen communicates telepathically with her minions, and the resultant leakage is the cause of both the increased severity of Newt's (and a number of other characters) nightmares and the worship and 'lust to join with the alien' of the alien-worshipping fanatics.

The comic continues the bleak undertones of the first two films with self-serving double-crossing company and government representatives betraying the main characters. However, there is an unexpected twist to the 'android in disguise' sub-plot of the first film, while a living example of the elephant-like 'Space-Jockey'/pilot from the original film is introduced. This being initially seen as a saviour of the survivors of the expedition to the aliens' home-world, but is ultimately revealed to have a more deliberate evil design than the merely instinctive alien.

The end of this series sees the Earth totally lost to the Aliens and Newt and Hicks barely escaping in a cargo ship on auto-pilot. Unfortunately, at the start of the second series the cargo is found to consist of live aliens bound for a military research station. Hicks and Newt kill the aliens. The research station is run by an obviously insane general, who is trying to train his own alien task-force to retake Earth. Naturally, things go disastrously wrong, and eventually the general is devoured by his own creation. This basic plot of experimentation on some aliens in an attempt to control them resulting in disaster in a remote confined location would become the basic plot for many subsequent series of the comic. Clearly it draws, as so much sf continues to do, on the *Frankenstein* archetype, and provides a basis for *Alien: Resurrection*. There is an interesting scene in which we see the aliens being trained which is virtual identical to a scene in *Alien: Resurrection*. Fire is used instead of cold, and the Alien Queen is forced to use her telepathic communication to stop her alien warriors being burnt for not obeying the General's commands. This series consisted of four comics published between 1989 and 1990 – the original atmospheric black and white art work replaced by some adequate if uninspiring colour work by Denis Beauvais.

The next series, entitled *Earth Invasion* is a disappointment. I am only discussing it because, rather unsuccessfully, it concludes the story begun in the first series. Even the title is confusing: the Earth has already been invaded. The artwork by Sam Kieth is a terrible. Instead of the realism of the first two series he offers Robert Crumb-style cartoonery. For no reason other than that the fans had been calling for her, Ripley is reintroduced. Kieth's drawings look nothing like Sigourney Weaver, presumably



because Dark Horse either could not afford the rights to the likeness of the screen character, or Weaver refused to authorise her representation in the comic book.

The story involves a return to the 'source', on the same, or possibly a different alien home world – though how a race could have more than one 'home world' is not made at all clear – to capture a 'lure' for the aliens on Earth. A semi-successful attempt is made to eliminate the aliens, by employing nuclear holocaust.

The three-series story-line finishes on a typically bleak note, with Earth being left to the invaders of both 'alien' and 'space jockey' type. As in the films the main characters win, but only their own survival. Later volumes introduced new characters in increasing derivative situations.

## Alien Developments

Every film since the first has introduced new variations of H.R. Giger's classic alien design. The Queen in *Aliens* is arguably the only new creature which really added anything to the series. A smaller, leaner alien, the dog buster, was introduced in *Alien³*, while *Alien: Resurrection* introduced the New Born: whatever the scripted intention, the on-screen result was a travesty of Giger's original creation.

One the most original features of the original alien design is an absence: the alien has no recognizable eyes. A creature that can find you without need of sight is a terrifying concept. It is a creature which can find you in the dark, which can 'see' you before you can see it.

The eyes are the main feature we focus on when looking at the faces of both animals and humans. We are accustomed to eye contact. Eyes are 'the windows to the soul'. Therefore, when we look at Giger's alien our own eyes just skid over the 'face' and focus on the main feature – the horrific double mouth, a mouth designed to leave us in no doubt as to the superiority of this alien as a carnivore and a killer.

With the New Born, the variant alien in *Alien: Resurrection*, we focus on eyes that were no doubt supposed to provoke at least some sympathy. Instead they just invite derision, the film makers seemingly unable to decide if we are supposed to hate the New Born or empathise with its plight. Its 'personality' switches so rapidly that in the end we feel nothing but frustration and a desire for the film to end.

Both the Gibson script and *Earth Invasion* comic series introduce new varieties of alien. Gibson, perhaps wisely, chooses not to describe his creations. Like Gibson, *Earth*

*Invasion* introduces a 'super' Alien that can tear through steel. The art presents a simplified, smoother, more shark-like version of the original alien which works quite well. It is a pity it is not used more in an otherwise poor four episodes. Joss Weldon, the writer of *Alien: Resurrection*, did describe his alien, but was unfortunately ignored.

As can be seen, *Alien: Resurrection* incorporated many ideas from the various previous scripts and spin-offs; in particular cloning the alien, Alien/human Hybrids and the attempted training of the aliens. It is a pity that it has been, so far, the most disappointing film in the series. Even Gibson's script incorporates more scientifically plausible ideas on cloning than *Alien: Resurrection* managed, and the comic although poor after the first two series, has introduced many ideas that could have produced a better film.

## The Next Step?

At the time of writing it seems certain that a fifth *Alien* film will be made. With a good script, a sympathetic director, and decent budget the series could still be successfully 'resurrected'. It would be to the best if H.R. Giger could be persuaded to return to the series, rather than employing an otherwise a second-rate pastiche of his work. However, such a return is, given the disgraceful way 20th Century Fox has reportedly treated him, highly improbable. I cannot say I am hopeful.

There is a major unspoken influence on the alien series which has not, as yet, been exploited. Perhaps it is now time to go back to the real source and inspiration; the mother lode – the cosmic horror of H.P. Lovecraft. Rather than such pale imitations as the recent *Godzilla* remake, let Hollywood revive the real *Alien* God, Cthulhu!

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## Comic Series Details

*Aliens*: Series 1 – 6 Issues (1988-1989 [bi monthly])

Writer: Mark Verheiden; Artist: Mark A. Nelson

*Aliens*: Series 2 – 4 Issues (August 1989-May 1990)

Writer: Mark Verheiden; Artist: Denis Beauvis

*Aliens: Earth War* – 4 Issues (June 1990-October 1990)

Writer: Mark Verheiden; Artist: Sam Keith

All three series have been reprinted as Graphic Novels (unfortunately the original black and white art of Volume 1 has been colourized for the reprint.).



# Cognitive Mapping: Exogamy

by Paul Kincaid

Again and again from 1989 on, I tend to use exogamy as a shorthand description of the essential subject matter of post-agenda sf, John Clute wrote in *Look at the Evidence* (1995). Leaving aside

the question of exactly what is meant by 'post-agenda sf', Clute is writing about one of the most fundamental changes in the nature of sf: our relationship with the other.

The first aliens we encountered were simply humans who had been located by their author in some fantastical other realm, such as the Moon or the Sun. They weren't characters but types, intended to reflect and comment upon

certain social and political situations, instruments of satire that worked by being identical to ourselves, not truly alien at all. Either that or they were curiosities, the distorted products of travellers' tales as wondrous and as essentially non-human as the elephant or rhinoceros or octopus. It was only with the cold and implacable intelligence of H.G. Wells' Martians that humanity found itself encountering other beings that challenged our place in the natural order of things

And challenge it was. *The War of the Worlds* (1898) followed a pattern that had already been established by such paranoid tales of invasion as *The Battle of Dorking* (1871) by George T. Chesney: if we could not trust our neighbours on this planet, still less could we trust anything that wasn't even human. We know that the Martians are a more ancient race than us, we know that they are technologically far more advanced, but we learn nothing of

their culture, if culture they have. They are nothing more than killing machines bent on simple, brutal conquest. The Selenites in Wells' *The First Men in the Moon* (1901) present a slightly more complex picture, but they still turn into the enemy. And this is how we would see aliens for a long time: the role of the

pulp heroes of the first half of this century, from Buck Rogers (in *Armageddon* 2419AD [1928-9] by Philip Francis Nowlan) to Flash Gordon (in the comic strip created by Alex Raymond in 1934) to Kimball Kinnison (in E.E. 'Doc' Smith's *Lensman* series which began with *Triplanetary* [1934]), was no different from the role of countless cowboy heroes of the slightly earlier dime novels: to kill aliens (Indians). The role of aliens was equally simple: they were bug-eyed monsters intent on nothing but destroying the Earth and raping human women. (Even that alien combination of great ape and Frankenstein's creature, *King Kong* [1933], was attracted to Fay Wray and met the inevitable response: the might of our military machine.)

Perhaps such fear of the foreigner was inevitable in a world which saw two global conflicts within a generation. In the years between the wars the alien didn't feature much in British science fiction, but in America writers such as

Jack Williamson and Edmond Hamilton were forever fighting the alien threat, reflecting a national mood of isolationism. There was a similar mood after the Second World War when Senator McCarthy's anti-Communist

witch hunts were reflected in such xenophobic literature as Jack Finney's *The Body Snatchers* (1955). Repeatedly, and in many forms, the alien is a cypher who fills one role only, that of the enemy. In 'The First

*He realised that he was thinking in the slow, muted logic of Ipan himself. He assumed that the pursuit of chimp status-markers was a given, the great goal of his life.*

*This revelation startled him. He had known that he was diffusing into Ipan's mind, taking control of some functions from the bottom up, seeping through the deeply buried, walnut-sized gyros. It had not occurred to him that the chimp would diffuse into him. Were they now married to each other in an interlocking web that dispersed mind and self?*

**'Immersion' (1996) – Gregory Benford**

Days of May' (1961) by Claude Veillot aliens use humans as depositories and food for their eggs; in 'White Fang Goes Dingo' (1965) by Thomas M. Disch aliens use humans as pets; even as recently as *Worldwar: In the Balance* (1994) and its sequels by Harry Turtledove the role of the aliens is essentially unchanged from that of Wells' Martians, to invade.

Already in the days after the Second World War, however, the mood was changing. Alongside the hatred of the enemy that was an inevitable residue of two world wars, and the further fears of the foreigner engendered by the new Cold War and the accompanying terror of the nuclear threat, there was also a thin optimistic vein that

believed in the new experiment in international co-operation represented by the United Nations. In the film *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) the alien visitors actually bring the peace of a United Nations in space. Klaatu may be confronted by a paranoid array of military might, but

*Suddenly, Gillespie finds he wants to seize Eamon Donnan and shake him. In the still centre of this spiritual space, he wants to shake all this stupidity and play-acting out of his prison friend. What do you look like? he wants to shout into his face from a distance of very few centimetres. Do you think you are one of them? You can't even sit on their stool because your legs are too short and your joints are in different planes, and you think that you can dream their dreams and give a home in your head to their archetypes?...*

*He wants to say all this and shake this thing in front of him back into the Eamon Donnan he knew. But he does nothing. He doesn't know why this angers him so much. He doesn't like to think that he is jealous that Eamon Donnan has found the courage to do and be what he desires most.*

***Sacrifice of Fools* (1996) – Ian McDonald**

the notion of exogamy, of marriage outside, was born here.

The mood was there, also, in *Childhood's End* (1953) by Arthur C. Clarke in which humanity's salvation lies in overcoming our traditional dread of demons (an eloquent expression of all that we fear in foreigners) and going with the aliens. In its way, *Childhood's End* set the pattern for exogamous science fiction as effectively as *The War of the Worlds* set it for tales of alien attack. As recently as *Dawn: Xenogenesis I* (1987) by Octavia Butler, the aliens – whom we must marry as our only hope of survival – are repulsive: there are many fears and prejudices to be overcome along the way to even the most desirable of outcomes.

Gradually a strand of science fiction grew up in which aliens became something other than the enemy, and in so doing we learned more about them than we ever did when their only purpose was rape and conquest. In stories such as 'Omnilingual' (1957) by H. Beam Piper, for instance, we

learned that they had a history; and in Roger Zelazny's 'A Rose for Ecclesiastes' (1963) we learned that they had a culture. Eventually this romance with the alien led to marriage, though in *Strangers* (1978), Gardner Dozois shows that marriage to the alien without fully understanding the alien could lead to tragedy.

Nevertheless, the rush towards marriage initiated by *Childhood's End* became ever more precipitate. Following the precepts of the Helsinki Syndrome, by which it is recognised that hostages come to share the beliefs and desires of their captors, (or maybe the religious principle that mankind was made in the image of God) humans have started to remake themselves in the image of alien invaders. In *White Queen* (1991), *North Wind* (1994) and *Phoenix Cafe* (1997) by Gwyneth Jones and again in *Sacrifice of Fools* by Ian McDonald, humans commit self-mutilation in order to reproduce alienness in themselves. (In *Phoenix Cafe* this is extended to an alien making herself over in the image of a human.) In the passage quoted, Gillespie recognises that biology and culture must place a yawning

gap between us and the alien. He works with them, he cooperates, for all the frequent failures in understanding he embodies the principle of the United Nations; yet his unexpressed desires show us this is not enough.

Yet still the basic necessity that drives this exogamy remains the same. Apes, because of their closeness to and difference from humans, have been a common feature of exogamic fiction, from Edgar Rice Burrough's *Tarzan of the Apes* (1914) through *King Kong to His Monkey Wife* (1930) by John Collier and *The Woman and the Ape* (1996) by Peter Hoeg. Yet, as Gregory Benford shows in his story of a man trapped in the mind of a chimp, 'Immersion', the purpose of this marriage of minds, this learning each from the other, is simple survival. In this anthropological tale we are told that fear of strangers is a significant survival trait in primitive beings, but the story shows that marriage, that the coming together of strangers, is an essential survival trait for the future.

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## The BSFA Award Winners: 1979 – Philip K Dick, *A Scanner Darkly* (1977)

by Andrew M. Butler

For many readers, *A Scanner Darkly* is the last book that Dick wrote before abandoning himself to the quasi-religious speculations of his final novels. The book's sympathetic dissection of both the drug scene and its casualties is arguably easier to deal with than the tales of an author telling you he has met God. Clearly it has its harrowing moments, but the sanity of its author is not in doubt. But in its depiction of a divided central character, who is both Special Agent Fred and Bob Arctor, Dick is beginning to pave the way for the structures of the characters Nicholas Brady and Phil Dick in *Radio Free Albemuth* and *Horselover Fat* and Philip K. Dick in *VALIS*, novels that allegedly represent the embarrassing ravings of a man who has lost his grip on reality. This is to ignore the careful way in which the novels are designed, in which an apparently sane character reports upon the madness of a friend – in *VALIS*, just as in the on-going diary or Exegesis written by Dick from 1974 until his death, the truth status of the mystical encounter with God (or whoever) remains debatable.

In fact, Dick had begun to work with such divided characters before *A Scanner Darkly*, by slipping autobiographical details into *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said*. Media star Jason Taverner and police chief Felix Buckman have separate existences – told always with them as focal characters of a third person narration. Their encounter brings leads up to a crisis, before the narration becomes omniscient, almost if the rift in the narrative has been healed.

Dick was the survivor of twins, and occasionally he fantasized that his lost sister was a lesbian; the parallel between this and Felix and his sister Alys is obvious. Both Dick and Felix attended University of California, Berkeley. But the links between Taverner and Dick are even more striking. Dick was born at home in Cook County, Illinois on 16 December 1928, Taverner at the Memorial Hospital in Cook County on 16 December 1946. Dick was forty-one

when he wrote the first draft of the novel in about 1970, Taverner is coming up to that age when the novel is set. He has had his agent Al Bliss for nineteen years, a similar period calculated from 1970 for Dick coincides with his joining the Scott Meredith Literary Agency.

Dick also drew deeply on personal experiences in *A Scanner Darkly*, with an examination of the Californian drug scene in the late 1960s and 1970s. However it would be a mistake to argue that Dick is Bob/Fred; Dick does not correspond to any single character within the novel. In the Author's Note he explains: 'I am not a character in this novel; I am the novel. So, though, was our entire nation at this time' (*A Scanner Darkly*, Author's Note: 254).

Bob Arctor is one of a number of drug users in 1990s California,<sup>1</sup> although this is not his real name. He is in fact an undercover agent, who has infiltrated this circle and reports back as SA Fred. When meeting each other as agents, or talking to the general public in their professional capacity, the undercover agents wear scramble suits, a high tech device which preserves their anonymity by projecting a series of different faces onto the outside of the suit. There is therefore no way that his bosses can tell that Fred and Bob are one and the same. Fred as Bob buys, sells and uses drugs in order to convince the real junkies that he is also a junky; he is behaving to all intents and purposes as a junky. It is possible that he can be busted by other agents for his illegal use of drugs, and any addiction would be severely dealt with. The starting point of *A Scanner Darkly* is SA Fred's assignment to spy upon Bob, and thus to present evidence which could lead to his own conviction.

<sup>1</sup> One sentence in the British edition of the novel dates it much earlier: 'It was midday, in June of 1944' (*A Scanner Darkly*, 1: 9). That must surely be a misprint, given that a magazine clipping is later mentioned, citing the date 1992 (*A Scanner Darkly*, 14: 220). A likely date is therefore 1994; indeed American editions carry this date. Is this future setting – hardly twenty years after the time of writing the novel – enough to make the novel sf?

Someone – presumably another junkie – has informed on him.

The distinction between drug enforcement agent and junkie is somewhat undermined by their increasing symbiosis. At one point Bob discusses the impossibility of telling agents and junkies apart:

'I talked one time to a big hash dealer who'd been busted with ten pounds of hash in his possession. I asked him what the nark [narcotics agent] who busted him looked like. You know, the – what do they call them? – buying agent that came out and posed as a friend of a friend and got him to sell him some hash.'

'Looked,' Barris said, winding string, 'just like us.'

'More so,' Arctor said. 'The hash-dealer dude – he'd already been sentenced and was going in the following day – he told me, "They have longer hair than we do." So I guess the moral of that is, Stay away from guys looking the same as us [...]

'How would a guy do that? [...] Pose as a nark'

(A Scanner Darkly, 12: 183).

Of course, the irony is that Bob himself is posing as a junkie and is funded by his agency wage. The conversation just quoted from is one of the scenes that Fred is watching with his video bugging equipment.

This erasure of the distinction between rôles is mirrored by Bob's personality breakdown. The separate identities he needs to maintain to pursue his work become an actual split; Bob forgets that he is also Fred, and vice versa. This cleavage is probably worsened by the side effects of their drug of choice, Substance D.: 'In many of those taking Substance D., a split between the right hemisphere and the left hemisphere of the brain occurs' (A Scanner Darkly, 7: 103).

Each half of the brain specialises in particular activities, and it is possible for them to operate, to a low level, independently of each other. The left side is especially concerned with logic and linguistics, and the right with imagination and spatial awareness. Fred and Bob, as two halves of a split-brain personality, can be seen as approximating to the division of the hemispheres: the rational, logical law enforcement agent and the imaginative junkie.

Occasionally one of them hears a brief passage of words, or is somehow aware of the words, from the opposing half of the brain. For Fred these are speculations or discussions about split-brain-theory, an imaginative theory; for Bob these are passages from Goethe's *Faust* and Beethoven's *Fidelio* in the original German, which is a linguistic feat. The reader, presented with these juxtaposed, indented texts shares his – or their – sense of confusion.

The similarities with *VALIS* should be clear: Horselover Fat is the wildly imaginative one, forever theorizing about the nature of his mystical experiences, Phil the narrator is the down-to-earth doubter. A similar hierarchy of authority is maintained: Fred spies on Bob, who is unaware of this, and Phil records Horselover's ideas, who seems to be ignorant of this. Such a careful narrative structuring enables Horselover's wilder theories to be rejected, or at least questioned. After reproducing one journal entry Phil adds: 'To which I personally am tempted to say, Speak for yourself, Fat' (*VALIS*, 2:23).

At least once, Dick has suggested that his mystical

experiences in 1974 could be explained by the interaction of his left and right hemispheres: 'I would imagine that it is merely my right and left hemispheres conferring in a Martin Buber I-and-Thou dialogue' (*The Dark-Haired Girl* 222). The chemical experimentation discussed above, and referred to in both *A Scanner Darkly* (2: 24) and *VALIS* (7: 106-8), would have affected the phasing between his two hemispheres, and might be the explanation for the colourful hallucination which Dick experienced.

In a parallel to the soft machine described by William S Burroughs, Dick sees the junkie as sometimes being little more than a machine or android. The use of hard drugs blunts the individual's ability to feel empathy for others – indeed Kathy Sweetcent in *Now Wait For Last Year* is one such character. The addict becomes a reflex machine only operating in two modes: desiring or using heroin. However, Dick does hold out hope the redemption of such individuals. In one interview he recalled an incident where a junkie became, however briefly, human:

[He] heard the jack slip while a junior high school kid was changing a tire on the car... this guy who thought he had bugs all over him, who had almost no brain circuits left, ran out of that living room, out into the garage, and knocked the kid out of the way of the car... Then he went back and sank into the incredible brain suffocation of heroin, and lived only another year. He not only did the right thing, he knew why it was the right thing... He was still a human being, with the finest attributes a human can display.

The machine state of the junkie is emphasized by the use of the phrase 'brain circuits' and the irony implicit in the adjective in 'living room'. The anecdote was adapted for *A Scanner Darkly* (1: 20-2), where Dick's rôle is taken by the character Charles Freck and the junkie is named Jerry Fabin. Dick records in the author's note that 'The person on whom the character Jerry Fabin is based killed himself.'

The paranoia which all the characters in the novel experience is typical of Dick's work, and the final revelation about the origin of Substance D. shows that paranoia is a sensible reaction to the world. (In fact the origin uncannily echoes later revelations about American involvement in the cultivation of heroin and opium in South-East Asia, drugs which ended up wrecking the lives of many Americans). The humour is here at its darkest, and its most satiric. In many ways, *A Scanner Darkly* is the perfect PhilDickian novel, and for that reason among others is a worthy winner of the BSFA Award.

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Page references, where appropriate, are given in the form (Title chapter: page)



# First Impressions

## Book Reviews edited by Paul Kincaid

**Note:** All novels marked: □ are eligible for the 1998 BSFA Award for Best Novel. All collections and anthologies marked: ✓ contain stories that are eligible for the 1998 BSFA Award for Best Short Fiction.

Iain M. Banks – *Inversions* □

Orbit, 1998, 345pp, £16.99, ISBN 1 85723 626 2

Reviewed by Gary Dalkin

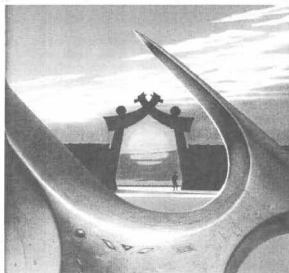
*Inversions* consists of two interlocking stories. Odd-numbered chapters comprise a report to his unnamed master by Oelph regarding the activities of Doctor Vosill, physician to King Quience of Haspidus, and, as the first page mischievously informs us 'without Argument, from a different Culture'. Even-numbered chapters, related by an unnamed narrator, recount the story of The Protector of Tassasen, UrLeyn; his bodyguard, DeWar; Lattens, the Protector's son; and Perrund, UrLeyn's favoured concubine.

Vosill is met with suspicion because she is an intelligent, independent woman, ahead of her time in attitude and learning. Her opinionated nature, her resistance to bigotry, the very fact of her being a doctor in an overwhelmingly patriarchal society, gains her the antipathy of members of the Court, some going so far as to suspect her of being a foreign spy or witch. Intrigues and conspiracies abound, mysterious deaths ensue, and Oelph begins to fall in love with Vosill.

When not saving the Protector's life, DeWar entertains Lattens with philosophical fables of the fabulous land of Lavishia, oftentimes in the company of Perrund, who also protected the Protector, at the cost of becoming crippled. As Oelph falls in love with Vosill, DeWar falls for Perrund. Then war begins, and Lattens becomes seriously ill. Inevitably, personal and national concerns intertwine.

*Inversions* is an elegant, slow-burning narrative on a long and beautifully lit fuse. For some considerable time it is not certain quite what sort of book it is. This is carefully reflected in the cover, which falls midway between the usual black and white packaging of Banks's 'literary' books, and the full colour of his science fiction novels (the words are conspicuous by their absence). The illustration itself evokes a medieval orientalism, until we notice that there are two suns in the sky. The text reveals there are also four moons. This is science fiction, though the feel is historical. The book could almost, though not quite, be relocated somewhere between our 17th and 18th centuries, an age of Empires, on the verge of a more modern world, lush, heady and decadent, a world not yet accurately mapped and full of the promise of undiscovered adventure.

There are inversions at every level. We first encounter Vosill deliberately taking the life of a patient. The question is raised: should a doctor kill to alleviate the inevitable suffering of a man about to be tortured to death? There are many inversions, parallels, echoes and reflections between the stories, and the book is, as an entirety, an inversion of the space fiction of *Excession*. It is a succession of love stories, stories of different kinds of love, and also, without being strained or pretentious, a book about storytelling. There are tales within tales,



perhaps told by unreliable narrators, and Drezen, from where Vosill claims to come, an idealised nation of islands, seems not so very far from Christopher Priest's Dream Archipelago. A formal, stately grandeur in both event and writing evokes the Renaissance and the Baroque, yet there is a warmth to the characters which makes this a most haunting Planetary Romance. Memory finds

comparisons in Michael Coney's *Hello Summer*, *Goodbye* and John Fowles's *A Maggot*, though as Oelph says, memory can deceive. It may be that I have forgotten just how good some of Banks's previous books are, but having just finished *Inversions* it seems to me to be as fine as anything he has written, and that is very fine indeed.

## Greg Bear – *Eon*

Vista, 1998, 504pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 575 60266 X

Reviewed by John D. Owen

It's a hard life being an *sf* author, and tougher still when you deal with stories set in the near future. The future has a nasty habit of turning around and confounding your 'predictions' in short order. That is certainly the case for Greg Bear and his 1985 novel *Eon*.

The novel has a magnificent central idea of awe inspiring proportions, but today it is difficult to get past the fact that history caught up and surprised Bear within four years, with the dissolution of the Soviet Bloc. As a result, *Eon* now reads like an alternate history, telling of a timeline where Brezhnev clones ruled the USSR into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, and Gorbachev never took the lid off the Soviet pressure-cooker.

If you do forge your way past the Cold War perceptions of our recent past to the nub of the story, then *Eon* still holds a lot of fascination. A strangely altered asteroid dubbed the Stone parks itself in Earth orbit. Upon investigation by an international team led by the Americans, the Stone is found to be hollowed out into seven chambers. Two chambers contain deserted futuristic cities, a third a vast tract of wilderness forest and lakes. The sixth chamber contains immense

unfathomable machinery while the final chamber opens onto a huge corridor, the Way, seemingly extending away from the Stone to infinity. In the cities, the researchers find libraries full of material beyond anything the explorers had imagined.

Unfortunately, Cold War paranoia keeps the Americans from sharing their discoveries (both in the libraries and the seventh chamber) with the Russians. They, in their turn, imagine the worst, that the Americans are gaining a huge technological advantage over them. A Soviet military expedition is launched to take over the Stone by force, which in turn pushes the opposing factions on Earth along the road to Armageddon.

Bear handles the story with a muscular ease, pushing everything along at a steady, easily assimilated pace, while throwing plenty of surprises into the mix. His characters are not spectacularly well-drawn, but are serviceable, malleable pawns in the bigger game of gobsmacking the reader. *Eon*

may not have worn well thanks to paradigm shifts in the political world, but it still makes for an amusing, amazing story, if you treat it as an alternative history.



## Ray Bradbury – *Something Wicked This Way Comes*

Earthlight, 1998, 215pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 671 01790 X

## Ray Bradbury – *I Sing the Body Electric*

Earthlight, 1998, 331pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 671 01789 6

Reviewed by K. V. Bailey

*Something Wicked* first appeared in 1963 when Bradbury himself was approaching middle age and is in essence an experiential interchange between age and youth, between the ageing Charles Halloway and his thirteen-year-old son, who is complemented in an almost twin-like way by his more mercurial friend, Jim. Carnival comes to the inevitable mid-western town, and the boys are caught up in the mysteries of a disorientating mirror-maze, and of a carousel which, counter-clockwise, will shrink the years and the body but clockwise will advance them. These are under the control of Mr. Dark, the Illustrated Man, who, with his freakish horde collects souls, absorbing them into his tattoos, offering them youth restored or maturity attained. In this plainly mephistophelean rôle he is the tempter of the unfulfilled Mr. Halloway and of the adventurous Jim, eager for adulthood. The latter almost succumbs, but is saved by the heroic father, whose victorious defence against Mr. Dark and his legions involves a cross-generational empathy, laughter and, in the novel's folksy finale, the singing of Campdown Races and Swanee River. Mr. Halloway's naively philosophic homilies, locating the aeonic tempter within us, are not the best of the book. What continually delights is Bradbury's deployment of brilliant if extravagant imagery and descriptive metaphor: of the Carnival ('Flags and banners bright as blue-birds snapped above the lion-coloured canvas'); of Halloway's work place ('the great dark library with its labyrinths and hedgerow mazes of sleeping books'); of the horrific

('Mr. Dark scuttled a tarantula hand up an electric brass switchboard').

Charles Dickens is mentioned in several contexts in *Something Wicked*, and Dickens the fantasist (e.g. the Dickens of Jarley's Waxworks) is a widely echoed influence. It is there in the title story of the republished *I Sing the Body Electric* (18 stories and a poem). Tim says, 'Where do you pick up words like Tosh?' Tom replies, 'Grandma read me some Dickens last night.' The convergence of characters at the end of that story of a super-robot, family-embracing grandmother, occurs simply 'by Dickensian coincidence'. The most typically Bradburian of the stories is 'Any Friend of Nicholas Nickleby's is a Friend of Mine'. It is again a story of reciprocity between unfulfilled age and eager youth (with Dickens's novels as the imaginal linkage). The beautiful android surrogate grandmother of the title story represents one aspect of a thematic strand in the collection – she is the active, good and perfect machine. The robotic simulacrum of President Lincoln in 'Downwind from Gettysburg' is perfected machine, but, outside the beholder's mind, is actionless. In one of two Martian stories, 'The Lost City of Mars', the city machine has perfection but is actively evil/hostile. The other Martian story, 'Night Call, Collect' is a nightmare of the youth and age of one marooned psyche in destructive inter-self communication through hellish electronic time-loops. I will only mention the poem, 'Christus Apollo', to say that there is far, far better poetry in Bradbury's prose.

**Marion Zimmer Bradley – *Lady of Avalon* (1)**

Penguin, 1998, 432pp, £6.99 ISBN 0 14 024193 0

**Sharan Newman – *Guinevere Evermore***

TOR Books, 1998, 277pp, \$13.95 ISBN 0 312 86641 0

Reviewed by Jan Malique

In these two books the familiar Arthurian tale (Grail quest, spiritual and moral dilemmas facing the questors, Arthur's loss of sovereignty over the land, etc.), is liberally laced with a good dose of blood and tears. That is to say, the stuff of legends is made more accessible and comprehensible on a personal level.

*Guinevere Evermore* is the third instalment in the saga of the queen, which began with *Guinevere* and *The Chessboard Queen*. The blurb claims it to be 'a heartrending portrayal of a failed romance, a fallen woman, and the end of an era', which it is largely. The reader is drawn into a complex interplay of relationships between the characters who are at times weary, cynical and troubled individuals. The triangle that is Arthur, Guinevere and Lancelot features prominently throughout the story as do their 'dark' counterparts, Morgan le Fay, Mordred and Morgause.

Guinevere may have been vilified for her adultery with Lancelot and was perceived to have played a part in the disintegration of an age and an ideal vision of kingship, but Ms. Newman invites us to look beyond that and explore the persona of this enigmatic character, the 'reality' behind the glamour and excitement of heroic adventure. The magic of the Celtic Otherworld lingers in the background, observing the play of history before withdrawing to another plane – the old gods of ancient Britain are overshadowed by the new religion. A theme which is echoed in Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Lady of Avalon*.

*Lady of Avalon* is the third volume in an Arthurian series, the others being *The Mists of Avalon* and *The Forests of Avalon*, neither of which I have read but shall rectify if this book is anything to go by. Ancient Britain and her secrets are alluringly conjured in *Lady of Avalon*, in which the guardians of the holy isle, Avalon, bear witness to the change in the tides of time and the near destruction of the old knowledge of the Britons as the land is overrun by a succession of invaders – the Romans, Saxons, etc. As Newman has the Celtic Otherworld hovering on the fringes of history before withdrawing, here Avalon's priests and priestesses are given the task of preserving knowledge throughout a dark period in their history – once again it is the challenge faced by significant individuals which is explored in this book and there is an artistry in the way language is employed at times (see the speeches by the Faerie Queen, priestesses Cailleán and Dierna which are interspersed at various points). There is a lot to get one's teeth into in this book and sustain the interest.

*Guinevere Evermore* on the other hand was a difficult book to read because I found the writing style a little stodgy at times and the characterisations occasionally annoying. This re-interpretation of a hugely romantic legend somehow lacked substance for me, but it presents an alternative view on a familiar theme which is always useful. There are many layers of meaning in a text and we may or may not always find something which resonates within us.

**Bryan Choffin (Ed) – *The Best of Crank***

TOR Books, 1998, 320pp, \$23.95 ISBN 0 312 86740 9

**Nancy Kress – *Beaker's Dozen***

TOR Books, 1998, 349pp, \$23.95 ISBN 0 312 86537 6

Reviewed by Steve Palmer

A couple of collections of short stories, *Beaker's Dozen* from Nancy Kress and *Best of Crank!* from the American SF magazine whose editor, Bryan Choffin, won the 1995 World Fantasy Award for his small press publishing.

*Best of Crank!* includes stories by, amongst others, Ursula Le Guin, Gene Wolfe, Brian Aldiss, A.A. Attanasio, Lisa Tuttle, Michael Bishop, Gwyneth Jones and Karen Joy Fowler and, of course, the standard is extremely high. Gene Wolfe's 'Empires of Foliage and Flower' is a fable from *The Wonders of Urth* and Sky, from *The Book of the New Sun*, and makes a fascinating read. Lisa Tuttle's story, 'Food Man', is peculiarly horrid and compelling. Ursula Le Guin's 'The Matter of Seggri' comes across as an anthropological study (like a number of her others). As somebody who tends not to read short stories, I found the anthology good enough to keep me reading.

The Nancy Kress volume is a more difficult affair since there is

not, at first glance, the variety required to make a really good collection. Not knowing the author's work didn't help. I didn't find these stories as interesting as those in the other volume, not because of the standard, which is high, but for lack of a 'hook' to make me want to read. Most of the stories cover genetic manipulation of some variety – the author admits this is her main concern in a number of candid forewords. The next century, for instance, she describes as the Century of Microbiology (a fair guess, I expect). Some of the stories are what might be called 'American-weird', for example 'Ars Longa', which features Walt Disney. My favourite is 'Summerwind', a short and deep retelling of the Sleeping Beauty myth.

Short stories are funny things. I've never found the format as interesting as the novel. Nancy Kress, apparently, finds the novella the perfect format, but this doesn't show...

**Samuel R. Delany – *They Fly At Çiron* (1)**

Voyager, 1998, 222pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 00 649939 2

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

I'm in two minds about this. Part of me says that, as a fantasy story, *They Fly At Çiron* is Delany marking time, with enough sometimes glaring logical inconsistencies that don't fully justify its expansion from a 1971 collaborative short story (with James Sallis) to its present short novel form. Another part of me says it is dangerous and unwise to dismiss anything by Delany as 'slight', and that *They Fly At Çiron* should be read, like Ryman's *The Unconquered Country*, as a form of moral fable.

What's it about? On the surface, it's about the invasion of a completely pacifist village society by an invading army, led by the



megalomaniac Prince Nactor. Both are exaggerated, in true pulp fantasy fashion, for effect. The village is a pastoral agrarian ideal; it's inhabitants appear to have no concept of the use of force or weapons for domination or power. They are an Edenic ideal, with no notion of greed or envy or discontent. They can kill, for food or in self-defence – the story starts with Rahm wrestling a puma – but the notion that one human being might actually kill another, or even want to, seems literally unthinkable. Nactor, by contrast, is brutal, devious, and power-mad. The novel starts with him casually shooting

caged prisoners with his powergun while conversing with his lieutenant, Kire.

The invasion of the village by Nactor's army is a forgone conclusion. The village is overrun, sacked, and the inhabitants killed or taken prisoner. Only a few escape, including Rahm, who kills one of the soldiers; the itinerant singer, Naa; and Qualt, the village garbage collector. Rahm's escape leads him to a cave where he discovers and frees a trapped Winged One, Vortcir, from the web of a giant spider. Qualt also has his own encounter with another Winged One, the mysterious and vaguely threatening beings who fly from the mountain top at Hi-Vator. Both Rahm and Qualt, almost simultaneously, but in different ways, learn something about themselves as much as about the winged people of Hi-Vator, and Delany chooses this moment again to step outside the text and address the reader directly, underscoring a reading of *Çiron* as a fable.

On a second level, the tale is about the arrogance of power, and that arrogance becomes a form of blindness and stupidity. There are several references, too many to be unintentional and sometimes over-stressing the point, that the invading soldiers do not 'see' the villagers; they never really look at them, to distinguish one from another. And they never look back at anything. It is this, and the realisation of their blindness, that allows Naa to exchange places with Rimgia, even as she is bound and led behind the soldier's horses to the army camp as Nactor's 'gift' for his lieutenant, Kire.

They Fly At Çiron, for all its deceptive, and perhaps intentional, simplicity, is quintessential Delany, using pulp conventions to examine a complex web of power relations, violence, morality, desire and innocence. Like Delany's tales of Nevèryon, I suspect this book will repay repeated readings.

## Diane Duane – *On Her Majesty's Wizardly Service*

Hodder & Stoughton, 1998, 309pp, £17.99 ISBN 0 340 69330 4

Reviewed by Jan Malique

This book opens innocuously enough with the loss of a scientific tome in a London underground station sometime in the late 20th century. Thereafter it jumps between alternate timelines

as a deadly cat and mouse game ensues to avert the destruction of the known universe. The eternal cosmic battle between Chaos and Order is played out on a grand scale and reaches its zenith as the forces of Chaos succeed in upsetting the balance of events on Earth. This they achieve by playing on individual morality and the depths to which it will sink for the acquisition of power and dominance. Overshadowing all this is the unseen presence of an ancient and unspeakably malevolent entity, referred to as The Lone One, who is ultimately responsible for the darkness which is creeping upon the world.

The lost book, *Van Nostrand's Scientific Encyclopaedia*, makes available 20th century technology to a 19th century world – a move which obviously causes a few problems! The assassination of Queen Victoria in an alternate universe, worrying distortions in the fabric of time and the threat of a nuclear holocaust are a few of the events the heroes of the book have to contend with. In their quest to save the world they mobilise a disparate band of individuals consisting of a young Arthur Conan Doyle, a dinosaur,



ravens from the Tower of London and the Keeper of the Mummified Cats at the British Museum, E. Wallis Budge. A good

spoonful of Ancient Egyptian mythology is also added to the already dangerously boiling pot.

The heroes of the book are an interesting group of characters: Arhu, Urruah, Rhiow, Huff, Auhlae, Fhrio and Siffha'h are finely drawn, complex and intelligent individuals who also happen to be cats. Diane Duane's secret cat civilisation first aired in *The Book of Night with Moon* is once again glimpsed in *On Her Majesty's Wizardly Service*. Our perceptions of these creatures as mere 'pets' is challenged – theirs is a civilisation which preceded even that of the Ancient Egyptians who recognised and acknowledged their wisdom. We are shown that parallel life-streams are just as intelligent as humans and very often exceeds them.

The book has a few wry touches – for example a cat nicknamed Humphrey who was formerly in the Civil Service, a raven called Odin and time portals which are constructed suspiciously like cat's cradles. Ms. Duane's storytelling skills draw in the reader quite skilfully and humorously above all, even for non-cat lovers.

## Parke Godwin – *Lord of Sunset*

Avon Books, 1998, 466pp, \$13.00 ISBN 0 380 72675 0

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

In the library of Exeter Cathedral you can see the Exeter Book, a collection of Old English poetry and a masterpiece of book production. Next to it, in the same display case, a scruffy little object, is the Domesday Book. I recommend a visit to anyone who still thinks that the Norman Conquest brought civilisation to England.

Parke Godwin's new novel opens with the Battle of Hastings, then goes back in time to examine the events which led up to it and the people who were involved in them. The emphasis is on the Saxons, in particular Harold Godwinsson and his family. The impression which Godwin gives is of a civilised and sophisticated group of people, valuing domestic comfort as well as courtly display, and well aware that if William becomes king he will destroy a culture which is distinctively English. The sense of something unique coming to an end pervades the book and is reflected in the title.

Godwin has chosen to tell his story through a multiplicity of first person narrators. The tone as well as the outlook varies; the effect is of a complex chorale. We come to know the central characters, Harold and his wife Edith, in great depth, while even

the unsympathetic figures like Tostig and Edward the Confessor have a voice and ask for our attention and understanding. History tends to preserve the public face of great people, while a writer's imagination can focus on private and personal details to make them come alive, as Godwin does here.

If I wanted to be really picky, I'd say that I'd like to have seen more of Harold's Queen, Aldith, who remains a rather shadowy figure, and some elements of the dialogue jarred; I can't believe in eleventh century people calling their mother 'Mum', or using 'Wizard' as a term of approval. I also found the trade paperback format shoddy and I hope there is a hardback edition somewhere to do the book justice. But these are minor matters looked at beside the book as a whole. I enjoyed it, and found it illuminated a period of history that I already know something about.

I hope Vector readers won't be put off by the purely historical treatment, without the fantasy elements that Godwin has introduced elsewhere in his work. He is a major writer, whatever the genre; if you don't know his work, read this, or his wonderful Arthurian *Firelord*, or any other of his books. I don't think you'll be disappointed.



**Colin Greenland – *Mother of Plenty***

Voyager, 1998, 451pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 00 649907 4

Reviewed by Chris Amies

It's been a long haul for Tabitha Jute. The maverick barge-captain who swapped her barge, the 'Alice Liddell', for the Frasque hiveship known as Plenty, and sailed it into nowhere in *Seasons of Plenty*. At the start of *Mother of Plenty*, she sails Plenty out into 'normal' space and, instead of hoped-for Proxima Centauri, finds herself looking at the baleful red glare of Capella. Where the parasitic Capellans came from, and found other races so amenable to takeover, especially humans.

As soon as she's come to her senses it's quite clear that the Capellan takeover has gone a very long way. A crew of angels and aliens collects space artefacts and experiments on the human and alien races who had been living in the Frasque hiveship. Her friends are dead or nearly so, or taken over by the parasites.

This panoply of alien races, huge spacecraft, the classic sfal description of vast spatial phenomena, is baroque and widescreen enough to be a complete contrast to Tabitha and her mates Saskia and Dodger, who resist anything being done to them, and are resolutely not taken in by Capella or what Capella did to Tabitha's old friend Marco. The *Plenty* trilogy has grown from a single original volume and it's been inevitable that it expanded its original horizons; the threats need to be greater, the descriptions more extravagant;



more pyrotechnics, more weird stuff. So *Mother of Plenty* includes a space battle, a Banksian trek across a deserted planet from a

crashed land spacecraft, Moorcockian jaded post-humans, and the rest of the vast palette and immense cheek that any self-respecting writer of sf needs to have these days to stand out from the rest.

Space Opera has made a comeback over the last few years, not least due to a few gonzo writers who ignored the nuts-and-bolts stuff of earlier writers, assuming this was all a given. In the same way that any technology gets popularised and is no longer the province of techies who talk about using that technology rather than using it, sf has become user-friendly. For this generation, a spaceship is to sf what a horse is to a Western – important, but not the subject of the exercise. Instead the writer's imagination can fill

in the holes where the story goes. Colin Greenland, as an author who has previously exercised his talents on Fantasy (though without magic) and Horror (though without monsters), has brought that same talent to widescreen sf and made the only difference that in the present stage of sf an author can make: that of applying an individual vision to characters and events.

**Anne Harris – *Accidental Creatures***

TOR Books, 1998, 287pp, \$23.95 ISBN 0 312 86538 4

Reviewed by Farah Mendlesohn

A rich young woman decides to leave the safety of her father's house and seek independence. Another young woman, bitter and resentful over the death of her sister in an industrial accident, makes a living picking the pockets of rich tourists in vat town. The opening sections of Anne Harris's *Accidental Creatures* are not promising, weighed down by poor writing and a society which is uncomfortably reminiscent of Nicola Griffith's *Slow River*. This is far from the first novel to begin with poor-little rich girl slumming as a route to self-fulfilment whilst our rich-in-family but poor in material possessions heroine teaches her the 'way-things-are' and is rewarded for her trouble. But Harris is painting on a larger canvas. The industrial accident quickly emerges as sabotage on the part of the totalitarian company, anxious to diffuse attempts to unionise whilst our poor-little-rich girl is the four armed result of an attempt to produce a worker capable of withstanding the toxins produced by the company's production methods. As with many

science fictional creations she 'turns' on her inventors, but Harris succeeds in avoiding many of the clichés, turning instead to compromise and a new order, rather than destruction.

*Accidental Creatures* offers the reader plots on a number of levels. It is a tale of industrial mis-deeds, a love story and a tale of self-discovery. The science, both biological and chemical, is reasonably convincing, as is, unexpectedly, the handling of American union politics. Where the novel falls down is its characterisation. It is rather hard to distinguish the voices in this book. It is not enough to give a character four arms, black and white hair, or a talent with computers; somehow this still left me with the feeling that they were all one person. Despite this, however, by the end the book had become a rather compelling thriller, with a more than usually convincing compromise offered as a resolution to both personal and political problems.

**Mike Jefferies – *The Siege of Candlebane Hall***

Voyager, 1998, 325pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 00 648219 8

Reviewed by John R. Oram

When I first received this, I thought it would be difficult to review: it's the last volume of a quartet of books, and I have not read the other three. But I was wrong. It stands alone quite nicely, and enough information is given for a new reader to pick up the plot quite rapidly, without spoiling the pace of the story. The information is given to the reader through conversations between characters quite naturally.

The plot reads as if Tolkien and Peake had collaborated on a

fantasy version of Macbeth, with Macbeth as the good guy. It features knights who have been turned into trees (Ents) and gives a whole new meaning to the lines, 'Macbeth shall never vanquished be, until Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill shall come against him.' (Act 4, Sc.1) But the clues came earlier with King Thane and his Knights of Cawdor (both names in the original play).

The Peake reference I took from the names of some of the

characters, such as Snatchpurse, and the sheer darkness and gloom of the castle in which he is living. Shades of Gormenghast! Snatchpurse has to be the nastiest villain I have come across in all the years I have been reading fantasy. He has no redeeming features whatsoever. I mean, nobody is perfect, but this guy is just sooooo nasty: he has a temper tantrum just because somebody he

wanted to torture has escaped. But it is not merely black and white. None of the heroes are perfect: they all have faults, and the reason for Snatchpurse's successes has been that the people did not like the reforms of the new king.

I liked it. A lot darker than most of the fantasy I usually read, but worth the money. Recommended.

## Garry Kilworth – *Castle Storm* [1]

Corgi, 1998, 381pp, £4.99 ISBN 0 552 54547 3

Reviewed by Lesley Hatch

This is a delightful book, Kilworth's second in his series for children *The Welkin Weasels*, with a concise introduction to the story which provides an excellent prologue to the events that take place on Welkin Island. From the moment we meet the invading rats under the leadership of Flaggatis, an old wizard-stoat, the action doesn't stop, moving along at a fast pace that never lets up.

Anthropomorphic novels are not to everyone's taste, but this one is cleverly done and contains some interesting characters, most of them on the side of good or evil, though there are one or two exceptions. The main protagonist is the weasel Sylver; once a servant of the stoats who rule Welkin, he now leads a band of outlaws in Halfmoon Wood. At the start of the novel, Sylver and his band are about to set out in search of the humans who built the sea walls around Welkin, as these are crumbling and in need of repair. All they have to go on are a series of clues contained in the diary of a human girl found in the library at Thistle Hall, the home of Lord Haukin, ruler of County Elleswhere. However, things are never that simple.



What begins for Sylver and his band as a straightforward quest to the Castle Storm of the title soon turns into something even more complicated, and they endure numerous adventures before they find the next clue to aid them in their search.

This novel does have its sinister creations: like Torca Mada, Grand Inquisitor, dressed in scarlet and with a nasty line in instruments of torture – a helmet full of earwigs is one. But it also has its lighter side, and its amusing characters. For example, there's Wodehed, one of Sylver's band and supposedly a magician, but not a very good one – early on in the novel, his attempt at casting a spell to bring rain on an advancing rat results, not in the downpour he had expected, but the collapse of a water tower due to the rat colliding with it. Then there are Rosencrass and Guildenswine, two ferrets who will do anything for anybody as long as the price is right, and who come to a nasty end. Add Sleek, an otter with great plans for a tailoring revolution, Clive of Coldkettle, a grey squirrel feuding with the red squirrels occupying Castle Storm, numerous magically animated statues, and you have a fascinating read.

## Stephen Laws – *Chasm* [1]

Hodder & Stoughton, 1998, 546pp, £16.99 ISBN 0 340 66611

Reviewed by Alan Fraser

Today on the radio I heard a reviewer say 'If you don't like something, then even tiny things about it get up your nose'. A friend of mine recently had a book published – reviews were generally favourable and it has sold well enough for a second printing to be imminent. However one reviewer hated it, and spent his review just criticising the grammar, including the misuse of 'plain' instead of 'plane'. By chance this was a mistake I'd spotted and corrected when I read the manuscript, but the proofs were rushed off to the printer before my amendments were included.

So with *Chasm*, the latest book from Tynesider Stephen Laws, I was really bugged because I couldn't decide whether it was set in England, in America, or in some mythical mid-Atlantic country. I have the suspicion that Laws submitted his manuscript with the story set in an English town (he used Killingworth as a template), and a sub-editor decided that if it were more American, someone might pick it up as a film script. Thus one minute in *Chasm* you're positive you're in the States, and the next a character comes out with some English slang that no American would ever use, and after that you meet a family from hell called the Caffneys who come straight out of *Deliverance*, but live on what can only be an English council estate. Distracting.

The story is simple – one day the town of Edmonville is hit by what appears at first to be a severe earth tremor that destroys most of it. The survivors find themselves on a series of crags like those topped by the famous Greek monasteries at Meteora, separated by chasms of nothing. The rest of the world has ceased to exist. But worse is to come, from the depths at night comes a nameless horror to attack the few survivors. And to cap it all, from a neighbouring crag come the Caffneys. The scene is set for the humble school janitor, Jay O'Connor, who has become the Edmonville survivors' unwilling leader, to prove himself worthy of the rôle.

Not being a regular reader of horror, I was unprepared for the preoccupation with gore. People die (or don't die) very bloodily in *Chasm*. Bad things and bad people are very nasty indeed. This was a book I was tempted to toss aside. But I stuck with it, and in the end I'll give Laws credit for resolving his story very well out of what seemed an impossible situation, and even working in a bit of sf parallel world stuff. I'm not tempted to seek out more from Laws, but if you're a fan of the genre you might find it up your street – provided you don't mind not knowing whether you're in England or the USA!

**J.M.H. Lovegrove – *The Krilov Continuum* (1)**

Millenium, 1998, 344pp, £5.99 ISBN 1 85798 536 2

Reviewed by Gary Wilkinson

Secret organisations; Russian academics; hidden underground laboratories; a psychic tramp; the mysterious explosion in Tunguska, Siberia in 1908; supernatural entities; the Roswell incident; a hard-nosed London copper; anti-gravity machines; a mysterious Japanese internet hacker; a villain called De Sade...

Sounds fun doesn't it? Could it be an exciting homage to the pulp novels of yesteryear? Well I'm afraid not. This is an inexcusable mess of a book.

It starts with an indigestible lump of info dump and ends with an indigestible lump of info dump; with any possible excitement or interest in between drowned in waffle. The wooden text has to be read to be believed. Lovegrove never uses one sentence when you can use a paragraph. A character is not just sick – 'Out came the contents of his stomach in a heaving, gelatinous rush – the mixed grill he had eaten for breakfast that morning at the hostel, sandwich and the can of 7-Up he had had for lunch – spattering the pristine white steps at his feet.' Which was just about my reaction after reading the damn thing.

And so a rather slight tale becomes bloated beyond the

capacity of its limp X-Files-like plot. Reading this is like going on a nostalgic trip back in time to when sci-fi hacks were paid by the yard or reading a very poor spin-off from a non-existent (unless I'm very much mistaken) TV program or movie.

Anything positive? Well I liked the cover: a rather natty minimalist clean modern design in black and blue that certainly stands out on the shelves. Oh, did I mention that it is already in the shops? Like the Avengers movie the publishers have tried to bypass any critical influence. Talking of publishers it's got the SCI-FI channel logo on the front but its not mentioned on their extensive web site – perhaps they are embarrassed by it. They should be.

'J' H M Lovegrove is the pseudonym of an Arthur C. Clarke Award shortlisted author' it says – well if that is the case he or she should hang their head in shame. My main fear is that there might be more adventures of 'The Guardians' following the 'Krilov Incident' story to come. There are absolutely no excuses for this sort of drivel; pulp it is and pulped it should be.

**Ian McDonald – *Kirinya* (1)**

Gollancz, 1998, 412pp, £16.99 ISBN 0 575 06077 8

Reviewed by John Newinger

There are books that regularly leave me with the feeling that we are going through some sort of 'golden age' as far as British sf is concerned. Although this is only a personal observation, strictly subjective, I think it is fair to say that I have got more pleasure from the genre over the last ten to fifteen years than during any other period. One of the authors most responsible for this is, without a doubt, Ian McDonald, whose work I have enjoyed and admired ever since stumbling across a copy of *Desolation Road*. Having said this I must confess to serious reservations with regard to *Chaga*, the book to which *Kirinya* is a sequel. While the writing in *Chaga* was often wonderful, the book's central protagonist, Gaby McAslan, left this reader cold. Not only did her selfishness increasingly irritate, but the book seemed to endorse her defects. She did not pay her dues, instead they were paid for her by other people. Consequently, my expectations of *Kirinya* were not too high. This book was not going to be in the same league as *King of Morning*, *Queen of Day* or *Sacrifice of Fools*. In fact, *Kirinya* is excellent. While Gaby might not have paid her dues in *Chaga*, she pays them with interest here.

Readers of *Chaga* will remember the genetic packages that arrive from space and begin remaking the world, creating an alien landscape and a new humanity. A new Africa was emerging and the young news reporter, Gaby McAslan, became part of it. The explanation for the transformation was believed to reside in the Big Dumb Object (BDO), an alien artefact that is in orbit around

the earth, and Gaby's lover, the father of her child, disappeared while exploring it. With *Kirinya*, McDonald explores the political impact of the changes that the Chaga has initiated as well as its continued effect on the lives of Gaby and her daughter, Serena.



The United States regards the Chaga as a threat to its New World Order. Contaminated areas are to be quarantined with murderous ruthlessness, although there is an insatiable desire for the technological/medical advances that have been made possible by the Chaga. At the same time, the Americans have used their military muscle to annex the BDO, bringing it under their control and trying to hunt down the dissident human communities that have established themselves there. Much of the book is concerned with the efforts of the new states/communities, that have emerged in the Chaga, to break the US blockade and wrest the BDO from their grasp. This political struggle is the context in which the badly damaged Gaby begins to recover from the blows she has sustained, and for her daughter, Serena, to discover herself and play an independent part in the resurrection of Africa.

The writing in *Kirinya* is as good as ever, the alien environment of the Chaga is well realised, sometimes startlingly so, and the politics are convincing. The one weakness of the book lies in a certain strain when McDonald integrates the personal narratives with political developments. This is certainly not McDonald's best book, but it is still highly recommended. I suspect his best is yet to come.

**Julian May – *Perseus Spur* (1)**

Voyager, 1998, 310pp, £10.99 ISBN 0 00 224669 4

Reviewed by Andy Mills

*Perseus Spur* starts promisingly enough: a young man is in exile on the far-flung world of Kedge-Lockaby. Victim of a frame-up, this former investigator of corporate fraud now ekes out a quiet

existence by hiring out his submersible to tourists and sportsmen visiting the Brilling Reef. With the obvious nod to Carroll, May introduces an intriguing mystery when the virtual beach-bum is

subject to an assassination attempt, his house being eaten by a giant sea-toad. It's quite definitely an interesting beginning to the novel.

Unfortunately, the story rapidly spirals downhill hereon in, as May takes us on a journey which could have been exotic or humorous but is instead a bog-standard space adventure. Helly turns out to be one of those irritating sub-Heinleinian heroes, scion of a powerful family (who of course take him back into the fold). The prodigal is helped by that other Heinlein staple, the wealthy old man (in order that Helly can chase the would-be assassin the old man lends our hero his state-of-the-art space yacht. As you do.) Helly discovers that the attempt on his life was part of a galaxy-wide conspiracy and acquires more allies – in particular the competent and beautiful young female security chief he eyes up and who (naturally) falls in love with him.

There is a sloppy feel to this book; it's supposed to be set in the twenty-third century, yet uneasily mixes references to Nat King Cole and Nike trainers with far-future paraphernalia. But above all, it's dull. This may seem an odd thing to say when there's so much action, but the plot twists are predictable. Helly may be left for dead on a comet, but you know he'll be okay; he may get knocked out – and he does, with great regularity – but you know he'll wake up rescued and intact. In between the bouts of activity, the principal characters explain what went on whilst our Helly was unconscious.

*Perseus Spur* ends up as pedestrian space melodrama (and be warned, it's the first of a series). The blurb quotes Asimov's: 'Julian May has irrevocably placed herself among the greats'. Not with this novel, she hasn't.

## John Meaney – *To Hold Infinity* [1]

Bantam, 1998, 556pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 553 50588 2

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

It was Arthur C. Clarke who famously declared that any sufficiently advanced science is indistinguishable from magic. This is a novel about magic. Or at least so it seems when walls deliquesce to allow you to pass through at any point, when floors do your walking for you, and when your mind, your personality, can be spread across an entire planet.

It is this last which provides the plot for John Meaney's excellent debut novel. Yoshiko Sundamori leaves Earth to visit her son, Tetsuo, on Fulgor, but unknown to her Tetsuo has been rather leftfingeringed and as a result he has had to flee for his life. Yoshiko, therefore, arrives on a strange planet, a planet of strangers, and has to solve a mystery, or rather several mysteries. Where is Tetsuo? What did he do? And who is trying to kill him? Her efforts at amateur detection take us on an odyssey through what is a very strange planet indeed, because on Fulgor there are two classes of humans: those who are pretty much like us, though with a technology that we would find magical, and the Luculenti.

The Luculenti are what make this book really interesting. They have been enhanced with additional artificial brains, and the advantages this brings in terms of instantaneous communication, multi-tasking and a host of other things make them not much short of gods. Though, crucially, they are that one step short – all except for one renegade, who has gone far over the limit for the number of extra brains, sometimes acquiring them by murdering other Luculenti and absorbing their personalities into his own. To keep this hidden he has had to disperse his brains across the planet, but to allow them to operate he has had to make use of new technology invented by Tetsuo. All of this has brought him to the verge of transcending humanity – though the Luculenti are so far beyond what we know as human that I was never quite clear what such transcendence might mean

– it has also made him into one of the enemies seeking Tetsuo.

But he's not the only one, there are other more shadowy bodies chasing Tetsuo, and Yoshiko has a difficult job sorting friend from foe as well as separating a very tangled web of different motives. One of the problems, I felt, was that Meaney

has loaded his book up with too much plot. It is such a complex and multivalent story that at times it almost buckled under its own weight. Though never quite, Meaney is a talented storyteller who just about managed to keep all the balls in the air, even though he had to take his eyes off more than a few of them from time to time. However, when you add this complexity to the complexity of the setting, then it all does become just a little too much. There is so much going on here that much of this futuristic technology does become like magic, as arbitrary and inexplicable as that implies. What's more, Meaney never stops the plot to dump info; we have to pick it all up as we go along, and though he plays fair and plants sufficient clues along the way you still have to be on your toes all

the time. Which makes this a rather wearying book to read at times, and it might have been better, for him and for us, if he had simplified either the plot or the setting just a little bit and made this a tighter book as a result. Though having said that, it still does my heart good to see a new writer prepared to take as many risks and play with as many ideas as Meaney does.

One final curious observation: I realised as I was reading the book that every female character, without exception, is good; every significant male character, with one exception, is either a villain or at the very least morally ambiguous. Even our would-be hero, Tetsuo, is a thief. I draw no conclusions from this, but it did make me wonder a little.

## Robert J. Sawyer – *Factoring Humanity*

TOR Books, 1998, 350pp, \$23.95 ISBN 0 312 86458

Reviewed by Stephen Deas

'Since the early years of the twenty-first century, Earth has been receiving signals from interstellar space – but no one can understand them ... until the day they stop.'

As a gross generalisation, there are two kinds of reader. The ones who revel in three-dimensional characters with real feelings and emotions, who lap up pages of personal angst, trauma and self discovery and who cares if the plot's going nowhere? And then there are the ones who, three lines in, are screaming 'put

your damn personality disorders back in the closet and get ON with it!'

When I picked this up, I thought it was going to be a character book. Okay, so the back blurb says stuff about extra-terrestrial messages, but flipping through chapter one, all I see is the principal character's daughter accusing her father of abuse. Touchy subject, eh? Can see this turning into social drama with futuristic trimmings, right?



Wrong. Trust me: this book is driven by its plot, even if it does take a good third of its pages to get going. The alien messages (or rather, the fact that they've stopped after ten years, and no one can figure what the hell it was all about) do take central stage, it's just that Sawyer seems to be taking the time to resurrect the lost arts of subplots (of which there are several) and themes (the nature of consciousness, both natural and artificial), and all this takes up time and space. There's a lot of info-dumping – psychology, quantum computing – but it has a natural feel to it, like it's supposed to be there, it's accurate and it's interesting.

Unfortunately, by the time the meaning of these messages-from-space becomes clear, Sawyer's got into a very comfortable steady gait and he doesn't want to come out of it. Thus the

enormity of the truth, the potentially momentous consequences (the resolution of one subplot, treated as almost an incidental, I found to be the most chilling thing I've read this year even though most everything else has a warm fuzzy feel) fall a bit flat, and it's down to your imagination to think it through. But that's what it's there for, right?

Overall, if this had been written with a passion equal to Sawyer's evident craftsmanship, it would have been a truly exhilarating ride. As it is, it's still a damn fine read and irritatingly hard to put down. And what endures is not what was said, but the hints of things left for my mind to work on. Now that's good writing.

### Joan Slonczewski – *The Children Star*

TOR Books, 1998, 351pp, \$23.95 ISBN 0 312 86716 6

Reviewed by Sue Thomason

This novel is set in the same universe as Slonczewski's previous books, *A Door Into Ocean* and *Daughter Of Elysium*, and it's probably helpful to have read one or both of them first, as familiarity with aspects of the shared background is assumed. The main setting of *The Children Star* is the planet Prokaryon which, as its name suggests, is inhabited by life very different from most of that on Earth. Prokaryotes on Earth are simple, single-celled life forms, with no nucleus, no paired chromosomes, no mitochondria or chloroplasts (i.e. bacteria, blue-green algae). On Prokaryon, multicellular prokaryotic life has evolved (though why toroidal DNA should produce solely toroidal life forms is never explained, the shape of terrestrial eukaryotic life doesn't mimic the shape of its DNA!). Because of Prokaryon's biology, and its high arsenic levels, human colonists need extensive 'lifesaving' before they can survive there. Treatment is easiest for children – the younger, the better – so a religious order is rescuing sick and starving children from other planets and rehabilitating them for a new life on Prokaryon.

Conditions on Prokaryon are... odd. In fact they're so odd that

there's a persistent rumour that the planet is being actively managed by 'hidden masters'. And when the planet is acquired for Terraforming by a ruthless developer (oh help! What will happen to the innocent colony of rescued children who are co-operating with the fearless scientists to unravel the mystery of Prokarian reproduction in a race against time??), it... fights back. By the end of the book, the 'hidden masters' have revealed themselves, Prokaryon's biology promises wonderful new things for humankind, the colony (and the planet) are saved, and the ruthless developer is utterly devastated – a changed and broken man – because his dog has died.

The good things in this book are its fascinating biological ideas (Slonczewski is a biology professor). The bad things (for me) are its lack of vivid description (particularly of the amazing landscape of Prokaryon) and its sanitised emotional dynamics. Nothing nasty happens – ever! Or if it does, it happens offstage. The book feels like a children's story: cosy and comforting. Of course, this is what many people want, and maybe need, from their reading. If you're looking for a comfortable read, try this book.

### Midori Snyder – *The Innamorati*

TOR Books, 1998, 381pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0 312 86197 4

Reviewed by Tanya Brown

Midori Snyder's previous novel, *The Flight of Michael McBride*, successfully juxtaposed cowboys and the Sidhe in nineteenth-century America. *The Innamorati* initially seems less ambitious, rooted in a Renaissance Italy which only slowly reveals its points of departure from the mundane. This is the Italy of the *commedia dell'Arte*; of that peculiarly Renaissance interpretation of classical mythology which inspired

Titian and Botticelli; and of Ariosto's fantastic epic of magicians and fabulous beasts, *Orlando Furioso*.

If all this gives the impression of meticulous research and historically accurate prose, that's less than half the story. Snyder is a witty and observant writer, with an eye for telling details. She handles a large cast with ease, and each character is an individual, with history and mannerisms and quirks that distinguish them from the usual fantasy archetypes as much as from one another.

And everyone carries a curse: this, after all, is a novel about a group of people with a common desire to rid themselves of the various problems that beset them. That it is not only a novel about what one might term magical psychotherapy, is perhaps its greatest triumph.

There's Anna, a maker of masks for Venetian nobles, whose masks speak to her. Lately, though, she has become unable to give life to them – a barrenness of creativity that mirrors her body's lack of fertility (though she has a teenage daughter, Mirabella, to console her). The wealthy merchant Roberto watches Anna's self-destructive gaiety and wishes that she would settle down and

marry him: but what can he offer her that will ease her pain? There's Rinaldo, a mercenary who wants to retire from his life of violence: Fabrizio, whose career as an actor is severely hampered by his stammer: Lorenzo, a lawyer who used to be a poet until he embraced Truth and realised that all poetry is lies ...

They've all heard tales of Labirinto, the City of the Maze, where the cursed and sick may find solace and win their hearts' desires. Severally and together, they embark upon a pilgrimage to lose their curses in the twists and turns of the maze. But a maze – like a wood – is also somewhere to lose one's way. Labirinto's Maze (like Holdstock's Mythago Wood) is not a mere collection of hedged paths, but a sentient place which presents archetypes for the delectation, and despair, of those who gain entry.

Forcing each pilgrim to confront what they fear, or love – for love can be a curse, as well as salvation – the Maze reveals its secrets slowly and, on occasion, painfully. The greatest trial, shared by all the characters, lies (of course) at the heart of the maze. Only through the actions of a sorcerer's daughter, and the literally elemental conflict which ensues, can the various quests be completed.

Snyder contrasts earthy humour and ethereal song, love and death, betrayal and redemption, with unobtrusive skill. *The Innamorati* is a beautifully balanced novel: each character, and each element of the plot, has a counterpart, and the whole fits together like an ingenious machine.

### Paul Stewart & Chris Riddell – *Beyond the Deepwoods* □

Doubleday, 1998, 282pp, £10.99 ISBN 0 385 40967 2

Reviewed by Kathy Taylor

This is a children's fantasy, aimed at nine upwards, and on that basis works well. It is structured clearly and well: each chapter is another adventure for Twig and ends satisfactorily rather than as a

series of cliff hangers. The chapters link clearly together, and overall feed in to the gradually building climax of the final section.

The main character, Twig, is a young woodtroll who is different from the others in his village. By 'leaving the path', which a woodtroll never does, he inadvertently sets out on a quest to find his true home and identity. This is classic fantasy stuff saved from too much predictability by the wonderfully imaginative series of creatures Twig meets. Two of these which merit special mention are Mag – a rather sweet pre-adolescent girl who happily looks forward to turning into a turgid once she's old enough to drink from the Mother Bloodoak, a blood-thirsty, flesh-hungry tree – and the Grossmother, who is fantastically and grossly obese, runs a pack of gluttonous gyle goblins, providing not only their food but most of their thinking for them.



Riddell, a series of beautifully drawn black and white pictures which add wonderfully to the story. Although the various creatures are clever and imaginative, for me it is the series of expressions on Twig's face that are the best features of the drawings. They, rather than the text, make Twig appear real. The wonderful cover is not credited separately but from the similarity of style I suspect it is also by Chris Riddell. The jacket cover mentions that he is a political cartoonist and I will certainly be looking out for his work in the newspapers as well as on other book covers.

*Beyond the Deepwoods* is the first book of the *Edge Chronicles*. I may not buy the next, but were my daughter approaching eight or nine I would. If you know a child who likes fantasy adventures but already has the must-have 'classics', this

One of the strengths of the book is the illustrations by Chris Riddell, which would make a nice present.

### Jean Stubbs – *The Witching Time* Ⓜ

Gollancz, 1998, 383pp, £16.99 ISBN 0 575 06613 X

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

*The Witching Time* is one of those novels that must have its publisher's marketing and publicity departments wringing their hands in despair, for while it cannot readily be described as mainstream, it does not fit comfortably into any other particular genre. For the first fifty or so pages it reads like a typical example of Women's Romantic Fiction: our heroine, Imogen Lacy, young, recently widowed and still grieving, attends a school reunion where she meets up with Alice Brakespear, her former teacher and friend, now married to a North Country vicar. Alice persuades Imogen to visit her, and introduces her to two eager and eligible suitors: honest, dependable George Hobbs and enigmatic, charismatic Philip Gregory who is himself being pursued by the cold, possessive Edith Wyse. As the novel progresses, however, it turns into what could broadly be described as fantasy/horror, a tale of magic, both white and black. Imogen, having decided to move and set up a small business in the north, is drawn into the activities of a group of women who form the local coven of white witches, Haraldstone, the village in which Imogen now lives, having been a centre of witchcraft for centuries. The discovery that a Black Mass has been celebrated in Alice's husband's church

is the first of several horrific occurrences indicating that a practitioner of black magic is also active in the vicinity, and village life being what it is, replete with gossip and rumour, the white witches of Haraldstone find themselves the object of much suspicion and speculation in the press.

On occasion the two very different genres that this novel seems to fall into jar alarmingly. For example, the murder of a young, mentally handicapped man, George Hobbs's half-brother, a murder that those characters with knowledge of magic believe to be part of a Satanic ritual, is met with a curious lack of police activity in the everyday world of the village, while our heroine seems less concerned about the murder than whether George will appreciate her cooking. Overall, the novel is competently written, managing to portray a range of credible and engaging characters, but it is an oddity, much too cosy to be described as a horror novel, despite its Dennis Wheatley-esque theme, and for readers of fantasy it can have only slight appeal.

### Tricia Sullivan – *Dreaming in Smoke* Ⓜ

Orion, 1998, 290pp, £9.99 ISBN 1 85798 539 7

Reviewed by Janet Barron

Tricia Sullivan's first generation settlers arrived on T'lane, expecting to find Terran-equivalent conditions, but the biosphere had inexplicably lost oxygen, stranding them on the surface of a world where the oceans are murky soups of yeastoid conglomerates, and the oxygen-thin air will not support human life. A generation later and no progress has been made to resolve this basic oxygen problem.

Kalypso is one of the second generation, and a great disappointment to the Mothers, and to her small peer group. Feckless, wilful, and signally failing to show the intellectual potential inherent in her genes, she is reduced to the lowly role of shotgun, where she rides the interface between the Artificial Intelligence Ganesh, around whom the colony revolves, and the scientist 'witch doctors' who use virtual 'dreaming' to unleash their creative potential. Sloppy to the core, Kalypso is responsible for an accident which crashes the AI, and sends the scientist, Marcsion, into a manic state in which he becomes violent and runs into the Wild.

The Luma of the Wild is not only in multi-species flux, it is in magnetic flux. Several of the constituent micro-organisms possess cellular magnetosomes, in the same way that Terran cells possess

mitochondria. This has allowed Ganesh to integrate with the Luma to store data, and re-booting the AI is therefore no easy task. It also sets up an ending where this integration is taken to its ultimate and rather predictable conclusion, in which the A in AI is redefined, and the planet is reconfigured.

While the world and its bio-mass is intriguing, its inhabitants are a sorry lot, and this is the weakness of *Dreaming in Smoke*. A plethora of Whinging Heads, a scarcity of fully fleshed characters. The Mothers, first generation colonists, are decadent, drug and alcohol dependant, peevish and inert. Kalypso's peers are, by turn, patronising and overly protective. Marcsion spends most of the novel in interface and uttering gibberish or Ganeshi conundrums. In pursuit of him, Kalypso encounters a further group of bickering first generation colonists (not dead as thought) but living in the Wild thanks to the efforts of a deceased maverick scientist who merged their biochemistry with that of the yeasty Luma.

Kalypso herself is a singularly irritating heroine, her rebellious tendencies infantile rather than heroic, her inability to draw the right conclusions or make the right decisions thoroughly annoying, and her relationships with others sketchy and self-centred. Following her through her mishaps is a chore, alleviated

only by the exotic surroundings. Her stupidity is redefined as 'an ability to withstand paradox' to turn it to advantage, allowing her to retain her sanity at the climax when she is the medium by which communication is achieved. But a medium is just that, and

even Kalypso's heroism is inadvertent. We leave her as we found her, transfigured in biochemistry maybe, but as moody and whimsical as at the start.

## James White – *Mind Changer*

TOR Books, 1998, 303pp, \$22.95 ISBN 0 312 86663 1

Reviewed by Chris Hill

Sector Twelve General Hospital has a new Administrator: O'Mara, the chief psychologist. The powers-that-be have decided to combine the two roles (for reasons which are unclear). However this is only a temporary situation as O'Mara is being forced to retire from the Monitor Corps. So O'Mara has the unenviable task of choosing who amongst his misfit collection of assistants and external applicants should be his replacement. Meanwhile, as he recalls the important incidents leading up to his own appointment to chief psychologist, a new crisis is brewing involving an injured telepath whose state of mind effects everyone around it.

James White's Sector General books have been appearing intermittently since the early sixties. For those who have not come across them before, Sector General is a huge multi-species hospital, designed to treat any of the sixty-odd known alien species in the Federation. In this, the eleventh book, the main purpose seems to be to fill in O'Mara's background and give some idea as to how he became the character we know and love. It is about 10 years since I read the earlier books (and I have missed some of them) so I am not sure whether the central revelation

about O'Mara is something that was already known; I suspect not. There will no doubt be howls of outrage from die-hard fans of the series at the retirement of one of the most popular characters.

To be honest there is little that is new here. The book revolves around several treatments of unusual aliens. It could almost be considered as a series of linked short stories (as some of the earlier books certainly are) rather than a novel, particularly as there are repetitive elements (for example, O'Mara's cure for an early patient is referred to at least three times during the first half of the novel. Are readers memories really that bad?).

As always there are humorous comments from various of the aliens about the human obsession with sex. There is something rather adolescent about this, though quickly gets irritating. However, this is balanced by White's humane treatment of his characters, human or alien. The message, it appears, is that co-operation and compromise are the keys to survival, rather than conflict. Given that I read *Mind Changer* during the aftermath of the Omagh bombing, the timeliness of this message cannot be denied.



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.

## Aaron Allston – *X-Wing: Iron Fist*

Bantam, 1998, 310pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 553 50600 5

Book Six in the Star Wars spin off series sees the elite Wraith Squadron having to infiltrate the fleet of a powerful warlord, then defeat him.

## Alan Baker – *Ghosts and Spirits*

Orion, 1998, 296pp, £9.99 ISBN 0 75281 766 3

This series, which goes under the title: 'Sci-Fi Channel True Life Encounters', has generally been very good, with reputable and authoritative writers, a healthy air of scepticism and a lot of solid research. Nevertheless, one can't help asking what exactly the Sci-Fi Channel is doing associated with an enterprise like this – hardly science fiction by any definition I can think of.

## Stephen Baxter – *Titan*

Voyager, 1998, 581pp, £6.99 ISBN 0 00 649811 6

Shortlisted for the Arthur C. Clarke Award, this powerful novel combines Baxter's fascination with manned space flight (in this case a cobbled-together expedition to Saturn's moon to investigate the chance that life might have been detected there) with a traditional British disaster novel (the elimination of humanity is a bleak vision indeed). In *V196*, Gary Dalkin commented: 'This is a harsh, unforgiving environment, and though there are moments of wonder, the overall tone is bleak.'

## Poppy Z. Brite – *The Lazarus Heart*

Voyager, 1998, 213pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 00 648365 8

A controversial photographer is wrongly executed for the murder of his lover, then must prowling 'the dark realm of The Crow' in order to prove he was innocent after all. Another in the on-going, rather vampiric series: The Crow™.

## Mike Dash – *Borderlands*

Arrow, 1998, 518pp, £6.99 ISBN 0 7493 2396 5

The millennium is upon us, and with it an interest in strange phenomena. Mike Dash, of *Fortean Times*, investigates the usual suspects (Roswell, spontaneous human combustion, crop circles, alien abduction, and the like) using the most up to date research findings to try to arrive at some sort of explanation.

## Christopher Bulis – *Vanderdecken's Children*

BBC Books, 1998, 281pp, £4.99 ISBN 0 563 40590 2

## Justin Richards – *Dreams of Empire*

BBC Books, 1998, 282pp, £4.99 ISBN 0 563 40598 8

The BBC has shown no great interest in bringing *Doctor Who* back to our screens. Presumably they would argue there is a lack of interest, since if they thought there was an audience they would have a new series in production quickly enough. Why then, one asks, do they feel there is such a demand for these *Doctor Who* books that they produce them at the hell-for-leather pace of one a month? And, as ever, one book that fits neatly into the existing

storyline (*Dreams of Empire* features the Second Doctor with Jamie and Victoria caught up in the death throes of the Haddron Empire) is balanced by one which features the Eighth Doctor in a completely new series arc. In this instance *Vanderdecken's Children* has the TARDIS materialise in deep space near a derelict yet strangely threatening alien craft.

### Simon R. Green – *Deathstalker Honour* [D]

Vista, 1998, 621pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 575 60178 7

When it comes to blood and thunder, science fiction seems to have a strange propensity for pseudo-medieval settings, or at least so one might assume from the fourth of Simon R. Green's *Deathstalker* series. This time Owen Deathstalker (who is inevitably with a name like that both an aristocrat and a warrior) and his companions find themselves with swords and chains battling to destroy the Evil Empress in the Palace of Golgotha.

### Katharine Kerr – *The Red Wyvern*

Voyager, 1998, 403pp, £6.99 ISBN 0 00 647860 3

Although this book is 'Book One of The Dragon Mage', it is also the latest in Kerr's long-running and very popular Deverry sequence which is notable for the fact that characters keep being reborn (the book even ends with a

'Table of Reincarnating Characters'). Reviewing the book in **V200**, Andrew Adams said: 'her characters come alive, and the continuity between incarnations is apparent... The mysterious nature of Nevyn (a powerful mage with some odd ways) adds spice to the tale, while the politics and wars arising in the Civil War have labyrinthine twists but are relatively easy to follow when the reader pays attention. Kerr has managed to hook me on her world and writing'.

### Stephen King – *Wizard and Glass*

New English Library, 1998, 845pp, £6.99 ISBN 0 340 69662 1

This massive novel is the fourth in *The Dark Tower* series in which King's very own Childe Roland, the Last Gunslinger, continues to battle his cunning old enemy and finds himself tempted by the quixotic Susan Delgado.

### Kim Stanley Robinson – *Antarctica*

Voyager, 1998, 562pp, £7.99 ISBN 0 00 649703 9

Robinson returned from Mars to the one area of Earth that is almost as desolate and inhospitable. Though there are the intricate political discussions familiar from the Mars trilogy, this has a simpler story as eco-warriors battle to save our last wilderness. Feeling distinctly underwhelmed by the book, L.J. Hurst commented in **V197**: 'At the heart of *Antarctica* I found much more of a cold emptiness.'

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**REVIEWERS KEY:** AF – Alan Fraser, AM – Andy Mills, CA – Chris Amies, CB – Cherith Baldry, CH – Chris Hill, FM – Farah Mendlesohn, GD – Gary Dalkin, GW – Gary Wilkinson, JB – Janet Barron, JDO – John D. Owen, JM – Jan Malique, JN – John Newsinger, JRO – John R. Oram, KT – Kathy Taylor, KVB – K. V. Bailey, LB – Lynne Bispham, LH – Lesley Hatch, P – Particle, PK – Paul Kincaid, SD – Stephen Deas, SJ – Steve Jeffery, SP – Steve Palmer, ST – Sue Thomason, TB – Tanya Brown