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Vector

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The View from the Revolution

t's early evening and I'm in a hotel function room, listening to an author speak. The room is half full, has a cross section of ages but is predominantly young, and has far more males than females. The walls are decked with posters (will the hotel management like that?), and ever so often the sounds of the much rowdier item from next door break in. The author takes a pot shot at the writings of Tolkien, and half the audience laughs appreciatively. Emboldened by this, C.S. Lewis and Narnia are the next to be skewered.

When the talk is over, there is time for questions, and the first to the mike is someone who whines that actually Tolkien is pretty good, and anyway it's an allegory of the Second World War, and maybe you should just enjoy it and not criticise it at all. A series of respondents come forward, some making sensible points, others appearing to hail from the Planet Halfwit. Some get a smattering of applause, others are received in silence. All the time the author is scribbling, but rather than being able to respond to each person individually he has to save it to the end.

Strangely enough, this is not a science fiction convention I'm at, but an event called Marxism 2000, and the speaker is China Miéville, author of *King Rat* and *Perdido Street Station*. China was speaking on Marxism and fantasy, arguing that Marxists should pay attention to fantasy. In some areas of Marxism – followers of Georg Lukacs – fantasy is a dirty word, since it demonstrates a retreat from reality. But China argued that it should be paid attention to. Marxism claims to be able to comprehend the whole world: it is a total theory. It has to pay attention to culturally important phenomena – and given the huge sales of fantasy, it is a phenomenon.

Some of the audience (and presumably most of the people in the room were members of the Socialist Workers' Party) characterised sf fans as "hairy palmed" and a ripple of laughter went around the room. If the same opinion were to be expressed at an sf convention, I'd suspect that it was being ironic. In this context, I'm not so sure. Any Marxist revolution would require mass support, but perhaps sf readers are the wrong kind of masses, and would be the first against the wall when the revolution comes (© Douglas Adams).

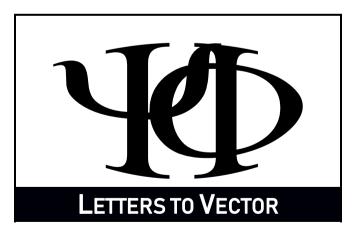
Someone else made some disparaging remark about the encyclopedic knowledge of sf fans – being able, say, to name all the dwarves in *The Hobbit*. Harumph, I thought, I bet your fan of Marxism could probably tell you what the eighteenth Brumaire of Louis de Boneparte was – and make a fair stab at the first seventeen. In fact, I thought, these Marxists need a dose of understanding of utopia – after all, my only contact with the SWP is them selling newspapers in university car parks, and that hardly seems the way to change the world...

I'm making cheap shots, of course, but it was a strange experience being in a situation that looked like an sf convention, but wasn't. I pondered whether the real Marxism 2000 was going on in the bar, with only the occasional panel item being attended. The average SWP delegate looked pretty much like an average sf fan, but with a less interesting t-shirt.

The interview with China was already scheduled for this issue when I attended the event, an issue which follows our four-part exploration of British sf since the World War Two. I know China would much rather see himself as a fantasist rather than an sf writer, but he is clearly part of a tradition that includes Wells, Morris, Harrison and MacLeod, even if he is reacting against them.

In the five years that Gary and I have edited *Vector's* features (from September 1995), we've railed more than once against identikit fiction, whether it be Wookie books or hack Sword and Sorcery. There's nothing I like better than a two hundred page, stand alone, sf novel. *Perdido Street Station* fits only one of those categories, but is one of the most extraordinary and mature novels of recent years. With writers like Miéville, MacLeod, Meaney and many more, sf in Britain at the end of the century seems to be revolutionary: clearly in a tradition, but still finding new ways to tell new (and old) stories. Could this be another Golden Age? Or am I being just too utopian?

Andrew M Butler, late Summer 2000, High Wycombe



From Cy Chauvin:

Well, here's another person that was sent off by the discussion to reread John Wyndham's *The Chrysalids* [by the discussion of 1950s British sf]. I must say that I enjoyed the reread, and was surprised at how little of it I remembered, and although I last read it as a teenager, I did read it at least three times then! It was a favorite novel, and I reread more often then. But it seems all I truly remembered of it was that it was about telepathy, and the wonderful dreams that David had of New Zealand. Kev McVeigh picks up on the idea it being a "cosy" future, because it is small and rural, but the evocative dreams of New Zealand and the

coming rescue had an equally strong appeal when I was a boy, and continues to have a strong appeal. The idea that someplace safe and sane has survived the disaster could be considered a comfort too, but I think it's something more, bordering perhaps on the transcendental even, being that the message too is conveyed only in dreams and telepathy until nearly the very end. The rescue too is not complete: one boy and another girl have to be left behind because there is not enough fuel to go and rescue them and then fly back to New Zealand, a very 'Cold Equations' sort of statement from Wyndham, and really not the sort of thing one would include if cosy was the major objective.

The whole discussion about "True Image" and the destruction of people and animals and crops that mutate from the 'normal' in the aftermath of the radiation is certainly not right-wing. The True Image is described in religious terms, and Wyndham's criticism of it is implicit, and so I agree with Kev that Wyndham seems left-wing. But one of the unrealized aspects of the novel is the way that everything is presented in such black and white terms. Most mutations are bad; what about all the ones that cause lingering health disorders, and can be passed on from generation to generation? Isn't that part of the reason we have abortion? It doesn't take much to realize that this could have been a much more sophisticated novel if the other side had been presented. And actually I thought on the whole that the novel wasn't as realized as others with this type of future, it's been forty years on, and what might have been adequate in the 1950s now

seems a little clichéd. There have been so many post-catastrophe rural futures with anti-religious/religious overtones! \blacksquare

From Paul Frasier:

First off, thanks to Paul Kincaid for his generally positive review of *Drek Yarman* [V211], but I have one moan, one difference of opinion and one possible correction.

The moan is about the phrase "such a risky venture as a small sf magazine". Paul... it's hard enough trying to flog copies of *Spectrum* sf as it is without these kind of comments. Especially as you don't know anything about my reliability, or lack of it. For what it's worth, all the writers have been paid, their work has been published unmutilated (although I am probably more 'hands-on' than I should be) and, as far as *Drek Yarman* is concerned, the final instalment will see print in the third (July) issue. As to the financial stability of the magazine, I can keep it going for as long as my spleen moves me – even if no-one buys it. Which, unfortunately, is not that far from reality of the situation at the moment

The difference of opinion is about Drek being "clearly not an example of Roberts at his very best." I disagree. First off, I think that it is probably the best of his linear novels, standing head and shoulders above the likes of The Furies, Molly Zero, The Road to Paradise, etc., etc. In particular, I thought that the passages where he hallucinates the ghosts are amongst the most powerful he has written for donkey's years. Secondly, if my pipe dream of publishing a hardback omnibus of Kiteworld, 'Tremarest' (another Kiteworld novella) and Drek Yarman ever happens, I think that Drek will be seen as a major part of a major work. I reread several sections of Kiteworld around the time that I was preparing *Drek* for publication and thought it stood up to many and surpassed several of the original stories. I realise, of course, that there is an element of "Well, you would say that, wouldn't you?" in all of this. The thing is, I think it's true. As to the observation that Roberts was already ill as he completed the work all I have to say is this: if you didn't know this from other sources, where is the internal evidence?

The possible correction concerns the observation about the fate of Stel and Sinki. I would suggest their fate *is* revealed, although implicitly rather than explicitly perhaps. There are two references to the demise of Stel in the text; the first concerns a gift from Drek to her that she leaves behind and never reclaims; the second is Drek's statement to her "ghost" in the final page that she must have died: "So you're a ghost now, are you? Somehow I always knew... Or you'd have come back, you wouldn't have stayed away. Not all them years..." As for Sinki, there is a clear reference in the text to Yarman murdering her: "But I had to see you Sinki, I had to see you one last time. I swear I never meant... You slipped away so quiet, at the end. I thought you'd fight, but you didn't. It was like you wanted to go. You'd had enough, you were ready. Just slip down nice and quiet like Bilba, and be at peace for ever..."

In conclusion let me say that I wouldn't want these minor grumbles to be taken out of context. I generally enjoyed the review and found it illuminated aspects of the work that had not occurred to me through my more than half dozen readings. So - thanks for taking the trouble to cover it.

Paul Kincaid responds:

I am very happy that Paul found my review, in the main, illuminating and positive. It was certainly meant to be so. But as for his quibbles:

My remark about small sf magazines being a risky venture was not meant to denigrate his efforts but was simply a statement of fact. Magazines have appeared and disappeared with remarkable regularity over the years. Even magazines with far more funding than, I suspect, Paul can put behind *Spectrum*, have folded within a handful of issues, others have become so irregular as to virtually disappear. In any straightforward

commercial sense, this is a risky venture.

As to the difference of opinion over *Drek Yarman* as a novel – this is clearly a matter of opinion. I think, as novels, both *Molly Zero* and *Grainne* are superior in terms of structure, characterisation, quality of writing and just about any other measure I care to use. And some parts of *Drek Yarman* – most notably the rather crude demotic speech he puts in the mouths of some of his main characters – hark back to the weaker parts of *The Furies*. Having said that, as I was at pains to point out in my review, even at less than his best Roberts is a better writer than most others in the field.

Regarding Roberts's health, I did know from other sources, obviously (I've known Keith for a number of years) so it is possible that such knowledge affected my reading of the work. However, there are various clues which support such a conclusion, both within and outwith the text. It is the first original piece of work to appear for many years, and ties in very closely with what Roberts was writing fifteen years or so ago, which suggests that it emerged from the same creative impetus. And, while he has always been a writer who describes things falling apart, this is a story suffused with far more images of death, injury and destruction than ever before (even his novel of nuclear annihilation, *The Chalk Giants*, contrasted images of the end with images of rebirth). This whole book was a dying fall.

The fate of the two women can be read as Paul does, but is never explicit and the hints and suggestions are capable of other interpretations, particularly when we see the clues Paul notes through the fevered eyes of Drek Yarman. Yes, it is likely that such is their fate, but it is not certain, and that lack of certainty is, I think, both deliberate and important. After all, their role, bracketing Yarman's life, makes them mirrors of each other, and our ability to read the one through the other would be hampered if either were explicitly killed off. Roberts is too skilled a writer not to recognise and exploit the resonances that bind the two women, which is why I think he was very deliberate in letting us guess but not know their fates.

Finally, if Paul manages to make his pipedream of a hardback omnibus of *Kiteworld*, Tremarest' and *Drek Yarman* come true, I will be first in line to buy a copy. Though I suspect that a slightly more modest omnibus of 'Tremarest' and *Drek Yarman* would be every bit as valuable. And I still lament the fact that no major publisher appears to be prepared to take on such a project. \square

From Seán Russell Friend:

Syd Foster's letter in *Vector* 212 spotlights a stageful of issues concerning the current interstices in human reasoning, particularly in allowance of ongoing computerisation in what was formerly a creative industry. However, it is clearly not the hardware that has achieved "technological obsolescence" but the human beast itself – or at least the symbolic shape and colour that represented the quality of imagination.

Organic creativity and mechanical derivatism have an inversely proportional relationship, even despite a minority of de-isolationists who insist upon maintaining the Origin of the graticule as a point for elite retrogestion, thereby preserving in amber an occupation otherwise extinct. The "Speculative Author As Dodo" debate may not be immortal after all, but it is integral to human arrogance to believe it so, perhaps as a subliminal attempt to clutch at the proverbial last straw of thought-freedom.

Syd's "engaging play of mind" and "cultural muscle" have not thus far proved to be sufficient in halting the human tendency towards self-destruction, and fringe deconstructivism has merely sectated what remains of the sf dodos, its schisms retreating into supposed golden ages, mush like the modern "pseudo-pagan" of hypothetical pedigree. The "beat of inclusivity" is secular and non-secular: whether we choose a religious path or not, we end up at spiritual death. This is by no means a new observation: the precedence of religion over genuine individual spirituality has long been Humanity's most potent weapon of

suicide, except now the computer has assumed the iconic position previously occupied by humanoid/animal deities, even in the soulless minds of writers who should know better.

Optimism about the future of film and literature is largely out of place when the internet has decimated the small press scene and allowed a non-discriminating blanket of untalent, whose only qualification for publication is having enough money to buy the Web. It seems that councils prefer to buy computers for illiterate toddlers and teenage thugs than finance worthy independent publications such as *Enigmatic Tales*. Is this the rose-tinted asymptotic progress we asked for?

Well, we all turn our typewriters into insects somehow: Welcome To Annexia...

GSD replies: The result of overdosing on bug powder is exclusive, impenetrable prose which fails either to communicate or convince. Happily, the 20th century will soon be leaving the building.

A random text generator replies: "Truth is impossible," says Baudrillard; however, according to Geoffrey, it is not so much truth that is impossible, but rather the paradigm, and thus the genre, of truth. However, several situationisms concerning neodeconstructive nationalism may be found.

The same reply with bug powder and Burroughs beyond the grave: Baudrillard; however, according to paradigm, and thus the genre, truth, that is, impossible, but rather the situationisms concerning neodeconstructive of truth, however several. "Truth is impossible," says Geoffrey. It is not so much. Nationalism may be found.

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

Blowing Raspberries

an Interview with China Miéville by Mark Bould

Born in 1972, China Miéville graduated from Cambridge in 1994 with B.A. in Social Anthropology. He subsequently obtained an M.A. in International Relations from the London School of Economics, where his ongoing PhD research is concerned with Marxist theory of international law. His short stories 'Looking for Jake' and 'Different Skies', anthologised in *Neonlit* and *Britpulp!* respectively, were followed by the novel *King Rat* (1998), which was nominated for both a Bram Stoker Award and an International Horror Guild Award. His second novel, *Perdido Street Station*, was published early in 2000.

Mark Bould: China's an unusual name?

China Miéville: Hippy parents. The story is that they looked through the dictionary to find a nice word, a weird name, and they very nearly called me "banyan". Fortunately they kept looking...

MB: What is it you like so much about London?

CM: The scale of London. and the particular topography. I grew up in Willesden, on the outer edge of Zone Two, inner edge of Zone Four. That particular ring that goes around London is spatially unique. It's not suburbia, but it's not part of the centre, either. There's a very particular feeling to it that I love: the skylines are much lower, the tube comes out from underground, shops tend to

be a bit more rundown, and you get surviving units of dying franchises. Kind of nostalgic, wistful.

MB: Your style is very visual. You draw comic-strips?

CM: I do black-and-white, very detailed, very sort of neurotic, cross-hatched comic-strips, but I'm very slow. People have

asked whether I'd like to adapt *King Rat* for a comic. I'd either want to draw it myself or veto choice of artist. So my chances aren't great. The novels are consciously cinematic. I almost always visualise in terms of cameras sweeping in and a massive CGI budget, but in retrospect I can see the influence of comics very strongly: all the roofscapes and stuff.

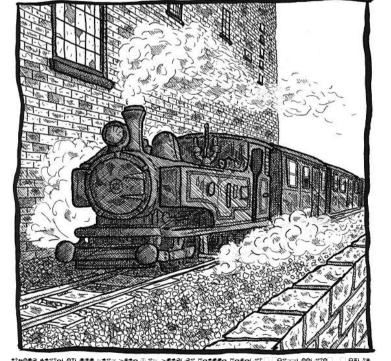
MB: Obviously films are important.

CM: It would be lovely to think that you're really unusual because you plumb high culture and low, but it's so common. Mostly I'm a low-culture, pop-culture person, a lot of popular sf and horror. I

like old things like Val Lewton and Jacques Tourneur, but also Jan Svankmajer, the Quay Brothers, Eastern European animation.

MB: And the Alien movies.

CM: The older I get, the less I like them. Alien I love, but beyond the age of 22 I just couldn't forgive them the cat. I used to love Aliens but then I saw it again and had a road-to-Damascus thing, decided it was rubbish. The Special Edition, along with Blade Runner: The Director's Cut, is the strongest argument I've seen for not giving directors total control. Alien: Resurrection was total shit. So my favourite at the moment is *Alien*³, but it has that egregious anti-Japanese stuff that's really embarrassing and fits so ill with the rest of the film. A



total tone change. With the *Aliens* films you realise how you can retrospectively not like something but it can still be a huge presence on your mind. They've been massively influential, and

even if I've now got all sorts of issues with them, they're still very big. They loom very large in *Perdido Street Station*. I didn't really

notice until after the first draft, and by then – in terms of structure and plot – it was too hard to get rid of it all.

MB: Several times in *King Rat* you seem anxious about deploying formulaic material.

CM: One of the things that was most marked about writing for me was that I was appalled and amazed at how incredibly tenacious the hold of cliché is. I could not believe it. I'd write three chapters, and then I'd go back and re-read them, and I'd be red-penning every fucking sentence. Linguistically cliché's incredibly strong, especially juxtapositions of nouns and adjectives that you suddenly realise always get used. Those are pervasive but easier to spot. Clichés of theme are very frightening because you're not conscious of them at all. So you're right, I am anxious about it, because I like putting in loads of riffs and allusions but I don't want it to become parodic or self-defeating. It's like thus far and no further, and I'm always concerned to get that line right.

MB: You always cite M. John Harrison and Mervyn Peake as influences.

CM: With Harrison there are formal and thematic relationships. Formally, he constantly does this thing of hinting that something extraordinary or beautiful or amazing - some vast thing - has happened but he doesn't explain it. The Pastel City starts with "Some seventeen notable empires rose in the Middle Period of Earth [...] All but one are unimportant to this narrative". That's such a cool thing to do, and it also dovetails with the geeky thing of trying to make it a consistent world. So one of the things I do is work out really surreal or strange things which I then refer to but don't explain. It's a very Harrisonian trope. Thematically, he gives all his characters dignity. He's one of the few writers who can report on conversations overheard in a pub and not sound like Martin Amis having a sneer at the working class. He has total respect for his characters, but at the same time there's this sense of complete powerlessness, and squaring that is something that I think has influenced me an awful lot, although I don't think people are powerless. John Clute talks about how Harrison punishes his characters for being characters in fantasy, and his readers for reading fantasy. There's a sense that fantasy is a sad and pathetic lost dream, but at the same time this is what pays his bread and butter. I like that sense of hostility towards the genre while being part of it. With Peake, it's the way the Gormenghast trilogy sustains purple lush baroque - incredibly rich language; lose yourself in the words like mulch - and is unapologetic about it. The only other people I know who do that come out of resolutely genre tradition: Clark Ashton Smith or H.P. Lovecraft or Jack Vance. Peake comes from a high literature direction so the tropes are different. And I like its unresolved politics: Steerpike is a villain but at the same time you realise that the system was impossibly absurd. I don't agree with the conventional view that Titus Alone is a weak volume. The easy thing to do would be to make 'and then I turned my back on... etc.' The End, but to start by leaving the castle, have a whole book, and then almost come home, that strikes me as a really brave thing to do. And I love Peake's drawings. I'm conscious of the relationship between his drawings and his writing. There's a very strong sense that those pictures had to be produced by the person who wrote those words. I feel like that about my own stuff but no-one's ever seen my pictures so...

MB: What did you think of the BBC adaptation?

CM: Shit, from beginning to end. Even in its own terms, it was really bad. People said, 'Obviously the genre purists aren't going to like it but the special effects are fantastic'. They were shit. I couldn't believe how bad they were, like early-90s standard CGI. And it completely misread the books and the characters. They turned Steerpike into a theatrical poseur, and Fuschia – who is a fantastic, sad, moving character – into a petulant little brat. There's a scene in the book where she gets pissed off with Nanny Slag, and she runs upstairs and goes 'Oh, I hate, I hate', and that's the thing: their Fuschia didn't hate. And she was too old, and too pretty, and too thin. It was just silly. Silly, silly, silly.

MB: You seem to name-check or allude to a number of authors.

You sneak in Harrison's title A Storm of Wings...

CM: I think I've had 'a storm of wings' in virtually everything I've ever written

MB: And 'cock stiffened'...

CM: Cock' is a Peake word. It's the classic dilemma: how to write sex and, especially, how to write 'penis'. 'Penis' is sterile and 'prick' is silly. I like 'cock', it sounds very dated, very '50s to me, but that's Peake. There's a scene in *Titus Alone* where his cock stiffens, and I was entranced by that because although it does read dated it's also the most dignified way I've seen of doing it.

MB: About those allusions. *King Rat* mentions 'the secret life of houses', 'roofworld', and has characters called Crowley and Barker.

CM: Scott Bradfield's short story is one of my ten favourite short stories ever, and the collection is wonderful. There are one or two conscious moments, like Anansi walking on things stretched between houses, that are from Christopher Fowler's novel. Crowley is Aleister, not John – he's a sympathetic policeman and I don't like policemen so I had to make him evil somehow. Barker is not Clive, although I admire the salutary effect he has had on horror. I can't think of anyone since Lovecraft who's almost single-handedly changed the physical shape of the monstrous. He reinvested materiality.

MB: Steampunk?

CM: The Anubis Gates was unfathomably influential on me. I read it when I was about 14, and it just looms so large. I read it so many times, and that's funny because I don't like time-travel novels where there's a fixed future. It debunks agency.

MB: William Hope Hodgson? David Lindsay?

CM: Yeah. I found *Voyage to Arcturus* really hard to get through, and I didn't really understand it at all. It's the kind of thing I'd need to be writing an essay on and I'd read it very carefully. I thought it was an extraordinary failure, but an extraordinary book. And I like that weird tale, visionary tradition – desperately intense, often quite religious, hypnagogic stuff, almost like an ecstatic religion thing using sf tropes. E.H. Visiak's *Medusa*. George McDonald's *Lilith* – that's a fucking mad book.

MB: Le Guin?

CM: That's mainly a political thing. As a leftist writer you're interested in other left-ist writers. It's like Canadian syndrome: you talk to some Canadians about something totally unrelated and you'll mention a name like Neve Campbell, and then all of sudden they'll go 'Canadian!' So I'll be talking about anything and someone will mention Ken McLeod, and I'll go 'Socialist!' And with Le Guin it's like 'Anarchist!'

MB: That's influences, but who do you like?

CM: It's one of those silly games, Who's Your Favourite Writer, but if a gun was put to my head: Philip K. Dick. There are writers you think are brilliant and writers who are very strong influences, and they don't necessarily overlap. I'm not conscious of being influenced by Dick, but in terms of quality and a certain constant centre of gravity for my reading and writing he is colossal. His registers are so different. There's this sentimentalism throughout him which can be mawkish but mostly he's got a spiky edge that turns it, protects it. So you get something like AScanner Darkly which is almost unbearably poignant all the way through. There's a scene in that where one of the characters who's a little bit slow tries to play a verbal trick on another one. He's thinking 'I know what I'm going to say, I'm going to say I bought a plant the other day, a dope plant, and he's going to say "How big is it?" and I'm going to mean it's a factory and he's going to think it's a pot plant', and he says "I bought a plant the other day" and the other guy says 'Well, what's its production capacity?' It gets out of hand and he can't do his punchline, he can't get out of the dialogue, and it goes on and on and on. It gives me goosebumps, it's so sad. It's such a moving book, and the ending is very clever: it's not a political book, but because Dick knows it's what should be done - and that you need some kind of moral closure - he gives you that bit of politics. But it's not what the book's about. Then you read other, more austere stuff, like Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said or The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch. Much colder. I read The Three Stigmata and just felt like it's been done, everything's been done. It really felt like literature had been finished at that point. It was extraordinary.

MB: Music's important to you, too.

CM: I write to music, and I can't just put on any music because it has an influence on the writing. I was listening to drum'n'bass all through *King Rat*, and I remain amazed that there wasn't a big drum'n'bass literary movement. There are two novels worth mentioning. *Junglist*, by Two Fingers and James T. Kirk, which got buried under a slew of shit – it was when there was a big interest in Black publishing, and the good stuff was obscured because there was just so much put out, a lot of which didn't really deserve to be published. And Q's novel *Deadmeat*. So when I wrote *King Rat*, I wanted to write a horror novel, a London novel, and a drum'n'bass novel. I certainly don't think I wrote the great drum'n'bass novel but I'm really surprised there weren't more.

MB: Several times King Rat himself seems to switch from pearly king to Chuck D in mid-sentence.

CM: Some people thought that King Rat's argot didn't work, but

that shift of slang register is deliberate because he's not a cockney, he wasn't born in London. What he speaks is a ragbag of different types of dated slang. I'm not saying it necessarily works, but it's not a cock-up. What he doesn't use is Black slang, although Anansi uses Caribbean slang, and that gave me a headache. first draft the phoneticised the patois like a lot of young London books do, but I thought that it was inconsistent, and it started to seem forced because Anansi actually speaks English with a Caribbean accent and a bit of patois. To phoneticise his accent begged the question of why I wasn't phoneticising all the others. So I ended up with almost-conventional spelling but patois formations, like "mi can't work with him". But that isn't ideal either because it makes him sound like a

Tarzan savage. You have to read it in a Caribbean accent otherwise it's going to look crap. I'm not saying there're a right and wrong way to do this and I'm not saying it worked....

MB: Has there been any film interest?

CM: People have been interested but nothing's come up, and it's such a world of bullshit I'm not going to get excited until I sign a contract. I was thinking of Robert Carlyle to play King Rat but then someone suggested David Thewliss...

MB: I had him older than that, like Kenneth Cranham...

CM: That's genius, that's the best I've heard. He's pushing it a bit, but the Kenneth Cranham from just after Shine On, Harvey Moon would be perfect. And I want a walk-on part. I was in Notting Hill, visible through the shop window, but it's one of the worst films ever. The only way you can make it watchable is to say that it's been completely misunderstood, and it's actually a savage dystopian vision of London forty years after the BNP came to power. Mass ethnic cleansing. There are no black people in Notting Hill. There is no carnival. And in terms of that chilling future vision, it's actually quite good...

MB: Getting back to music briefly, *Perdido Street Station* mentions straightedge.

CM: It's a very minor thing. I was quite interested in it for a while

because I never drank, I wasn't into dope, was never part of that scene. After I discovered straightedge there was a very, very brief time when I flirted with the idea of defining myself as straightedge as a sort of post-facto attempt to dignify the stuff I was already doing, er, not doing. Then I started looking into it more and actually it's a very flaky movement, and I've got no time for it. Politically and philosophically it's very woolly, so they get really steamed up about animal rights, and that pisses me off not because I hate animals, but because there are more important things. The only thing I think was a real kind of aesthetic coup for straightedge was the sign of the diagonal cross on the back of the hand. It's from these non-alcoholic gigs. To mark you out as underaged, not-drinking in the States. It's an appropriation I thought was quite cool.

MB: Let's talk a bit more about your fiction. It's said first novels are always autobiographical.

CM: It's funny. I grew up in a single parent family with my mother and my sister, very female household. I never really knew my father, who died about ten years ago. I met him a couple of times, but he was not a presence in my life. And with my hand on my

heart, it did not occur to me that this kind of thing might influencing me. And then my mum read King Rat, and she was she was, like, 'Hello! Search for the lost father anyone?' And I was, like, 'What do you mean?' Totally unconscious, but of course, in retrospect, the problematisation of fatherhood was a big thing thematically

MB: Both novels contain a lot of grief.

CM: It's the thing I find hardest to write. I haven't experienced a huge amount of it personally, and in both of them I worried that I had put in too much. Some people said King Rat was too skinny on grief, but it permeates



Unused Frontispiece from Part 5 of *Perdido Street Station* – 'Councils' © China Miéville 2000

the book and comes back at various points. It's not particularly organically throughout the whole narrative, but you're constantly reminded of it. In *Perdido Street Station*, I thought I might have overegged the pudding – there are two or three chapters when one of the characters is basically a useless lump – because it's not something I feel very sure-footed about. And there's a structural problem which is that you also know you've got to get him to do X, Y, and Z for the narrative, so you can't just have him sobbing into his beard. And it was problematic for me because, narratively, grief is so often the springboard or the dénouement. In my stuff, grief tends to be midway along something. It's not a focal point, it's between two places, and so I find that quite hard to write.

MB: In *Perdido Street Station*, it serves an important function in the overall narrative arc. It brings Isaac to that point in his political and ethical education, which began with quite nebulous anxieties, where he makes the conscious decision, 'I can't back down from this, I can't leave this to the authorities'.

CM: That was added in the second draft because somebody whose opinion I respect said, 'You need something more here, the motivation is too unclear', and so I added that sequence. I think it worked quite well.

MB: Do Lin's feelings about the khepri Plaza of Statues in *Perdido Street Station* – "the statues represented dedication and community, and bankrupt imaginations falling back on codheroic grandiosity. This was why she lived and ate and spat her art alone" – correspond to your own feelings about contemporary fantasy?

CM: Yeah, and so I wanted to undo some of its assumptions. Almost all the time fantasy essentialises characters in terms of their race and ethnicity. For example, one of the purposes of a character from an esoteric race will be to talk about this great noble culture from which he comes, and this is what defines him. So what I wanted to do was have a character who is demonstrably not human and comes from an alien culture but who doesn't like that culture, because people don't, people turn their backs on their culture. There's a similar thing with Ged: the vodyanoi are surly, only Ged isn't. So you see the stereotyping of a particular race and the way people manipulate that to explain away someone who doesn't fit the stereotype: they're all X, except my mate Ged...

MB: In *Perdido Street Station*, Derkhan defines art as "something you choose to make... it's a bringing together of... of everything around you into something that makes you more human, more khepri, whatever. More of a person." Is that your own view?

CM: Yes, but it's also taken from Scott McLeod's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*.

It's a sophisticated, theoretical textbook done as a comicbook. He argues that art is what makes humans human, and he defines art very simply as anything that's not connected with the immediate needs of clothing, shelter, or food. There's a scene where a caveman is being chased by a lion. He dodges out of the way and the lion sails over a cliff. Then the caveman blows a raspberry after it, and that, that's art, that's the human faculty. It's not a very rigorously formulated notion, but it appeals to me. It's not meant as an exhaustive statement of theoretical intent but, as an ongoing hypothesis, I like the idea that art is the definitively human moment.

MB: *Perdido Street Station* is full of hybrids, transition zones, border crossings.

CM: The important thing is having the hybrids themselves claiming they're not hybrids. One of the things that's always pissed me off about postmodern critics is this attempt to colonise the marginal and then self-define yourself as marginal, which is by any rigorous standard such a self-undercutting move. The people you're defining as marginal do not see themselves that way.

MB: Both novels establish political perspectives on the events they recount. How important is it to you that your readers pick up on this?

CM: It would be very nice, but it can't be important or you'd go mad. If I wanted to make a case for socialism it would be a spectacularly incompetent way of doing it. I put that stuff in there, and hope that people pick up on it, but it's really about giving the book texture. If you don't pick up on it or you're not interested in it, hopefully you're still going to like the story and the grotesquerie and so on. But if you are vaguely interested it might make you think about it, and if you start to think 'Ah, this is written from a leftist perspective' it might make you reformulate some of the way you've looked at it. So it's all about adding layers of texture. The minimal aim is for someone to enjoy the books.

MB: One of the scary bits in *Perdido Street Station* – one most people would recognise – is the way we see the strike brutally suppressed, only to have everyone then think of it as a riot.

CM: It might have been a little heavy-handed to give Derkhan that little speech about how it wasn't a riot, but you get so pissed off about that sort of thing. I was on the Welling demonstration against the BNP. When it got written up as a savage anarchist riot, I was almost speechless with anger, having been there and seen it. And it happens all the time.

MB: There are also the offstage business interests who're unconcerned about the huge ecological disaster they've

unleashed.

CM: What really bothers them are some threats to their technological and economic dominance.

MB: In *King Rat*, is Fabian's name intended, like the gift of Lenin's *What is to be Done?*, to evoke the loss of socialist politics?

CM: I like him as a character, but if I wanted him to get a positive signifier I wouldn't saddle him with the name of the Fabians. It was supposed to be some kind of socialist reference at the time, but it's a bit cackhanded, and now I'm saddled with it. Like Mornington Crescent being reopened, the bastards. It was just before *King Rat* came out so I suggested having the launch there. If I was Stephen King, I might have been able to pull it off...

MB: Several reviewers have criticised you for caring too much about your characters.

CM: To be honest, I literally don't understand the criticism. It makes no sense to me. If they mean, 'I get bored because you give us too much backstory', then I would say, 'Well, I'm sorry if it bored you but for me part of the pleasure of a fantasy novel is having loads of cul-de-sacs and little byways'. And if you're going to use multiple narrative then you might as well indulge in it. It would be craven if it was useful for the exigencies of the plot to suddenly go into, say, Penge's head for a minute. If you're going to take a series of characters and do that, then you might as well give Penge a couple of pages. It's part of the whole project of world-creation, which is one of the fantasy things that I like, and giving her those two pages allowed me to do that Harrisonian thing of saying, 'I'm going to go to the Cold Claw Sea'. Full stop. End of paragraph. And it's about dignifying even bit players, again very Harrisonian. The only people I don't really think I did that successfully with are the baddies. People like Rudgutter do fall into caricature somewhat but I didn't really notice that until afterwards

MB: This 'excessive commitment' to characters really pays off in the final section of *Perdido Street Station*.

CM: It was a tricky section for me, very hard to write. Isaac is put in an impossible situation, and there is literally no way for him to get his head around it. The situation is not what he thinks it is, and I'm categorically not saying that he does the right thing...

MB: It's a profoundly unsentimental conclusion to an unsentimental book.

CM: I can't stand the sentimentality of genre fantasy. It's a product of poor characterisation. If you have characters who are defined racially, as you do, you tend towards sentimentality. When pigeonholed things interact, you either get tragedies or sentimentality. Tolkien's essay on fairy tales defines the purpose of what he's doing in terms of sentimentality. He is sentimental to an extraordinary degree, and by writing him into history as the source of fantasy, you make it a defining principle. Perdido Street Station is very much about a tradition of fantasy that's been marginalised since the 1970s: the Harrisons, Peakes, Leibers, Weird Tales

Also, I'm quite a sentimental person so I have to be ruthless about it. I consciously try to strip it out.

MB: Why do your novels give academics such a hard time?

CM: It's an easy target. I'm not cynical about academia. It was enormously influential: changed my life, totally changed my politics and the way I look at the world. But I'm also constantly amazed at the level of bullshit that can be spun and be wellreceived by an academic audience. And I hate the lack of seriousness, the way you get these people who sit around in a room discussing some trite paper - they define it as a big contribution, and also 'disagree' because one of them is nominally a liberal and one is nominally a postmodernist, and they know they're supposed to disagree. And then they all go off and have a nice drink together afterwards. I'd have more respect for people who'd actually get really angry with me because they disagree and refuse to let it go. Basically it's because there's a lot of really poor academia, which is a shame, because when it's good it can be life-changing. Research and theory strike me as vital, so it's not about disapproving of high-level, self-conscious

theory. It's about the structures of academic debate.

MB: What are you working on now?

CM: There are a couple of short stories coming out this year or next: 'An End to Hunger', which is probably the most polemical/political thing I've written; and 'Details', a Lovecraft homage, in a forthcoming US anthology edited by John Pelan. There are a couple of others I'd like to write, but the only concrete thing I'm doing this year is *The Scar*, a standalone set some months after *Perdido Street Station* with different characters and stuff. It's quieter, more introspective, and I'm trying to make it more disturbing on the inside rather than the outside. And for that I've bought quite a lot of classical music, atonal avant-garde stuff, and I'm getting into Bach, the cello pieces. I've started listening to a bit of Satie and a bit of Britten, but Bach's the man. He rules.

MB: What do you do in your downtime?

CM: I get really stressed about time. The big drains on my time are academia, fiction, political activity, and I'm on the editorial board of the journal *Historical Materialism*. I play computer games and I read, although not as much as I'd like, and I watch films and I draw pictures. But I don't feel like I have a lot of downtime.

MB: I'll shut up then. Thank you.

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PERDIDO STREET STATION IS REVIEWED BY DR. ANDREW M. BUTLER ON PAGE 26 OF THIS ISSUE.



Cognitive Mapping 19: Gormenghast

by Paul Kincaid

he fabulous land has been the setting for most fantasy and a lot of science fiction for as long as these genres have been written. Occasionally this realm will be (or at least contain) an unsettling and disorienting maze, whether this is the original labyrinth where Theseus defeated the Minotaur, or the more cerebral landscape of Jorge Luis Borges's The Garden of Forked Paths' (1941). In the main, however, these fabulous realms have a geography little different from our own familiar world, with streets, houses, palaces clearly modelled on those we might see around us. Even if the story was displaced to the Moon, as in so many satires from Daniel Defoe's *The Consolidator* (1705) to H.G. Wells's *The First Men in the Moon* (1901), the architecture and furniture of this new land followed a familiar terrestrial pattern.

This started to change after the invention of the lift by Elisha Otis in 1853 allowed the modern urban landscape to be transformed. The height of buildings had always previously had a natural limit imposed by the need to walk up stairs. It took architects and the public some time to realise that Otis's invention rendered that limit obsolete, but by the end of the century, particularly in New York, new skyscrapers were soaring

to ever greater heights. Steven Millhauser's superb modern Martin Dressler. fable. perfectly captures this period optimism when the America's new entrepreneurial élite was reflected in the ever greater size of their buildings. Dressler is an hotelier in turnof-the-century New whose ambitions lead him to larger and larger

Through honeycombs of stone would now be wandering the passions in their clay. There would be tears and there would be strange laughter. Fierce births and deaths beneath umbrageous ceilings... And there shall be a flame-green daybreak soon. And love itself will cry for insurrection!

Mervyn Peake, Titus Groan (1946)

structures, each of which must therefore contain more and more within its walls. The immense folly that finally ruins him contains, in effect, an entire imaginative world – in fact its multiplicity of basement levels become an almost literal descent into hell and into madness. In a parallel story, 'Paradise Park' (1999), Millhauser makes this explicit: it tells of a Coney Island amusement park beset by similar follies of grandeur and gigantism, in which the final underground park is known as 'Devil's Park' and features real suicides. Dressler's progress tends to mirror the way that writers of the fantastic have reacted to the world within a world possibilities of immense buildings.

Once the real world began to grow upwards rather than outwards, the world of the future began to grow in the same way. In the popular imagination, represented by films such as *Things to Come* (1936) or stories such as 'Alpha Ralpha Boulevard' by Cordwainer Smith (1961), the city of the future became a place in which skyscrapers were transformed into slender towers linked by high-level walkways between which buzzed flyers in air cars or jet packs or private aircraft. For many this was a glittering, glamorous vision of a future devoutly to be desired, and the idea that such towers and walkways might grow together into a city that eventually would encompass the whole world, as Trantor does in Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* (1951), was both inevitable and desirable

Already, however, there were warning voices. In 'A Story of the Days to Come' (1899), for instance, H.G. Wells presented such a city of the future in which the raised walkways and beautiful towers were the preserve of an elite, while the masses toiled in the darkness beneath the walkways, a social division in which the evolution of his Eloi and Morlocks (from The Time Machine [1895]) is clearly visible. By the time the 1960s began their experiment with high-rise living, the enforced enclosure of society was more and more being seen as a bad thing. In Non-Stop (1958) Brian

Aldiss had already presented the enclosed world of a generation starship as an agent for social decay, and it requires no great imaginative to the leap see similarly enclosed world of a high-rise apartment block in the same light. Which is exactly what Robert Silverberg (in World Inside [1971]) and J.G. Ballard (in High [1975]) Rise among others, did.

Tall as Silverberg's tower block was, and it really did scrape the edges of atmosphere, and

varied as were its inhabitants, the world inside was one of conformity, each floor following the pattern of the one below. Such massive structures have often served this purpose in science fiction, the storeys providing a neat illustration of social stratification. In such varied novels as Aestival Tide by Elizabeth Hand (1992) or Spares by Michael Marshall Smith (1996), for example, we see the higher floors of the edifice are the spacious, airy abode of the rich and powerful, while the lower down one goes the more dark, dangerous and chaotic it gets.

Some writers, however, have extended this chaos throughout the structure, bringing the labyrinth within the building so that it becomes immeasurable and, apparently, infinite in content. The archetype for this is the castle of Gormenghast in Mervyn Peake's trilogy. Only in the final part of the trilogy (Titus Alone [1959]) do we get to leave the castle, before that it is literally the world, a place that has grown beyond any one person's comprehension. The structure of the place, an insane arrangement of rooms and staircases and roofs that follow no logical order, provides a physical representation of the world it encloses, a world that obeys its own rules (or lack of them), where, as he says, 'love itself will cry for insurrection', and in which the grotesque cast of characters can exist and operate in ways that would be impossible in our more ordered reality outside.

It was said that to descend into the world beneath the world was

to learn the secrets of heaven and hell, to go mad, to speak in

tongues, to understand the language of beasts, to rend the veil,

to become immortal, to witness the destruction of the universe

and the birth of a new order of being; and it was said that if you

descended far enough, down past obsidian-black rivers, past

caves where dwarves in leather jerkins swung pickaxes against

walls veined with gold, down past the lairs of slumbering

dragons whose tails were curled around iron treasureboxes, past

regions of ice and fire, past legendary underworlds where the

shadowy spirits of the dead set sail for islands of bliss and pain,

down and down, past legend and dream, through realms of

blackness so dark that it stained the soul black, you would come

Steven Millhauser, Martin Dressler (1998)

to a sudden, ravishing brightness.

One precursor of Gormenghast and its fellows is the Biblical story of the Tower of Babel (made explicit in Borges's story of an infinite library, The Library of Babel' [1941]), in which a tower to the heavens gives birth to madness and incomprehension. Such mis-rule, in which the labyrinthine madness of the castle mirrors the disorder of its inhabitants, plays a central part, for instance, in The Golden by Lucius Shepard (1993) and Feersum Endjinn by Iain M. Banks (1994). Both make clear the insanity of their enclosed

fantasy, creating not enclosed world but an enclosed cosmos of the

(computer-encoded) dead in Permutation City[1994].)

normality.

Gormenghastly

worlds by making them realms of the dead, vampires in Shepard's computerencoded personalities in Bank's novel. (Greg Egan has, typically, gone even further by

In general, it seems, we are not happy with the move from cottage to tower block. The larger the building, the more it is cut off from what we might term

structure is a place that imposes its own rules upon mankind, a place where madness and mayhem rule. Thus, James Lovegrove (in Days [1997]). Michael Marshall Smith (in Spares) and Steven Millhauser (in 'The Dream of the Consortium' [1999]) have created gigantic department stores in which war breaks out. Meanwhile Carter Scholz, in 'The Amount to Carry' (1998), brings together three artists - Franz Kafka, Wallace Stevens and Charles Ives who also worked in insurance, the unfettered imagination deliberately contrasted with the structured conformity of their everyday occupations. Gradually we realise that the ultramodern hotel which houses the insurance convention they are all attending is actually the sort of labyrinthine, near-infinite structure Martin Dressler might have built. The hotel offers far more than might be expected, except that there is no way out. As with so many of these buildings, it comes to feel like a representation of the twentieth century, a mad, labyrinthine edifice of our own making in which we are trapped.

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Abjection and *The Thing*

here is a moment in Julia Kristeva's book *Powers of Horror:* An Essay on Abjection, when she writes that:

The body's inside [...] shows up in to order to compensate for the collapse of the border between inside and outside. It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of one's "own and clean self" but, by Andrew M. Butler

scraped or transparent, invisible or taut, gave way before the dejection of its contents. Urine, blood, sperm, excrement then show up in order to reassure a subject that is lacking its "own and clean self". (53)

Our bodies continually remind us of who we are, lumps of meat, as our thoughts and senses range over the outside world. It's as if they are saying, don't worry, you are grounded, you aren't just a collector of sense data, you are an on-going biological process.

So if we are to be reassured, as the sheer size of the external world overcomes our puny selves, we have to trust our bodies. Each body ought to be able to identify the individual as a self, as an identifiable point in time and space, as something which is unique, even if it is a unique set of repeatable biological processes.

But where precisely are these limits of identity, these boundaries? Where is the point that separates the self from the

other? Is it just the surface of the skin - a skin which may be peeled away and unfolded? Go back to the beginning of how we became ourselves. Once we were part of our mothers, in her womb, nurtured, fed, and perhaps safe in there. But then each of us were born, into a world of desire. There was a mother, something other than ourselves, the other that made us into a self and there was a father, or a father-figure, representing law and control. Just as for the Victorians the individual family stood as a microcosm of the society as a whole, so the father, the notional head of the patriarchal household, is invested with power beyond his biological position. The most obvious difference between the female and male is the genitalia, in particular the male's penis. The phallus, as symbolic version of the penis, stands as a representation of that power.

The process of the child growing up is one of disattachment from the mother. Perhaps as infants we breastfed at our mother's nipples, certainly we still share some of her antibodies. We were fed, nurtured, given life, but eventually we had to put this away and become independent beings. Then we became aware of the rest of our body, and a more disturbing side: defecation and urination. Surely it must have been a traumatic experience, those few first times, as we each lost part of our interiors, and seemed to be losing control of our bodies. When would it stop? How much is there in there?

In fact, perhaps it was all enough to make us nostalgic for an earlier time, a time when we were in the womb, when these things were taken care for us. Still to return to the womb is to reverse the progress we have made in controlling our own bodies, it is giving up our own power. What if, again, we lost control of ourselves, lost control of our body? What if we were no longer sure that it was our body any more?

. . .

This is all preamble to a discussion of John Carpenter's 1982 film *The Thing,* based on a novella by John W Campbell, 'Who Goes There?', written under the name of Donald A Stuart. It had first been filmed in 1951 by Christian Nyby, although Howard Hawks is generally held to be more responsible for it. Also known as *The Thing from Another World,* and one of the most successful monster movies of the 1950s, the film features an obvious man in a monster suit, and bears little resemblance to the original story. Two women are added to Campbell's originally all-male characters, to provide the love interest thought necessary at the time.

Carpenter had wanted to make *The Thing* for some time, having met to discuss it in 1975 with a former classmate. It was the success of Ridley Scott's *Alien*, in which the alien uses humans as host as part of its life cycle, which gave Universal Studios the courage to finance the venture. However, when the film was released in 1982, it was a flop, with audiences clearly preferring the much cuter alien of Spielberg's *ET: The Extra-Terrestrial*. The reviews were largely hostile, seeing *The Thing* as disgusting, lacking in characterisation, gory, dull and vulgar. The

special effects were seen as going too far, being too brutal.

What the narrative offers, in a disguised form, is a haunted house and *Ten Little Indians* scenario, just as Ridley Scott had in *Alien* a few years before. Take a group of characters, who don't particular like each other, and strand them together in a isolated location: a spaceship, an island, an Antarctic base. If they are already suspicious of each other before the deaths start, then so much the better. Ensure one of the deaths is ambiguous, that a body isn't found, to leave open the possibility that he or she is really the killer. Up the ante by having someone destroy any

remaining means of escape – to prevent the killer from leaving, as well as any future victims. The film begins with a dog that seems more intelligent than it should be, who has been shot at by the Norwegian base it was part of. The dog is taken into the American base, who discover that the Norwegians are all dead. In fact the Norwegians have been infiltrated by some kind of alien which can shift forms, and they realise too late that the dog is infected. One by one they are picked off.

The film differs from the haunted house scenario in that it's set amongst the white wilderness of the polar permafrost, just as winter is about to set in. I suspect the makers failed to take into account the fact that day and night would be much more balanced to the night, but this depends on how early in winter it is. The point is to establish that no one else will be coming into the area for a number of months. Unlike

much horror, it's only when the film gets into process of destroying the base that the cellar and the darkness really become factors. Since the alien blends in perfectly with the humans, there is little need of shadows to hide in.

This is clearly an aesthetic judgement, as Carpenter told Anne Billson:

It's one of those things where you decide to do a monster movie, you'd approach it one of two ways. Either you do the classic Howard Hawks way, which is to keep the monster in the dark. You never see it, it's all shadows. Which sounds like we don't need to do anything else to this – that's enough to scare people. But I thought well, why don't we bring it out in the light and really show there's a creature here, make you believe it (40-1)

There's certain amount of truth to this: so often what isn't seen is much more frightening than what is (witness the recent hysteria of *The Blair Witch Project* [1999] which relied purely on suggestion). Much of the fear of horror films is the fear of the dark, of the unknown. And unless the effects are sophisticated, the creature when finally revealed usually looks like a man in a rubber suit, or a radio controlled rubber shark.

. . .

The *Ten Little Indians* scenario suggests that the film overlaps with the crime genre: the men at the base have to track down a murderer before everyone is killed off. But then crime and horror fiction often start from a similar point: some law of society is violated and the person who violated it has to be punished. The difference is that in crime fiction, the rule-breaker is very much the villain and the punishment comes as the result of the hero's actions. Just as the family is the microcosm of society, so the reverse is true, and the hero takes on the role of the father, with the punishment being a metaphorical castration. But unless the criminal is actually killed in the film – and notice how often criminals fall onto spikes, are impaled (by bits of boats or other vehicles), or pierced by hooks, or otherwise penetrated – the punishment only occurs after the end of the crime narrative. In



the horror narrative the punishment is very much part of the narrative

In the horror film the violation of the law is often accidental, through naïvety, ignorance or stupidity, on the part of the good guys. But naïvety, ignorance or stupidity is no defence and so they are punished as a result. A handful of individuals may come through and defeat their punisher, or sometimes the punisher(s) go(es) free; there is always the loophole for the sequel. (The rule is the villain never dies the first time).

Anne Billson outlines seven rules for characters in horror films to obey; of course, they tend to break most of them:

- Never split up into small groups. Always stick together with the rest of the cast.
- 2. Never root around amid ancient artifacts.
- Never take a shortcut through the woods, especially when dressed in only a nightgown.
- 4. Never go skinny-dipping after dark.
- 5. Try not to have sex.
- 6. Don't, whatever you do, go down into the cellar.
- 7. Should any of your colleagues manifest a tendency to bite, babble, or sprout tentacles, don't stand around and stare; they must be staked, decapitated, or put to the torch without delay. (69)

In *The Thing* there is a lack of actual sex, in part perhaps because of a lack of women; in part because they are all loners, and in part because they are soon too busy fighting for their lives. The only speaking female presence in the entire movie is the chess computer that Mac plays with, loses to and destroys it with the phrase "cheating bitch". Some critics have been tempted to see the invading presence as female – as we see society as maledominated, misogynistic and see its polar opposite as female. To do this we must return to the ideas of Julia Kristeva where I began.

Kristeva was born in Bulgaria in 1941 and emigrated to Paris in 1965 to pursue her doctoral studies. She became involved in the Tel Quel group and published in their journal, specialising in linguistics. From 1979 she also had a career in psychoanalysis, developing a feminist spin on the ideas of Jacques Lacan. Lacan had in turn developed Freud's ideas, particularly in relation to the Oedipus Complex. There the child's desire for the nurturing mother is limited by the castrating presence of the father.

The Lacanian model is much more defined in terms of language or signs – symbols which stand in place of concepts. Rather than an actual father in every case, the top of the power triangle is the function of the father, represented by that symbol of male power, the phallus, the body part which denotes his difference from the female. The mother, lacking this phallus both physically and symbolically, desires this power. The child desires to be desired by the mother, and to achieve this tries to transform his or herself into a substitute phallus. Again the father figure forbids this, as being superior in power, and so the child turns away from the mother. The male child turns to language – what Lacan calls the symbolic order – as a temporary consolation.

Of course, as Freud and Lacan realised, the female child should not feel fear of the threat of castration, since she lacks the male genitalia. Rather than abandon the theory, both suggest that the female child thinks of herself as *already* castrated, with this discovery denoting a loss of innocence. The vagina is said to be thought of, even if only on an unconscious level, as the wound left behind by castration. The female child can only lose herself in nostalgia for the pre-castrated past (a golden age which of course never was since she hasn't actually been castrated) or a yearning for the phallus in future (thus slotting into the role of mother). Unlike the male child, she cannot enter into the symbolic order, since this is theorized as male, rational, logical, practical.

Kristeva has argued that in opposition to this patriarchal male language, there is a woman's language, a kind of babble (she

labels it the semiotic) which is irrational, illogical, poetic. For either the male or the female, gendered identity is tied up in language, which locates the individual within space. Every speech has a speaker and one or more listeners, in some kind of spatial relationship, and so identity can be drawn from listening and speaking to others.

In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva examines another means for the body to constitute itself as a specific identity, as distinct from the rest of the world. She situates what she labels the "abject" as neither subject – the I – nor object – the other of the outside world. She argues that "The abject only has one quality of the object – that of being opposed to *I*". According to her:

Food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection. When the eyes see or the lips touch that skin on the surface of milk – harmless, thin as a sheet of cigarette paper, pitiful as a nail paring – I experience a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly; and all the organs shrivel up the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire (2-3).

Perhaps this fear caused by food is a memory of the time when the individual was breastfed? In any case the individual rejects the sight of the skin as other, as not-I, and tries to expel it from the body, in the process expelling "myself". In this process of expelling "myself". I give birth to "myself": it is an emphasis of the self and a rejection of the mother and the father.

She goes on to situate abjection as an essential part of society, perhaps seeing that society as another kind of body:

Abjection appears as *exclusion* or taboo (dietary or other) in monotheistic religions, Judaism in particular, but drifts over to more "Secondary" forms such as *transgression* (of the Law) within the same monotheistic economy. [...] The various means of *purifying* the abject – the various catharses – make up the history of religions, and end up with that catharsis par excellence called art (17).

Art then is part of the process of abjection, as well as our individual reactions to it. Art can be a means of exploring what may be part of our society, and what isn't, taken to a wide extreme, to examine what is and isn't human. We try to repress that which is not human. That which is not human, which is so terrifying, is virtually beyond language, in the unnameable, in the realm of the Thing.

And so back to *The Thing*. John Carpenter's Thing, his alien, is a conglomeration of cells, individual organisms, that can mimic the appearance of humans, that can lurk among our numbers. In fact, such simulation is more frightening than the obvious monster we glimpse at a number of points in the narrative:

It is [...] not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The inbetween, the ambiguous, the composite.

That last word, most of all, suits our purposes: "the composite". The Thing is a composite. It is very telling that the means of separating humans from aliens is a blood test, the heat stimulus of a number of blood cells, forcibly extracted from all of the crew. As it slowly becomes obvious that the crew are being replaced with alien doubles, so paranoia becomes the dominating mood. Anyone could be an alien, lurking in the shadows of identity, rather like her description of abjection as:

immoral, sinister, scheming and shady: a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you. (4)

Notice how here I seem to be slipping between abjection as the symptoms associated with a particular source of nausea and abjection as that which is inherent within a horror film: it perhaps comes from the slippage between I and not-I, inside and out, and the look of the audience in the cinema and the look of the characters within the film.

. . .

The scene is which the men try to revive one of their number offers an opportunity to examine the idea of abjection as a rejection of the father and mother, particularly a rejection of the mother. One of the characters is unconscious on the operating table, and a doctor tries to revive him by jump-starting his heart. But as soon as the pads touch the body, the body opens up and bites the hands off the poor doctor. The wound might be a symbolic vagina. I've already said that the vagina is seen as a wound left by castration; under Freud's symbolism (or circular logic) the wound in turn can stand in for the vagina. The vagina, in turn, stands in for the womb "beyond" it, as another interior space. But why might the wound, especially if it stands for the vagina/womb, been thought of as having teeth?

Freud, writing about the case of what he called the wolf man, gives an account of a child's confused witnessing of his parents having sexual intercourse. The child sees the male genitalia being "eaten" up by the female genitalia, confused further by the half memory of pleasure being derived from the oral or anal zones. Freud labels this experience the primal scene. Unable to comprehend what is going on, the child fears that the father is being castrated by the woman. (This idea of the vaginal dentata is behind a joke at the climax of Neal Stephenson's *Snowcrash*, when Raven is injected in his genitals when having sex with Y.T. A penetration is also, paradoxically, a castration).

The mother figure is thus something that is desired – as a former primary source of pleasure, and before that a space of total comfort, a womb to retreat to from the isolation of the harsh outside world. Yet the woman is also to be feared, particularly by the male child, because of her position as womb/vagina – already perceived as wounded, which can be perceived as wishing to take revenge, to castrate in turn.

Writing about *Alien*, Barbara Creed argues that horror films enact and re-enact a fear of the devouring womb of the mother: [W]e are given a representation of the female genitals and the womb as uncanny – horrific objects of dread and fascination" (135). The mother is other, somehow uncanny and unnameable, a castrating presence that reminds us of how once we were powerless, and could be again. Creed suggests that the mother is the site of conflicting desires:

constantly staged and restaged in the workings of the horror narrative where the subject is left alone, usually in a strange hostile place, and forced to confront an unnameable terror, the monster. The monster represents both the subject's fears of being alone, of being separate

from the mother, and the threat of annihilation – often through reincorporation. As oral-sadistic mother, the monster threatens to reabsorb the child she once nurtured. (138)

Film after film features a villain or monster which is female or perceived as feminine, from "Mrs" Bates in *Psycho* to the alien queens in the Alien sequence. There is also a strand of horror film in which the monsters, often presented as hive, bee-like (matriarchal?) communities, threaten to take over the identity of, or to bond with, individual humans. This absorption is both a cause of horror, and on some occasions, even more scarily, something to be desired – such absorptions occur in *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers, The Faculty, Society,* the Borg episodes of *Star Trek*, the Alien sequence, especially *Alien: Resurrection* and, of course, *The Thing.*

. . .

At the end of *The Thing* we are left with two people, Mac and Childs, alone, their base destroyed, who have cut themselves off from any means of escape, at the start of winter so no one else is likely to come along, sharing their last bottle of whiskey, uneasily eyeing each other up. Is one of them the Thing? After all, they've not been together throughout the confusion of blowing up the base, and more importantly we've not been able to watch them at every moment. Even if neither of them are infected, is the Thing really destroyed, or will it eventually be found again and allowed to escape? We've seen a computer model of the creature absorbing the world's population within days, like a viral epidemic but much worse. Watching these two men, can we ever be certain about the purity of the human race again?

To return to where we began, we have had to reinterpret the boundary of inside/outside, through our own fears. Still, we are left with an ambiguity. Under Kristeva's model the symptoms of watching horror lead to our own embodiment: horror by showing the body under threat in a fictional form, offers us a reassurance about our own bodies. But can we be reassured, or do those horror narratives and the powerful reactions they produce simply lead to a greater anxiety about ourselves and our boundaries?

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Fantasy, Magic, History an interview with Guy Gavriel Kay by Cherith Baldry

Cherith Baldry: You started out as a lawyer, and then almost immediately changed to broadcasting and writing. Why was that? Guy Gavriel Kay: I trained as a lawyer, but I never practised. My expectation was that I would, because I thought it would be exceptionally naïve to imagine in my early twenties that I could successfully make a living and end up supporting a family writing fiction. So my pragmatic belief was that I would end up practising law, and in the classic way struggle to find time to write, on the edges of whatever I did to make a living. Then an opportunity emerged at the end of my articled clerkship when I was invited to become legal consultant to the radio series Scales of Justice. I was offered one script as a test as to whether I could write something, and I was single, I had no debts, I was young, and I said if I'm ever going to take a chance, turning my back on the law, this is it, so I said yes. It worked out wonderfully well, because the one script became half a dozen that first year, the legal consultant role became associate producer, and within a year I was associate producer, legal consultant, principal writer and frequently director of the radio series. A wonderful series, I loved it. Radio was an absolute delight, and the best thing about it was that we would produce a season of shows in about eight months which left me four, sometimes five months of the year to disappear. That's when I developed the glamorous-seeming habit of going abroad to write. By the time the books started to gain an international following, which was really with Tigana, the radio

series was scaled down to doing four specials a year and eventually went to television. I didn't go with it in a production capacity, but by that point I was succeeding as a novelist, and that's what I wanted to do. I didn't want to do television or film production, and so I wrote for the television series. And so I never practised law.

CB: And... why fantasy?

GGK: That's one of those two word questions that need two thousand word answers. The doorway into fantasy for me was by way of mythology. It was an interest very early in life. By my undergraduate years there was a strong interest in learning that formally - comparative anthropology, comparative religion, the formal study of myth and legend. I did my degree in philosophy, but there was a very intense interest in myth and legend, and also in history, which comes into the story later. Of course I had read The Lord of the Rings, and a great many of the predecessors -E.R. Eddison, Dunsany, Morris, James Branch Cabell, the giants of the earlier period. They all worked for me in one way or another. The additional element I suppose was a somewhat aggrieved perception of barbarians in the temple, the post-Tolkienic cloning of the genre, and the irony of course is that we're talking the early eighties - late seventies and early eighties - when in fact there wasn't remotely as much as there is now of downgraded, lazy fantasy, but there was enough out there to make me feel outraged at the bastardisation of a genre in which I saw so much strength and potential. When I wrote Fionavar, there was undeniably an element of conscious statement that the original sources that Tolkien and others drew upon, retained tremendous

outstanding vitality, and they could not be cheapened and eroded

...the racing factions in the Hippodrome employed full-time cheiromancers to dispel curses against their riders and horses...

by however many lazy, unambitious uses a given decade or generation might throw out. And that's one of the reasons Fionavar is almost formally adopting many of those elements. So many of the tropes of high fantasy are deliberately in there. The sense I had back then was that the ambitious young fantasists, the people I respected, seemed to be turning away from what we would categorise as high fantasy. Urban fantasy was developing. Charles de Lint and others were emerging with books that took contemporary cities and introduced fantasy elements. Megan Lindholm, Wizard of Pigeons, Charles de Lint, Moonheart, books like that, were saying we can still do original fantasies, but we have to scale them down, we'll leave all of this to the sludgy fat imitators, we'll go and do something different. And I was trying to say, "No, we don't have to surrender that high ground, we'll fight them on the hill," and that partly was the genesis of Fionavar. From the very beginning I said I'm going to do it as a trilogy. I'm going to address the middle book problem of trilogies. I'm going to use the elements of Germanic folklore that Tolkien used, I'm going to go with elf-like and dwarf-like races, I'm going to use as many of these components as I can and still try to do something distinctive with it. Now after that was over, you run into a different problem, which is the problem in all fields for all artists: the tendency of readers or editors, but mostly those who discover you, to want you to stay frozen in the mould in which they fell in love with you. For those who are staggeringly

successful that pressure is enormous. I wasn't with *Fionavar*. It was a success, but it wasn't a runaway commercial block-buster, and so the pressures were there, but were relatively easy for me to resist. *Tigana* became the significant departure at that point, starting the movement away from myth and legend and towards history.

CB: It seems to me that as your books continue, the magic component, in whatever form it

books continue, the magic appears, becomes less.

GGK: Yes, with the caveat that there's more of it in the *Mosaic* than there was in *Lions of Al-Rassan*.

CB: Yes.

GGK: That is not in any way a knocked-out plan or strategy. I've come to see the use of magic as a case by case - to use a lawyer's phrase - decision, that in each book I'm evaluating the needs of the story and the setting as to the degree to which the supernatural, the magical elements are appropriate. What underlies that is a deeply-rooted belief that magic is not what defines fantasy. That's the lazy definition. Fantasy is defined by and composed of a great many different things of which magic may be a component but is not the defining element. The Lions of Al-Rassan was probably of all my books the one most deliberately conceived to use fantasy and history to reflect something I see happening here and now: the way in which the space for individual people to communicate and interact disappears when ideological, holy warfare arises. People lose their individual humanity, they become cogs in the army of warfare. Their individuality gets erased and in Lions that's in fact the literal truth in the dramatic climactic scene between

Roderigo and Ammar. You cannot see them, you can't tell them apart, their individuality is obliterated. They become representative of ideologies, even though we know they're not. I tried to make them as compellingly individualised as I could, in the span of five hundred pages to set up the appalling nature of what happens when such individual people become erased.

CB: There's this sense in the novel of the inevitability that that clash is going to happen in the end.

GGK: Thank you. I'm glad you felt that way, because that's what I was working towards. Now in that kind of book where there are references to the sort of things that are happening today in various ideological fights, in the demonisation of the enemy, it seemed to me that I would undermine the intensity of the parallels I wanted to draw between my take on the period of the Spanish Reconquista and the present day if I pushed forward too much the fantastical, magical, supernatural element. It would make it easier for the reader to displace their own recognition of the home truths that I was pushing. So in that book the magic element was subdued. When I get to *The Sarantine Mosaic* and I'm

thinking about Byzantium Byzantium for me and for many of
us is imbued with this
supernatural, spiritual, Eastern,
mystical, Yeatsian element. The
ideas of magic and the
supernatural pervade our sense
of early Byzantine society so from
the very beginning it seemed
obvious to me that it would be
appropriate, it would even be
necessary if I tried to capture
some of that aura of the Byzantine.
You know, they believed in these
spirits and the half-world. It

...my orientation as a writer is to see fantasy as something that has far more potential and capability than it is usually allowed to have.

impregnated society. The idea of curse tablets, that the racing factions in the Hippodrome employed full-time cheiromancers to dispel curses against their riders and horses, because they were so fundamentally a part of the way in which the culture operated. Given that, I felt completely licensed to incorporate more of magic and the supernatural. And the other aspect of it is that I'm looking at a society - I think every book that I've ever written involves this - I'm looking at a society in a transformative state. The transition of paganism to sanctioned state religion is a very interesting, uneasy time. Beliefs, vanished beliefs, persisting beliefs, forbidden beliefs, people wrestling with themselves, with the old faith and the new faith. All of these things are wonderfully parcelled out for a novelist. It's a flux in society, and that of course finds its embodiment in Crispin's encounter with the zubir in the forest, the ongoing presence of the pagan gods in a world that is shifting its ground. It's wonderful for me.

CB: To go back to what you were saying about holy war, it seems to be a continuing theme in your books that different aspects of religion or different gods and goddesses or their followers are in combat with each other.

GGK: I think that's fair enough.

CB: Is this an important thing to you?

GGK: There's a shift. I think you were talking before about a trend with respect to magic, and I don't think that's strictly true. What I do suspect could legitimately be said is that there's a trend from looking at myth and legend as such, towards examining the apparatus of religion, the ways in which religions co-opt people to their service, the manipulation of belief, from Fionavarthrough the later books. An easy example would be something like in A Song for Arbonne the artifice of the arrow that is supposed to be the goddess's arrow. It is in fact the construct by the priestesses but it is used and is specifically described as something that will become a holy moment, a powerful symbol for the devout. I became interested in the ways in which belief can be subverted and used in warfare – the Crusades is an obvious example. Arbonne is about the Albigensian Crusade when Northern

France went down to Provence in what was essentially a land-grab masked as a holy crusade. That intrigues me – the interplay between the state and the individual. In the latest book, in the Mosaic, it's very specifically the interplay between the state and the artist, the relationship between power and art. Now that fascinates me, and of course that incorporates religion, that the artist is working on a religious work, it's the dome for a sanctuary. So I think you're right that there's – I won't say an increasing, but a steady interest in this aspect of things, the relationship between faith, and the manipulation of faith, between the idea of genuine piety and of religion as a cloak for power politics. All of these things engage me quite a lot.

CB: Another thing which is related to that, for me anyway, is that you don't give easy solutions. Some fantasy ends up with everybody happy at the end, they've won the last battle, etc. etc.

GGK: It's a cop-out.

CB: Yes

GGK: It's a cop-out for contemporary writers. The notion that there's a price to be paid is fundamental for me in fiction. As a

reader I feel cheated if an author sets up an apocalyptic conflict and the resolution is so benevolent that I end up feeling 'It couldn't have been that dramatic after all.' My own natural readerly response is to say that if everything ends up so happily I guess the forces of darkness weren't as threatening as this author led me to believe, for the emotional, psychological, intellectual stakes to be high enough for me, the most compelling way to underscore that is to demonstrate that there are

losses with the victories. This is not only for me a part of convincing writing, it's a way in which fiction must mirror the actual experience of most readers. The other side of that is that the last pages of every single novel I've written point forward to something beyond the ending. It's most explicit in Tigana which is probably the best known of the endings, but that's only the most explicit. In every single book that you look at there's a suggestion that something will happen beyond the last page, and that's very deliberate, because I really do like the notion that the story you're reading, even if it's a long, vast story, is just a section of the lives of the people in it, that they have an existence before you open the first page and the survivors will have an existence after the last page is closed. I find 'happily ever after' when you deconstruct it, means nothing ever happened. Nothing else worthy of note ever happened to these people. And of course things happened. We get old, experiences happen, friends die, children are born, events occur. All through my career I want to have each book contain within its ending the seeds of that awareness, that things do and will happen and we don't know them. We're not prescient within the framework of the fiction, that the lives go on and things will take place, good and bad. The price is paid, for whatever the resolution might be, and the ending of the book isn't in my conceptualisation of fiction the ending of the lives of the people in the book. And those two come together, the way in which I conceive the endings of the novels.

CB: I find it interesting that almost all your characters are ambiguous. You don't have black and white, good and evil, but there's a great mixture.

GGK: How many people do you know who are black and white? How many interesting people do you know? It's so much more engaging as a writer and as a reader when you give people dimensions and complexity. I would be bored in the writing of my books if I felt unable to seek out and explore and develop this notion of nuance in the personality. It comes up a lot, the question you've raised, and I'm almost bemused by it. I've always argued that good fiction involves interesting things happening to

interesting people. In my feeling many 'best-seller' type of books of fantasy have an ample component of the first thing, which is interesting things happening, and no time or interest in making the interesting people. Now they're racing through the story and we tolerate the flat or two-dimensional characters, clichés, undeveloped in the story, because it's a good page-turner. The celebrated contemporary fiction character novels are choc-abloc with the second component, of interesting people, or at least complex people, carefully observed in their lives, where remarkably little of note happens to them, they're character studies. I don't see it as inconsistent to aspire to both, in the tradition of the great nineteenth century novelists. You know, if you're looking at Dickens or Tolstoy, if you go back further to Jane Austen, these were page turners. You want to know what happens next, but the characterisation was wonderful. I find it banal or boring to have characters, for good or evil, who didn't have as many layers of complexity as I could invest them with. It's part of my job.

CB: How important is the prose style to you?

GGK: You're giving me these wonderful short questions that demand essays! For me as a reader it's significant. I'm aware that in the history of speculative fiction that has been a huge demarcation line. If you track back through the history of science fiction, there was actually a strong component of the sf writing

community that said that attempts to write well were pandering to the standards of taste of the mainstream, and that science fiction was a literature of ideas and it was written in part by scientists, and prose style was a knuckling under to the expectations and beliefs of those people who didn't understand sf at all. And there was a strong alternative segment who said, that's rubbish, we're writers, we're story-tellers, how we tell our story is as important in sf as it is in anything else. I come at reading and writing without genre constraints, which is to say I read everything. My taste as a reader and my orientation as a writer is to see fantasy as something that has far more potential and capability than it is usually allowed to have. Consistent with that I see it - again, as a reader, not just as a writer - as part of the responsibility of the writer to write as well as he or she can. So style matters to me a great deal. It also shifts book by book. There were some early comments in the reviews of Sailing to Sarantium that it seemed a cooler book than Lions or Arbonne or Tigana. Fionavar is a much hotter book, because it's working with the primal material of myth. It was seen as opera. When I got to Sarantium, I see the Byzantines by way of the mosaic images we have of them, the stiff, beautiful formal portraits and mosaic of the heiratic faces on ikons. That formality, that stiffness of image, invests my sense of the Byzantine. They're a little bit alien to us, at least to our West, they're a little removed in the way they saw the world and the way they pictured themselves, and I let that be picked up in the way I wrote. I was trying for a historian's tone. The first paragraph of the first book talks about historians as a profession - historians as a profession often prefer the invented to the truth. It is a failing of the profession, which is a signpost for the whole of the two books because of course the books are about who are the lords of emperors. How do we remember the emperors? Who is responsible for how we have an image of Justinian and Theodora? Procopius, and the artists who portrayed them, are the custodians of their images in our eyes. The artist is the lord of emperors in that sense. The historian is the lord. Shakespeare is the lord of Richard the Third. For five hundred years the only image people had of Richard the Third was of Richard Hunchback, demon king, because of the brilliance of Shakespeare's Tudor propaganda. It was so spectacularly successful that it completely controlled the way people visualised that monarch. That's very much what the two books

are about. And when you think about the historians' point of view of the Byzantine period it felt right to adopt the style and the tone, to pull back a little bit from the intensity that I used when I wrote Lions, which is about the almost Arabian Nights melodrama of Moorish Spain and the Reconquest. That note of drama that invested that period felt right. When I was doing A Song for Arbonne, it's about the troubadors, it's a love song, and the style should reflect that kind of romance. And so in each book the style for it, if I do it right, will reflect or embody some aspect of the period. That's why, by the way, when people ask me what's next, I've no idea at this point, and I never do, because I need the last book to recede for me significantly before I can start the next one, because I'm afraid that the style will bleed through. I want to let the last book go right out of the picture as much as I can before I even start thinking about what I'll do next, which state I'm in now. CB: To finish with, is there anything that you'd like to say about your own work, that I haven't touched on?

...a last antediluvian

monster is drawn out of

the sea by the mating call-

like booms of the foghorn

GGK: The soap box I get on is that I'm deeply averse to the impulse to categorise. I think the human animal is a categorising species. We have this remorseless desire to slot things in order to better apprehend the world, and this carries over in a big way into fiction: the remarkable heat but very little light that sometimes gets shed on issues like: is Dragonflight a science fiction or a

fantasy novel; is P D James writing mysteries or psychological novels? I find this a waste of time. I'm bored by it, because it obscures what seems to me the far more interesting question, which is, is it any good? And if so, why? What did they do to make it good? How did it engage me? What does it have to say to me, and if it says a lot how did the writer do it? I'm so much more interested in that than I am in sorting, and as a consequence the questions that often come up about why fantasy, or how are you using fantasy, or what's the relationship between history and fantasy in your books, they're all quite genuine questions, but they're subsets of the larger issue or question which is that I don't see any of this categorisation as central. I'm comfortable being called a fantasy writer. I'm uncomfortable with people who see fantasy as narrow in its potential. I'm comfortable with being seen as a writer who makes use of fantasy elements to tell a story that has contemporary resonance but I don't see that as important. My guess is that as time goes by the borders are blurring. I'm very happy about that. I think that demographics have something to do with it, the baby boomers we are, giving way to Generation X, the people who grew up with science fiction and fantasy as part of their mainstream culture. People who grew up with Star Trek and Star Wars, and are now living through The X Files. For them there's nothing remotely marginalised about sf. It's central in their culture, and my guess is that as that comes more and more a reality of our world, fantasy and science fiction are becoming more and more perceived as simply a way of doing what you want to do in fiction. I can see writers of scope swinging in and out of different modes to explore whatever interests them. So when you ask me the open-ended question "What interests you?" I suppose what does is the notion of contributing to the breaking down of barriers, the blurring of borders, the eroding of categories, that seem to me to be artificial constructs designed to over-simplify the slotting of books. The downside of this for me is that when you inhabit that hinterland, that land between categories, you're at risk of not pulling in the reader who is still most comfortable in the centre of whichever country. The core fantasy reader for whom fantasy is Robert Jordan and David Eddings and the battle of mages and wizards with fireballs can have trouble with a fantasy that suggests that that's not the only thing that fantasy is about. Whereas the mainstream reader looking for a novel of ideas mixed with a page-turning adventure might have trouble with something as simple as the fact that I use two moons in my books as a metaphor. There'll always be a segment of the readership that feels more secure with something that's all one thing or the other, and that's the challenge that confronts me, and I suppose that's the challenge I present to readers, that I invite them to contribute with me to this blurring of borders. Not everyone wants to do that. I'm lucky that a great many people seem to want to but I'm aware that it

challenges them. **CB:** Thank you very much.

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CHERITH BALDRY IS A REGULAR CONTRIBUTOR TO VECTOR AND A PUBLISHED AUTHOR — EDS.

Science fiction writer, fantasist, playwright and poet Ray Bradbury was born in 1920 in Waukegan, Illinois. But almost despite sixty years' of sales, *Vector* appears to have ignored the work of this important writer. In this and subsequent issues of *Vector* we hope to remedy this omission, beginning with this piece by L.J. Hurst

Where, not When, was Ray Bradbury?

ate in 1941 Ray Bradbury was not murdered, nor was he suspected of murder. Yet in either case he would have been in good company that included Robert Heinlein, Cleve Cartmill, Anthony Boucher, and L. Ron Hubbard. It was murder committed via experimental rocket that brought these names together. Unfortunately, the author of the fell deeds that Bradbury managed to escape failed to understand the science of rocketry developing at the neo-natal Jet Propulsion Laboratory at Pasadena just outside Los Angeles, and so had to record an unsuccessful attempt.

Later, when asked about the pioneer rocketeer, Ray Bradbury said: "I only met him once, when I was a teenager and he came to lecture at the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society in the late thirties... I was merely part of a small audience of about twenty or thirty who were fascinated with his ideas about the future." What had happened, of course, was a chance recording of a small moment when literature and science (or technology) were crossing. There was no murder, at least not beyond Anthony Boucher's novel Rocket to the Morgue² which gave pen portraits of the small Angeleno sf community, but there was a rocket being developed at the California Institute of Technology at Pasadena by John Parsons, whom Boucher disguises as Hugo Chantrelle (all the sf authors are given pen-names, too) and describes as an "eccentric scientist". Boucher knew that the sf community listened to men like Parsons, and that men like Parsons communicated with writers, and so he used a failed experiment, described at second hand, as the second murder method in his novel. (The book is thought to be a good record of the sf community, and of Jack Parsons, but not to be trusted on rocketry. Given Boucher's own interests, he probably thought the vehicle should have been blessed with holy water first). And we know that Ray Bradbury touched it, too.

Why approach Ray Bradbury by drawing attention to his absence, and his non-inclusion in the record of a historical event? I believe this is significant because it indicates something that will be true, if not for Ray Bradbury the individual, then at least for his authorial persona and voice. Ray Bradbury when he looked back to the past used the absence of connection – things are not connected to things. His method was to make other connections: to the atmosphere, noosphere, even literally to nebulousness itself. In his late noir thrillers *Death is a Lonely Business* and *A Graveyard for Lunatics*³, inspired by his youthful strivings to become an author, Bradbury emphasised distance and isolation, rather than proximity and community.

When Boucher included the sf community as the background to his novel Bradbury was not there. Perhaps Boucher could cope only with a small cast, perhaps someone like the young Bradbury was too insignificant (though the omission of his LA patron, Leigh Brackett as well, tends to suggest the small cast theory is best), or perhaps then he was not part of the sf community as such. Certainly Bradbury had started to publish in the late thirties - but he was writing in many genres though Weird Tales took the most. His bibliography shows that it was only in the late forties that he turned notably to science fiction and by then that cross-over of science and sf was past. By 1950 he had published The Martian Chronicles, but the breakthrough for Bradbury came in June 1951 when the Saturday Evening Post published his short story The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms' (later to be given the alternate title 'The Foghorn') - he had made the slicks. (As the alternate titles suggest 'The Foghorn' describes how a last antediluvian monster is drawn out of the sea by the mating call-like booms of the foghorn). Although he published only eleven stories in the Post, Bradbury is often regarded as the man who made the commercial breakthrough for sf and this was the story that did it.

Now leap forward thirty-five years. Bradbury publishes the novel that brings him back to attention – the story of a young would-be writer, living on decaying Venice beach at the end of the trolley line out of Los Angeles, finding himself in the middle of a grotesque murder. *Death is a Lonely Business*, set in 1949, is followed by *A Graveyard for Lunatics*, which recounts the later attempts of the writer to work in Hollywood. Bradbury makes clear the fictional templates he is following: he dedicates *Death* "to the memory of Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, James M. Cain, and Ross MacDonald. And to my friends and teachers Leigh Brackett and Edmond Hamilton".

In *Death is a Lonely Business*, though, no one comes in with a gun. Instead the spirit of the first paragraph continues all the way through a phantasmagoria – "Venice, California, in the old days had much to recommend it to people who liked to be sad. It had fog almost every night and along the shore the moaning of the oil well machinery and the slap of dark water in the canals and the hiss of sand against the windows of your house when the wind came up and sang among the open places and along the empty walks"

This seems to be some part of the Californian coast other than that into which Raymond Chandler dumped General Sternwood's limousine⁴.

Reaching the second paragraph this other connection is clearly made: "Those were the days when the Venice pier was falling apart and dying in the sea and you could find there the bones of a vast dinosaur, the rollercoaster, being covered by the shifting tides."

⁽¹⁾ John Carter – Sex and Rockets: The Occult World of Jack Parsons (Venice, CA: Feral House 1999) page 60

² Anthony Boucher – *Rocket To The Morgue* in *Four Novels* (London: Zomba Books, 1984). First published 1942, under the pseudonym H. H. Holmes

[©] Ray Bradbury – *Death Is A Lonely Business* (London: Grafton, 1985); Ray Bradbury – *A Graveyard For Lunatics: Another Tale of Two Cities* (London: Grafton 1990)

[®] Mike Davis – *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London: Pimlico, 1998) describes the relationship of Los Angeles and the developments of its parts.

All has come together: "fog", "moaning", "dinosaur". Readers may have noticed the discrepancy between the age of the anonymous narrator and Bradbury's own age – Bradbury cannot have been the young man, he was ten years older, he would have been close to his publishing contract. So this is not an autobiography – it may be an accurate description of Venice, CA in the last days of its canals as Bradbury knew it – but what joins then and now is the idea – and the idea is of the world in which Ray Bradbury wrote 'The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms' and changed the public perception of fantasy and science fiction.

There are other fictional yet realistic accounts of struggling young authors in Los Angeles in 1939 and of the geography of Los Angeles⁵. To read these two novels of Ray Bradbury's, though, is to discard notions of geography or chronology, and to find connections made of a more abstract kind. Read Rocket to the Morgue and you'll find it a Golden Age locked-room mystery, nothing like the hard-boiled fiction being written by Hammett, Chandler, or even Leigh Brackett herself. When he himself had been a young man, Ray Bradbury found he had missed being recorded by Anthony Boucher's record of struggling sf authors; later, when he came to create a young man, he did not connect the character to other struggling authors, he did not write a noir pastiche, instead he linked that young man to a world he was struggling to create and the breakthrough for sf into the commercial wider world. It almost seems as if he had no other words.

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L. J. HURST WROTE ABOUT THE TURNER DIARIES IN V212 — EDS.

[©] Notably John Fante's *Inherit The Dust* (republished by Canongate in 1998 under their Rebel Inc imprint). He makes life out to be far harder than a reader of either Boucher or Bradbury might infer.



First Impressions

Book Reviews edited by Steve Jeffery

Note: All novels marked: ☐ are eligible for the 1999 BSFA Award for Best Novel. All collections and anthologies marked: ✓ contain stories that are eligible for the 1999 BSFA Award for Best Short Fiction.

lain M. Banks – *Look to Windward* 🕮

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

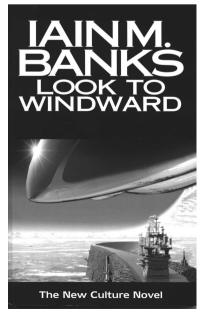
"Gentile or Jew

O you who turn the wheel and look to windward, Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you"

And so the wheel turns. The same quote that gave Banks the title

of his first sf novel also provides the title of his latest, and the explosive climax of that first novel has an effect upon the events of this. For the light of the two suns blown up then is just now, 800 years later, reaching the Masaq' Orbital. Hub, the Mind that controls Masag was once a General Service Vehicle which played a significant part in the events leading to those twin explosions, and it wants to commemorate this special event by commissioning a piece of music by the renowned Chelgrian composer Ziller, now living in self-imposed exile on the Orbital. But the Chelgrians have recently been involved in a dreadful civil war which was partly the fault of the Culture, and an emissary has come to Masaq', ostensibly to persuade Ziller to return from exile, but almost certainly with another, hidden, motive.

So the situation is set up for another of Banks's complex thrillers. And if what you're looking for is epic sweep and hard action you



Orbit, 2000, 357pp, £16.99 ISBN 1-85723-969-5

won't be disappointed. On form, Banks really knows how to tell a story and this is a gripping tale. But it is more than that. Something strange has been happening to his creation of the Culture over the last few science fiction novels. You started to get an inkling of it in *Excession*, but now it is even more prominent.

Behind the action is a very thoughtful account of what the Culture is, and more particularly what makes it peculiar. We learn, for instance, how many other races have sublimed, but that the Culture regards sublimation with a curious distrust. Why this should be isn't explained, but I suspect that it is going to become more and more a central theme of subsequent Culture novels. For the Culture is dying. Not literally, not noticeably, but its hegemony has already lasted longer than any of its predecessors, and it is becoming notably decadent. Sublimation is going to become a threat and a promise that has to be faced.

As yet, this is only a strand that runs in the background of the novel, but the number of times that Banks stops the action to explore such questions and to look at what has happened to other races, shows it is a question that is coming to occupy him. In the meantime, we have this novel. It is not as good as *Excession*, but it is perfectly competent and

enjoyable. Better constructed than Consider Phlebas, for instance, with vivid characters, lots of great big set pieces, the domestication of the immense that has been a Banks trademark in all his science fiction, and a strong plot. There are a couple of loose ends that could have been tied off better, but you hardly notice any of this until you stop reading and start thinking about it.

Greg Bear - Darwin's Radio

Harper Collins, 2000, 440pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-00-651138-4 **Reviewed by Stuart Carter**

As New Scientist has pointed out on the back cover, "Darwin's Radio is a tense technothriller in the Michael Crichton vein..." and. just as with Crichton's work, you almost can hear the publicists screaming, "It isn't science fiction, OK?! It's a technothriller." Then, just to hammer the message home, it has a stunning medical-

turquoise cover and the title and author's name in exceptionally large type, whilst inside, the biographical details - condensed into nine lines - state that the author "published his first science fiction story aged sixteen... [but despite that] his novels and stories have won prizes and been translated around the world". There isn't a mention of Bear being one of the biggest sf writers

Maybe I'm being oversensitive, but this seems a depressing statement about the public perception and market position of sf today. Well, more power to Mr Bear if he makes it truly big - and who knows, perhaps the best way to improve the general public's perception of sf is through some New Labour-esque "Third Way" - tell them it's something else altogether and they'll buy it!

Darwin's Radio certainly won't lose the genre any fans. It's a fascinating concept, an exploration of the question "When is a disease not a disease?" (A: When it's an evolutionary strategy.) The science is fascinating throughout, but more interesting is the murky cloud of politics and spin doctoring that surrounds the discovery and explosive spread of an entirely 'new' form of retrovirus, SHEVA, which causes pregnant women to first miscarry and then spontaneously conceive again.

You might expect the fundamentalist right to come off badly in such a scenario, and they do, but it's far more interesting to note that so do many of the scientists studying the new virus. Science is shown as being a very human affair, a far cry indeed from the straightforward sf of old; the big intuitive leaps are shown to be as much about individual initiative as any form of scientific method.

If the three main characters don't come across as marvels of literary engineering they are at least sympathetic and work well together to advance the narrative - as in all of Bear's novels. What is chilling, and had me reaching for my copy of Sagan's brilliant The Demon-Haunted World, was the ignorance, fear and reactionary responses of the general public, which in the light of AIDS seem all too depressingly accurate. SF or not, definitely worth reading.

Gregory Benford - *Timescape*

Reviewed by Chris Amies

alive today.

It's 1998 and the world is a mess. Algal bloom infests the seas and has started to make the transition into the atmosphere. Meanwhile, in early 1960s at a university in California, young Gordon Bernstein discovers some strange interference in a physics experiment, which he can't explain but which, it is suggested, just might be evidence of extraterrestrial transmissions.

Benford published this novel of environmental disaster and big science in 1980, between the two timeframes of the story. It was an era when environmental pollution was starting to be taken seriously; the nuclear threat was receding but people were realising that a lot of damage had already been done to the world. John Brunner's *The Sheep Look Up* delivered a powerful attack on environmental disasters in store for careless humankind some eight years earlier. Timescape, although it delivers a similar picture of a blighted future-world, is more of a novel of scientific speculation which establishes once more the figure of the scientist as hero. John Renfrew and Greg Markham in 1998, and Gordon Bernstein in 1962-3, have to save the world.

Unconvincing: the English setting for the 1998 sections of the novel. Why Cambridge? It leads Benford to some very odd

Millennium (SF Masterworks No. 27), 2000, 412pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-935-X

observations that actually stop the flow of the novel while this reader tries to re-suspend his disbelief. It is all a bit similar to the 1970s TV series Survivors (which is of the right era to have influenced that aspect of Timescape) and other films and novels where tweedy rural types try to come to terms with a world turned upside down.

Convincing: the portrayal of scientists at work and the horrors of dealing with bureaucracy. Scientist characters are well portrayed, although Bernstein is a bit clichéd as an innocent lad abroad on the big bad West Coast. Other characters are less well-drawn, and Gordon's mother can only there be for comic relief. The unpleasant and manipulating Ian Peterson is bizarrely described as a "prig", which, as he has the morals of a tomcat, hardly seems the right word.

Benford drags in that same old marker of a parallel world, the John F Kennedy assassination in 1963. In this version Kennedy is shot but survives. Perhaps only that event is sufficiently wellknown that it will always be used to signal that the world of a particular novel is not our own. Put it down to writerly shorthand.

None of which detracts from this being a classic, often funny, intriguing and puzzling. It was well worth reprinting.

Michael Bishop – *No Enemy But Time*

Reviewed by Claire Brialey

Nearly twenty years ago, Michael Bishop wrote a novel which looked at what it means to be human as well as what it could mean to be able to travel in time, with a dual narrative structure which remains fresh despite the fact that multi-strand sf narratives now seem almost obligatory.

Bishop's protagonist, Joshua Kampa, can dream the past; a combination of his dream memories and top secret military technology takes him into Africa at what the sponsoring governments hope is the birth of humanity. In our past, Joshua in turn dreams his own past, recalling the story of how he came to step out of a time machine in a disjointed order triggered by Gollancz, 2000 (first printing 1982), 397pp, £10.99 ISBN 0-575-07096-X

random thoughts and memories, in effective contrast to the linear story of his adventures in prehistory.

Bishop carefully constructs his time machine so that there's no danger of making the entire human race a time travel paradox. Journeys back in time take the dreamer only to a "perfect simulacrum" of the past—a copy history which seems real, but through which a time traveller cannot change his own future. Other points are equally well-constructed, provoking questions without labouring the point: for instance, as a black man who has been an outsider both in his native Spain and in 1960s small town America, what happens when Joshua becomes an outsider in the past with superior technology and an assumed evolutionary advantage?

Against the narrative flow, the teasing sub-texts and the rich detail of habiline life, however, clash some authorial conveniences which waste some compelling ideas. When Joshua concedes that his rescue from dire circumstances which almost end his adventure in the early Pleistocene "will strike many as an improbable deus ex machina solution" you have to wonder how Bishop is expecting the reader to react. And the way in which Joshua finds a strong assertive habiline female without a mate who, despite being old enough to be his ancestor, is apparently better attuned to a sensitive twentieth century new man than to her own kind—and who proves to be, strangely, physically better

adapted to sex with an entirely human male in the missionary position than to something a little more bestial with *homo habilis*—has its touching moments but occasionally also pushes dream into idyll, fiction almost into farce. The ideas in this novel sometimes strain past credibility in their haste to flower.

The economics of the new Gollancz yellow jackets—£10.99 per 'B' format paperback—may persuade most readers against acquiring a full collection (especially in the context of its Orion stablemate series: the admirable, and cheaper, Millennium Masterworks). In principle, however, there's a lot to be said for reprinting the sort of thought-provoking sf which can't quite claim classic status but which it would be a shame to forget.

Ray Bradbury - Long After Midnight

Reviewed by Penny Hill

This collection of 22 short stories (with copyright dates spanning 1946 - 1975) has a wide range of settings, covering familiar Bradbury territory such as nostalgia for small town American childhood and the canals of Mars.

The theme of each story is longing. The success of individual stories depends on how convincingly this longing is presented. The opening tale of 'The Blue Bottle' alienates its audience as the protagonists destroy every Martian artefact that is not the bottle that they seek. Having done this, it is very hard for the reader to sympathise with the Freudian urge for death that is Beck's ultimate desire.

Another failure for me is 'One Timeless Spring' which attempts to portray the actions and emotions of a small boy who realises he cannot stop himself from growing older and sees everything that contributes to this necessary growth as a poison. I found the portrayal of his attempts to prevent food from benefiting his body by starving and vomiting to be particularly distressing.

I did enjoy some of the gentler stories, especially 'A Story of

Love' with its depiction of a boy and his teacher trying not to fall in love with each other. I felt Bradbury skimped the resolution here by causing the teacher to die young. This suggests that her life is

Earthlight, 2000, 275pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-671-03769-2

less important than its effect on the boy, but then Bradbury was never very good at the female viewpoint.

My favourite story in this collection is 'The Utterly Perfect Murder' in which a middle-aged man finds he doesn't need to murder the childhood 'friend' who bullied him because time has been so much crueller to the 'friend'. I strongly identified with the passage, "Never once in all the years did he, or anyone else, prove their friendship by coming by... And you always knew that the day you stopped going to Ralph's house, calling up in the morn, that would be the day your friendship ended." I'm sure this will speak loudly to anyone who has been on the giving end of a one-sided friendship.

Despite his occasional infuriating quirks, everyone should have some Ray Bradbury in their lives and if you have none then this collection would be a good place to start.

Eric Brown - New York Nights 🕮

Reviewed by Andrew Seaman

"The future is never as slick and shiny and new as films and books make out. It's always much as it is now, but grimier." (p.71). In sf publishing at least it now also routinely seems to come in three

volumes, of which New York Nights is the first (standalone) book in the planned 'Virex Trilogy' At first glance, the setting for Brown's latest work breaks little new ground - a mildly dystopian near-future New York City burdened almost to breaking point by a world energy crisis and refugees fleeing a Deep South devastated by terrorist attacks on nuclear power plants. In outline the plot is also reassuringly familiar: an ex-cop turned private investigator, the case of a missing computer scientist who is pioneering work in virtual reality, a shadowy neo-Luddite group opposed to the new technology, and a ultimate threat far more sinister than the simple proliferation of VR. Why, then, did I find myself gradually warming to it?

Undoubtedly it has much to do with the author's talent for convincing characterisation, exemplified by his portrayal of the relationship between investigator Hal Halliday, his

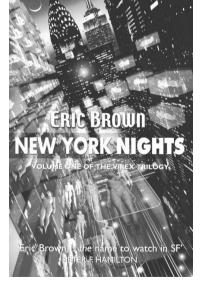
emotionally distant father and his two sisters, one dead in a childhood accident, the other long estranged. Hal's neurotic lover Kim, and his partner, Barney, whose attempts to recapture the memory of his dead wife through sessions in the VR tanks achieve a particular poignancy, are equally sympathetically drawn. All the leading characters are in some way haunted by

their past, just as Brown's metropolis is itself haunted by a technological future that threatens to erode the distinction between the real and the virtual. You *could* argue that those characters are cut out of fairly standard cloth, but as in any good thriller Brown makes you genuinely care about them long before they are placed in the mortal danger demanded by the exigencies of the action.

Gollancz, 2000, 261pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-575-06872-8

For the most part that action twists and turns in a satisfactory, if not always unexpected, fashion. Though the nature of the novel's ultimate technological threat will come as no big surprise, even to the most casual fan of the genre, Brown capitalises efficiently on its potential for sending paranoid shivers up the collective spine of his readers, and the closing fifty pages of the book manage the not inconsiderable trick of being both thrilling and quietly moving. A certain familiarity in its stock of elements aside, his blend of solid writing

allied to a fine eye for individual characterisation bodes well for the forthcoming volumes in the trilogy, especially as there are some potentially intriguing loose ends still to be resolved.



Lois McMaster Bujold – A Civil Campaign 🕮

Earthlight, 2000, 405pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-7434-0829-2

Reviewed by Avril A. Brown

When I received this book originally, my heart sank. I had heard of the author, of course, but her work had really never appealed to me. Well, how wrong I was.

Within a dozen pages, I got completely sucked into this, the latest in an ongoing series about Vor Lord Miles Vorkosigan. For those not already in the know (like me), Miles is the "mutie Vor lord", damaged before birth by a poison gas attack on his parents. By a combination of determination, talent and sheer cussedness he has the reached the exalted rank of Imperial Auditor.

This, however, doesn't appear to have done much to improve Miles' manners, nor curbed his habit of jumping in with both feet, and he spends a lot of this book being a right charmless nerk. This is particularly unfortunate as he has fallen head-over-heels and hopelessly in love. Since the object of his affections only escaped her previous marriage by dint of her fool of a husband getting himself killed, she's a bit less than chuffed to find herself pursued

by most of the eligible (and some not-so) bachelors on the planet.

Okay, so I suppose you could classify this as a love-story with a dash of sf. If you really insisted. But Bujold has been just a little bit smarter than that, and put sufficient side-plots in so that the non-romantically inclined among us can enjoy the book just as well.

Does the hero win the day and get the girl? Well, you'll have to read it and see. I can tell you that the twists and turns and sideplots and other bits of business make it rather a lot of fun getting there. The author is particularly adept at characters, and she has a pretty neat line in one-liners. She also manages to fill in a lot of background information on what has gone before, without making it obvious that she's doing just that. An awful lot of writers make pretty heavy work of that

I liked this book so much I went straight out and bought its predecessor *Komarr*. How's that for a recommendation?

Chris Bunch & Allan Cole - Sten 🕮

Orbit, 2000, 310pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-84149-007-5

Reviewed by Stuart Carter

"Over one million *Sten* books sold worldwide!" screams the cover over an armour-suited squaddie toting a large gun. "Some people just don't give up"! Hmm, I almost have before I've even begun.

Sten's father is a "worker" for The Company $^{\text{TM}}$, the largest single bastion of free enterprise in the galaxy. The Sten family are just one of millions of wage slaves on Vulcan, The Company's gargantuan industrial station, which supplies anything and everything The Empire $^{\text{TM}}$ needs. When the rest of Sten's family are killed by The Company's rich, mad and evil head honcho to protect his top secret "Bravo Project", Sten decides that free enterprise is just not for him and embarks on what looks like being a four book series of classic/hackneyed space opera by escaping to join the elite Imperial Guard.

On the minus side, *Sten* hasn't an original idea in its 310 pages, it is only just adequately written, and at times sickeningly and gratuitously violent. There is some kind of Felicific Calculus in effect, however: because The Company off-handedly kills 1,385

people in the first chapter it's quite alright for Sten to gun down, stab, break the necks of, burn and blow out of the airlock a similar number of victims in the ensuing 37 chapters.

On the plus side, *Sten* is a disarmingly simple and entertaining read that demands little of its readers, and I couldn't help but enjoy it. You know almost exactly what's going to happen next and, even while my PC side was kicking and screaming in indignation, my darker side relished the history of the Imperial Guard battle suit, the grubby sub-*Blade Runner* world of Vulcan and the undeniable righteousness of Sten's bloody guerrilla war against The Company. If you're looking for subtlety the Imperial Guard's armoury does include, of all things, Bester Grenades, which utterly confound their victim's sense of time. Well, it made me lauqh!

Sten is probably not something to give to sf's detractors to try to raise their opinion of the genre - it's one to read under the covers at night with a torch!

Elizabeth Counihan, Deirdre Counihan & Liz Williams (eds) – Fabulous Brighton

Shrew Press, 2000, 110pp, £4.99 ISBN 0-9538481-0-8

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

This is a collection of short stories set in Brighton, but not the Brighton we know. Sometimes the Brighton of the past or the future, or of an alternate universe. Even when the setting seems familiar, strangeness keeps breaking in.

In any collection, the quality of stories will be mixed, and here I felt that the ones which worked best are the ones most firmly rooted in their setting. The only story I really didn't care for was Peter James's 'Twelve Bolingbroke Avenue', which I thought was derivative, and the house which is the focus of the story could have been anywhere. At the other end of the scale, Elizabeth Counihan's 'Message in a Bottle' takes the reader on a marvellous journey back in time, a *tour de force* in the way it evokes several different periods while never losing the thread of the story. I was also impressed by Liz Williams' 'Prince of Lamentations', which gives us Brighton Pavilion as it never was but easily might be, in a

chilling and very moving story. Lynn Truss's 'The Green Man' and Nick Szczepanik's 'Hove Druid: I Stole Stone to Save Seagulls' embarrassed me by making me laugh out loud on the train where I was reading. And I loved the wicked twist which Deirdre Counihan gives to Arthurian material in 'Insinuations'.

Two of the editors are on the editorial team of *Scheherazade* magazine, and the cover is by the art editor, Deirdre Counihan. Many of the writers have appeared there, so it's a safe bet that if you like *Scheherazade* you will like this. If you don't know the magazine, then the collection is well worth trying. My spies tell me that more collections are planned from Shrew Press, and I'm looking forward to them.

[Shrew Press: 14 Queens Park Rise, Brighton BN2 2ZF, UK www.fabulousbrighton.co.uk]

Paul di Filipo – *Joe's Liver*

Cambrian Press, 2000, 313pp £25.00 ISBN 1-878914-11-1

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

I should say from the start that there is no character named Joe in this short novel, nor does his liver, or any other liver come to that, appear in the story. What we have is the picaresque story of

a young man from a Caribbean Island invaded by the US who embarks on a pilgrimage to what is, to him, the most important

place in America, Pleasantville, home of the *Reader's Digest*. Our

hero is even called Reader's Digest (Ardy for short) who was abandoned as an infant lying upon a bed of *Reader's Digest* magazines, and throughout his life he has learned everything he knows, his whole perspective on how the world works, from that same magazine. Now he wants to go to Pleasantville, but his pilgrimage doesn't go right from the very beginning. He falls in with a petty would-be drug smuggler who tries to smuggle Ardy across the border from Canada using a crudely altered stolen passport, he is chased by a pair of Immigration agents who dog his tracks throughout the rest of the book. Lost in the wilds of Maine he falls in with a vet who was once profiled in the pages of Reader's Digest, but rather than the gentle humanitarian Ardy imagines, is actually a crazed revolutionary intent on fomenting armed rebellion. Ardy escapes their botched

uprising and is picked up by a rich Bostonian whose husband is currently in gaol. She takes Ardy as her toy boy and chauffeur (though he has never learned to drive). Her son, Roy, however, turns out to be another incompetent would-be revolutionary, and Ardy is sucked into another disastrous scheme which results in

JOE'S LIVER

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half of Boston being irradiated by a bomb attack on a nuclear

facility. Ardy escapes, but in short order finds himself unwittingly involved in one mad scheme after another: being passed off as the son of the Dalai Lama in Pawtucket, in the middle of a gang war, part of an immigrant scam being run by a drunken ex-priest in New York, and as part of an army of downand-outs (led by the Maine vet in another shot at revolution). Throughout, Ardy retains his sunny innocence, seeing everything as it would be interpreted in the pages of Reader's Digest. Meanwhile, this optimistic vision of America is contrasted by the violence and destruction which accompanies Ardy every step of the way. It's a thin book, the contrivance of incident doesn't seem to lead to any particular insights other than the obvious and oft-repeated one that the world as presented by Reader's Digest does not match up to reality, nevertheless this is a

slickly written and often very funny adventure.

[Available in the UK, post paid for £25 from BBR, PO Box 625, Sheffield S1 3GY]

Lord Dunsany – *Time and the Gods* E. R. Eddison – *The Worm Ouroboros*

Millennium Fantasy Masterworks No. 2, 2000, 584pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798--989-9 Millennium Fantasy Masterworks No. 3, 2000, 520pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-993-7

First published in 1922, this book is an important milestone in

the development of modern fantasy. Some have claimed it as an

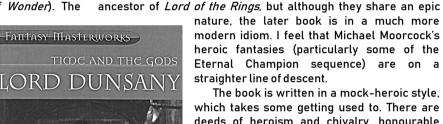
Reviewed by Chris Hill

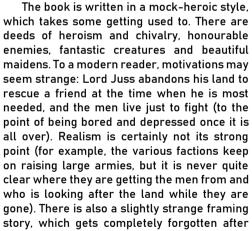
Time and the Gods assembles together six of Lord Dunsany's short story collections, originally published between 1905 (The Gods of Pegãna) and 1916 (The Last Book of Wonder). The

collection is extremely varied. Some stories are mythologically-styled tales of ancient gods, their prophets and subject peoples (the two *Pegãna* books, which for some reason are printed the wrong way round, with the earlier book last in the collection), some are heroic quests, while others are ghost stories or comic fantasies.

It would be dishonest of me to say that I liked all of them; in a collection of over one hundred stories, it would be very unlikely. A number of the stories are little more than squibs and some are made difficult to follow by some fairly obscure language. However, there are many absolute gems, which should be savoured. Of course, reading this book for review does not lead to the best way of appreciating these tales: you have to read too many too quickly. For best effect *Time and the Gods* should be dipped into, reading perhaps no more than two or three stories at a time.

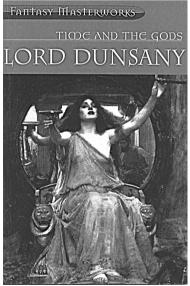
In *The Worm Ouroboros*, Lord Juss, the ruler of Demonland arranges for one of his lords to wrestle with Gorice, the king of Witchland, to determine who should have sovereignty over his realm. When Gorice is killed in the fight, his successor decides to take Witchland by force, after raising a sea monster to attack the Demonland fleet.





the first couple of chapters.

I did find myself with slightly mixed feelings. I can understand the importance and cleverness of the book, while having to admit that it is not really my sort of thing. However, Millennium should be praised for putting this back into print.



Paul Fraser (Ed.) – Spectrum SF1 / Paul Fraser (Ed.) – Spectrum SF2 /

Spectrum Publishing, February 2000, 160pp, £3.99 ISSN 1468-3903-01 Spectrum Publishing, April 2000, 160pp, £3.99 ISSN 1468-3903-02

Reviewed by Paul Billinger

In the dark distant past of the 1980s, Britain was a poor place for regular short story magazines, only the consistently strong

Interzone shining in the darkness. Others have come and gone but it could be that we are now seeing a renewed interest in the

short fiction form. *Interzone* is still going strong but we also have *The Third Alternative* (TTA Press) with an excellent contemporary design, a wide range of authors and, just as importantly, a regular publishing schedule. We now have a new, regular magazine, *Spectrum SF*, with two issues so far and the third available soon.

In format *Spectrum SF* feels like a cross between a magazine and an original anthology, being published as a small paperback book more along the lines of the relaunched *New Worlds* than a traditional magazine. *Spectrum SF* is almost entirely given over to fiction, with only a short editorial and reviews round-up. The fiction content, all original, is slanted towards the harder edge of sf with a range of well known authors.

The backbone of the first two issues is a serialisation of a new Kiteworld story by Keith Roberts, 'Drek Yarman' [reviewed by Paul Kincaid in *Vector* 211]. This tells the life story of a First Mate on a Kiteship from his upbringing in the slums of Fishgard, his escape on one of the ships and a disastrous voyage to the southern islands returning to revolution in his homeland. This serial alone makes it worth getting these magazines: a strong, well-structured story with vivid characters and a rich and complex backstory.

Both issues have other standout stories. In issue 1 it's 'Great Wall of Mars' by Alastair Reynolds, which takes place in the same

future setting as his excellent recent novel *Revelation Space* and shows the disastrous, but vital, consequences of a diplomatic mission to a rebel Martian settlement. As with the novel, the scope is vast but well centred, the large scale fitting surprisingly well into a short story. In the second issue, 'Destiny on Tartarus' by Eric Brown is also large in scale, describing the world of Tartarus Major and a young man's search for his father's history amongst the racing ships of Charybdis. The characterisation is especially strong with the enigmatic Blackman standing out.

Most of the remaining stories are successful, particularly ones by Keith Brooke, '.zipped', Stephen Palmer, 'Dr Vanchovy's Last Case', Stephen Baxter & Eric Brown's 'Green Eyed Monster' and the Keith Brooke & Eric Brown collaboration 'Mind's Eye'.

Overall two successful editions which give great promise and deserve to be read; I'll certainly be getting the third containing the conclusion to the Keith Roberts serial. For the magazine to have a long-term future it will need to widen the range of authors (good though they are) to include women writers (both editions are exclusively male) and hopefully to bring in new talent.

That aside, this is a strong start to a new series which deserves our support.

[Spectrum Publishing, PO Box 10308, Aberdeen, AB11 6ZR. Subscription is £14 for 4 issues, payable to "Spectrum Publishing"]

Roland J. Green - Voyage to Eneh

Reviewed by Stephen Deas

Whoever proof-read this needs to understand that a simple run through the spell-checker doesn't cut the mustard. This has more typos in it than all the other books I've ever read put together. No, really, I'm actually serious...

The year is sometime-in-the-future. Man has developed marvellous technologies and spread across the stars. None of this is relevant, however, as about a hundred years ago, the humans in *Voyage to Eneh* seem to have broken down en-route somewhere else, and, lacking a trans-light equivalent of the AA, have been reduced to landing on the conveniently nearby planet of Kilmoya, currently populated by furry humanoids of some sort. Said furry humanoids are enjoying stomping around their planet in steam and sail powered gunboats, while the humans, pretending to be some lost tribe from the interior, profess a policy of non-interference and quietly wait for the natives to develop enough technology to repair their spaceship.

All of which could have made for quite an interesting background and exploration of issues such as conflict and contamination of cultures. Instead it makes for an excuse to write about people stomping around in steam-powered gunboats. No technology, no gadgets, no existential musings, no intricate

background, nothing to stimulate the mind at all. This is simply an adventure story set in a place that doesn't exist, where some of the characters happen to be short and furry.

Tor Books, 2000, 384pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0-312-87231-3

Of course, there's not anything inherently wrong with that. I suppose it doesn't even necessarily matter that the internal conflicts between both the humans and the natives are so sketchy, you have to take the author's word for it that they make sense. I could even forgive the characters being, without exception, cardboard cut-out shrubs. But please, if this is an action/adventure story, I believe it's usual to have some action and adventure...? Eventually things start to happen, but mostly I found myself simply bemused – why did he do this apparently stupid thing? Why does it matter? Why does anyone care? Why am I still reading this?

Maybe if nineteenth century sea-faring stories are your reason for living, this might tolerably pass the time. I don't know - not my thing, guv, so I have no idea how accurate the details of the lifestyle and the ships are. Maybe they're perfect. Maybe that's enough for some people to go out and enjoy this and then enjoy the rest as well (did I mention this was book one of an 'x'ology?)

Voyage to Coma might have been a better title.

Simon R. Green – Hawk & Fisher 2: Fear And Loathing In Haven Millennium, 2000, 646pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-939-2 Reviewed by Colin Bird

Hawk and Fisher are a husband and wife team in the City Guard, walking the mean streets of the corrupt city of Haven in Green's reworking of cop story conventions within a Sword and Sorcery setting. This weighty tome combines three novel length tales which, between them, tackle just about every hoary old police story cliché you've ever read or seen in the movies. Green gives us by-the-book Commanders interfering with our heroes maverick tactics, evil crime-lords prepared to wreak havoc which, in reality, would devastate their business and, of course, those pencil-pushing assholes at City Hall whose political manoeuvring constantly dogs our heroes' investigations.

The first story is set in an isolated old mansion where family members gather for the reading of a will. Proceedings are interrupted when the deformed spawn of an ancient family liaison escapes from his cell and begins to pick off the hapless relatives one by one. For some reason the bastard creature has the ability to take on the appearance of another but, luckily for the grieving relatives, Hawk and Fisher are on hand to solve the case. It's all as clichéd as it sounds.

In the second story Hawk and Fisher are given separate assignments in the aftermath of a misguided drugs bust. While Hawk busts heads on the trail of the evil drug baron Fisher locks horns with a sorry bunch of diplomats who are decidedly ungrateful for her efforts to protect them from a sinister plot. The two stories intersect rather lamely and the intrigue never rises above the predictable.

The third tale is a mite more complex and is also the longest of the stories. Hawk and Fisher have to thwart a conspiracy to kill the monarchs from two neighbouring kingdoms as they enter a period of détente after a long and bloody conflict. Further complications ensue when a supernaturally reborn rogue enters the fray with his own muddy motivations. It's the most interesting of the three tales but suffers because Hawk and Fisher are off stage for large chunks of the fractured narrative. Not a very involving book then, but entertaining in an undemanding sort of way and a clever deployment of police story conventions within the fantasy genre.

Thomas Harlan - The Gate of Fire

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

This is the second volume of Harlan's fantasy sequence 'The Other Empire', which began last year with Shadow of Ararat [reviewed in V208]. As it appears that these are the beginning of a series rather than the first two books of a trilogy, the overall work will be vast. The setting is an alternate Rome, where the Western Empire never fell, and where a recognisably Roman society survived into the seventh century AD. Here magic is common and institutionalised, particularly in Roman legions composed of magicians. The basic conflict in the first book was between the two halves of the Roman Empire on one side and the Persians on the other, but now the stage is opening out, other peoples are drawn into the conflict, and Rome in both East and West is under threat.

When I reviewed the first volume I said that the pace of the story suffered through the detailed description and building up of the background. I feel this is also true – perhaps even more so – of the second volume. The amount of research that Harlan has done is impressive, and the world of his imagination is vividly authentic. Scene by scene it works, yet I felt that for most of the

Tor, 2000, 477pp, \$27.95, ISBN 0-312-86544-9

book the thrust of the story was swamped by the detail. I found it hard to tell where it was going, and in many cases the motivations of the characters were obscure. Only in the final section did the threads come together in a compelling sequence.

Stylistically the book is uneven. I was irritated by Harlan's habit of beginning a sentence with 'Too,' (in the sense of 'also'), and that he doesn't seem to know that the word 'magi' is plural. This may seem like nitpicking, but it's enough to jerk this reader at least out of engagement with the story. Another point I would question is his use of Latin words in the dialogue of characters who are, presumably, speaking Latin throughout; again, it breaks the illusion of reality.

There is much to admire in this book, and I want to know where he will take the story next, particularly as many of his characters suffered 'cliff-hanger' endings. However, I feel that it could be much better if Harlan were more selective, so that readers don't lose sight of the basic thread of his plot. Prospective readers should begin with the first volume; there's too much complexity to pick up the story part way through.

Tom Holt - Valhalla 🕮

Reviewed by Jon Wallace

Tom Holt has written a lot of books, covering a lot of myths, a few legends and most of the historical greats. In this one, surprisingly enough, he covers a bit of Norse mythology, some legends and most of the historical greats... They're all in here: Valkyries, mead drinking horned Vikings, Attila the Hun.

Yes, I know that Attila the Hun wasn't a Viking, but he's ended up in Valhalla anyway. And there's the problem. No, not the incongruity of Attila in Valhalla, it's that this book is a bit all over the place.

Now, I don't mind separate narrative threads. I've read *Lord of the Rings*, I can handle separate narrative threads. But I am a bit of a stickler for these threads actually weaving together into a coherent plot. Without that, all you've got is a collection of short stories, stories that have been sawed up, shuffled and put back

together again. Well not exactly shuffled, that would mix up the chronology, more riffled.

The threads are actually interesting enough on their own, nothing here to give an outright laugh, but I smiled a bit. The bit where the heroine's dad is the theatrical agent that gets gods their gigs is amusing.

But in the end I didn't really like this book. Far too bitty for me. Call me a traditionalist, but I prefer my plots to link up and make sense. Maybe Holt should have considered writing this as a series of shorts and tying them together at the end in true fix-up style? Oh and the title is DULL. Whatever happened to the man who gave us titles like *Paint Your Dragon*, or *Snow White and the Seven Samural*?

overtly feminist slant as Racoona Sheldon.

James Tiptree, Jr. – *Meet Me At Infinity*

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

In an all too brief period, from 1967 to 1977, James Tiptree Jr,

under a pseudonym inspired by a jar of marmalade, produced some of the most challenging, enigmatic and brilliant short stories the genre has seen. The chatty, avuncular 'Tip' also established a number of deep friendships through voluminous correspondence with editors, writers and fans, and in particular with fanzine editor Jeffery D. Smith. Smith invited Tiptree to participate in a written 'Symposium on Women and Science Fiction', published as *Khatru 3/4*, in 1976. Several of the other participants, including Joanna Russ, found Tiptree's masculine persona hard to take, and Tip was invited to step down

Then, in 1977, shortly after the publication of the *Khatru* Symposium, James Tiptree Jr, was revealed as one Alice Sheldon, a 60 year old psychologist and ex intelligence operative, who had already started submitting stories with a more

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THE UNCOLLECTED TIPTREE: FICTION AND NONFICTION

Tor Books, 2000, 396pp, \$25.95 ISBN 0-312-85874-4

Orbit, 2000, 277pp, £15.99 ISBN 1-85723-983-0

Most stories have it that Smith 'outed' Tiptree, bringing a brilliant and meteoric career to a premature end. *Meet Me at Infinity* tells a slightly different story.

This is not The Best of James Tiptree Jr'. That is served by several other collections and the splendid Arkham House Her Smoke Rose Up Forever. In fact, as Smith admits, most of the stories here are slight, with the notable exception of the previously uncollected The Color of Neanderthal Eyes' (F&SF1988, later published as a part of an Ace double). Trey of Hearts', previously unpublished, certainly qualifies, though, as one of the most erotic of Tiptree's stories. But it is the second half, the non-fiction writings, that make this book special and valuable. This is made up of articles, autobiographical pieces, travel writing, and

letters largely compiled by Tiptree for publication and collected by Smith, who became Tiptree's literary executor after her death in 1987 (in failing health, and with her husband in the terminal stages of Alzheimer's disease, she shot him and then herself). Here is a life lived to the full, and yet in a strange and self imposed isolation whose strain was beginning to tell, and an almost palpable relief when her real identity became known, but also a

puzzled hurt at the sudden 're-evaluation' (invariably by male critics) of "James Tiptree Jr." as a writer that followed in its wake. And perhaps, at long last, it's time for another re-evaluation. Here is James Tiptree Jr. who was Alice Sheldon – brilliant, sharp and funny, angry, passionate and fiercely loyal. Someone whose friendship would be something you treasured for ever.

Kate Jacoby - *Voice of the Demon*

Millennium, 2000, 478pp, £6.99, ISBN 1-85798-926-0

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

Voice of the Demon is set in a fantasy world with a Scottish flavour, where sorcery is outlawed, and anyone with magical powers must either hide them or risk execution. The country of Lusara, years before, was conquered by Selar, who now rules and seeks to extend his power, not realising that one of his closest advisers is an evil entity with an agenda of his own. One strand of the plot deals with the consequences of this, while a second strand follows the working out of an ancient prophecy and the lives of the people who have key parts to play. Robert Douglas, hero of the previous volume, Exile's Return is pivotal to both strands of the book.

When I reviewed the first volume, I said that I didn't quite understand why everyone in the book found Robert so compelling. He comes over better in this version, perhaps because in some ways he seems more vulnerable, as he fights some buried knowledge which he has sworn never to reveal.

Although I suspect that many readers will guess what his secret is, long before any of the characters in the book, his dilemma is still a powerful one, and the culmination of his struggle is unexpected.

The way that magic is outlawed means that its use has to be secret and limited, and in my view this is one of the strengths of the book. It isn't an easy option, for the writer or her characters. The story becomes much more interesting than if magic was allowed to solve all the problems. Although it's a cliché to say, "I couldn't put it down", the pace quickens in the last third of the book and I found it very hard to do just that.

The plot is complex. Although I think it would be possible to read the book without having read the first volume, it would be better to begin with *Exile's Return*, if you haven't already read it. I recommend both books, and I'm looking forward to the next volume.

Fritz Leiber - The Big Time

Tor Books, 2000, 127pp, \$21.95 ISBN 0-312-89079-6

Reviewed by Mark Plummer

In 1958, when if the name 'Peter Hamilton' meant anything to sf readers it was as the editor of Scottish sf magazine *Nebula*, Fritz Leiber won the Hugo for best novel with a two-part *Galaxy* serial. The book version, first published by Ace in 1961, ran to 129 pages. Now, over forty years later, *The Big Time* receives a handsome hardcover reissue from Tor, and battles for shelf space with the giant novels of recent years.

Everywhere the Change War is in full flow with the two sides, the 'Spiders' and the 'Snakes', battling across the timelines altering past and future to achieve victory a billion or more years hence. Somewhere outside the cosmos, in an R'n'R centre for battle-scarred Spider soldiers known simply as the Place, narrator Greta Farzane works as an 'Entertainer'. All the action in this compact book occurs within the confines of this one room—

"midway in size and atmosphere between a large nightclub... and a small Zeppelin hangar decorated for a party"—making this very much a novel of character. In the past, critics have noted that the novel has something of the feel of a play, and it's an unavoidable conclusion, especially given Leiber's own theatrical background.

On a simple quantitative level this new edition looks like poor value for money and the language does have something of a dated feel to it—it's not just the page count that leaves you in no doubt that you're not reading a contemporary work—but it's an important novel and worth seeking out, although you may have to look hard for its slender form, nestling amongst its giant modern cousins by the likes of Alistair Reynolds, China Miéville and the latter-day Peter Hamilton.

Holly Lisle - Vengeance of Dragons 🕮

Gollancz, 2000, 379pp, £10.99 ISBN 0-575-06898-8

Reviewed by Iain Emsley

Vengeance of Dragons is the second of the 'Secret Texts' series, begun with Diplomacy of Wolves (reviewed in Vector 205). Whereas its predecessor had a claustrophobic, fraught atmosphere, this book is much more relaxed, taking its time in developing the characters. There is a consequent loss of momentum, but this is more than amply made up through the new characters that are fully embedded in the plot.

Kait Galweigh has found the Mirror of Souls, but is marooned in the Wizard's Circle with Ian and Hasmal. They are rescued by Ry Sabir, exiled from his Family, and make an arrangement to bring the Mirror back to Calimekka, their former home. Both Kait and Ry are guided by voices, but quickly realise that they cannot be trusted. On their return journey, they are attacked by the Sabirs, who seize the Mirror. Both the Sabirs and Kait's company are brought into a battle of wizards as the Dragons, a group of long-dead wizards, try to regain human form through the Sabirs. Whilst escaping, Kait finds her uncle, Dùghall, whom she assumed to be dead. Dùghall begins to lead the attempt to

recover the Mirror using Kait and Ry's shape-shifting abilities and Falcon magic.

Danya, Kait's cousin, gives birth to Solander but is tricked by Luercas, a Dragon's voice, to kill the newborn. Inhabiting the body, Luercas physically changes Danya from being a monster to human again, so isolating her from the people who have sheltered her. Danya has become increasingly embittered through her isolation and she becomes a wildcard. The author appears to be building her up for a specific, though as yet undefined, purpose.

This next instalment is more democratic than its predecessor. Dùghall takes much of the novel's weight, linking Hasmal's magic to the Family system of Kait and Ry. Both Kait and Ry develop emotionally, while the magicians, Hasmal and Dùghall, begin to integrate the Mirror of Souls and the Wizards into the plot.

Lisle links many of the plot threads in the first novel, allowing them to form a more coherent whole. As the story progresses, the characters on the sides are developed and push the plot closer to its climax. Although this novel does not have the same atmosphere as the previous one, it raises the ante for the

conclusion.

Jack McDevitt - Slow Lightning

Reviewed by John Newsinger

Men and women have reached the stars, colonies have been successfully established and humankind's problems (poverty, disease, crime, etc.), have all been conquered. But still we are alone. The Universe is empty. No evidence of intelligent life has been discovered anywhere. Ennui seems to be the fate of the species. But there are still a few determined to carry on the search for first contact, among them Kim Brandywine. She is involved in the Beacon Project, exploding stars in a somewhat desperate attempt to attract the attention of anyone, anything, out there. Kim is keeping faith with her sister, Emily, who disappeared in confused circumstances, nearly thirty years

A reluctant and half-hearted investigation into Emily's disappearance turns into a fully-fledged detective story. Kim uncovers evidence that contact was made, that it cost her sister her life, and that there has been a cover-up ever since. Slow Lightning is the story of the how she exposes the truth and changes humankind's direction forever.

McDevitt has come up with a good idea here and on one level the novel works quite well. It does sustain a degree of interest, although it is certainly not 'nail-biting' as Stephen King's blurb

Voyager, 2000, 435pp, £10.99 ISBN 0-00-224735-6

suggests. There is, however, a real problem with suspending disbelief. McDevitt's low-key style just does not convince. Momentous events take place in a too matter-of-fact setting. It really is B-movie stuff, a novel where the author apparently cannot afford the necessary special effects! Even his aliens are small-scale, disappointing. What is at stake is far too momentous for the characters he invents and the narrative style he employs. In the novel Kim has to take on the authorities, stealing spaceships, breaking the law on a whole number of occasions. What is missing from the narrative, however, is any sense of politics. McDevitt does not seem to have any real idea of what power is and what its exercise involves. The whole affair remains one dimensional.

Much the same criticism can be made of Kim's personal relationships. The tragedies that accompany her efforts at uncovering the first contact leave the readers unmoved. We are not engaged by her activities. Slow Lightning is one of those books where you find yourself just watching the characters rather than being involved with them. Definitely a book only to be read if you cannot lay your hands on a Bruce Sterling, a Paul McAuley, a Walter Jon Williams or an Ian Macdonald.

Tor Books, 2000, 416pp, \$27.95 ISBN 0-312-87054-X

Sean McMullen - *The Miocene Arrow*

Reviewed by Mark Plummer

Civilisation in the America of the Fortieth Century has reverted to a few enclaves containing quasi-feudal states. The aftermath of 'The Chaos War' some two thousand years previously is The Call which holds sway across most of the earth and sweeps through the enclaves every few days, temporarily plunging men and all but the smallest animals into a fugue state and luring them away into the wilderness. As if that weren't enough, orbiting 'Sentinels' destroy any vehicle more than twenty-nine feet six inches long or wide or anything travelling at more than 120 miles per hour.

But, as always, mankind adapts and survives. Life in the enclaves—the Callhavens—is rigidly hierarchical, with disputes settled by stylised warfare based on a strict code of chivalry. Transport is by tram or 'wing', small aircraft built within the Sentinel-imposed constraints, and every persons carries a tether, ready to anchor themselves against the lure of The Call.

Into this society come a number of travellers, unconventional in manner and with radical ideas, sowing dissent amongst the enclaves and stirring up war on a scale previously unknown. Perhaps they are the semi-mythical Callwalkers, immune to the power of The Call and still able to function while everybody else is incapacitated by Call-induced reverie. But where do they come from and what do they want? And what exactly is the Miocene

McMullan's future takes some setting up and this is often clumsy: for all that it might be necessary for the novel it's unlikely that somebody would have to explain to their colleagues something as fundamental to existence as The Call but that's exactly what happens here. Elsewhere, certain aspects of the world are left curiously vague, although this may be explained in the earlier volume which shares this setting (apparently there is at least one other novel, although this fact isn't noted on the cover of this proof copy). Yet there is pace enough here to carry you through such stylistic infelicities and even through the explanation of the true nature of The Call which, when it comes down to it, is pretty daft. Political machinations bring the Callhavens into conflict, a new kind of war waged without chivalric constraints and embracing new and mysterious technologies, and this leads to plenty of personal conflict as the war causes some of the younger flyers to clash with the values and strictures of their society.

Overall The Miocene Arrow offers few surprises—although the eponymous weapon is perhaps an exception—but an involving plot and suitably exotic society add up a engaging novel all the same.

John Meaney – Paradox 🕮

Reviewed by Jon Wallace

This is quite a big book. It's full of wonders and broad, sweeping intellectual vistas - but of course it is - this is sf after all. The question as to whether this is a good sf book or not is harder to answer.

In the beginning it seems as though this is going to be one of your standard "Oh look, civilisation has fallen and the colonists have forgotten their technological roots" pseudo-fantasies. A market place, people collecting their water from a stand-pipe substitute. Our hero uses a scribing tablet to record his poetry, but that's obviously left-over technology, isn't it? But as you read on, it becomes obvious quickly that that's not true. This culture is

technologically advanced, civilisation hasn't fallen, it has just

Bantam, 2000, 408pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-593-04573-4

rediscovered that it's better to keep the peasants poor and happy than to give them some wonders and have to slap them down when they want more...

Into this carefully structured world of budding poet Tom Corcorigan, fall two people who are going to change his life. The first is a Pilot, an almost legendary figure who leaves Tom a great gift. The second is the Oracle Gérard d'Ovraison who takes from him something of great value. These two events start Tom on a journey which takes him from the lower strata of his society all the way to the top.

Arrow?

As Tom makes his way from the bottom levels to the very heights of society, we are given glimpses of how this world works at each level. Alongside this, Tom's gift from the Pilot shows him enigmatic scenes from the life of an early Pilot, one who was trained on Earth...

John Meaney paints a detailed picture. Everything we see, we see through Tom. The interactions between Tom and his peers at every level are finely drawn and the incidental characters are as detailed as Tom sees them. Like life, some are mere ciphers that flit in and out of view, some are meticulously observed as Tom himself focuses on them. This narrative technique is highly

effective, but contains a flaw, especially noticeable in a novel like this. There is not enough explanatory detail. I know, we reviewers usually complain about info-dumping, but this time there just isn't enough detail for me. Granted, the technology of the far future will be obscure and incomprehensible, but I found my inability to get a feel for the stuff frustrating. This is maybe a good thing, it makes you work for it, but it didn't really work for me. Still, apart from that, I enjoyed the ambience, the detail in the society and the bits I could piece together of how it all came to be. Maybe the book does work after all.

China Miéville - Perdido Street Station

Macmillan, 2000, 710pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-333-78172-4

Reviewed by Andrew M. Butler

Miéville's first novel *King Rat* was a dark fantasy set in contemporary London, featuring a King of the Birds and King of Spiders, as well as the titular character. In his second novel, a spider also features, as well as flight. Yagharek, a garuda, visits a

researcher and part-time academic Isaac Dan der Grimnebulin to ask him to restore the wings which have been amoutated from him. At about the same time. Isaac's lover Lin. an insect headed being, is visited by Mr Motley, who commissions her to make a sculpture of him. It is Isaac's progress that we follow most closely, as he pays a criminal friend to bring him examples of winged creatures, and visits to garuda for inspiration. In his researches he stumbles on an entity that the city government and the criminal underworld would rather he hadn't, and finds himself caught up in a crisis that threatens his life, his friends' lives and the whole city of New Crobuzon.

Perdido Street Station is a hybrid of fantasy and science fiction. Clearly it is fantasy, since it has a map of the city at the front, cares not a jot about cube-square ratios and flying, unfeasibly large spiders or summoning demons. At the same time, Isaac proceeds by means of the scientific method in his researches, uses a difference engine.

and has a robotic cleaning device which is suffering from a virus. The station itself, both an actual place and a metaphor for Isaac, is hardly a mainstay of fantasy; indeed at first thought trains would seem to be inimicable to fantasy. I've said it before and will say it again: any sufficiently advanced fantasy is indistinguishable from science fiction (and vice versa, of course). The epigraph at the front is from Philip K Dick, a move which pays off in the last third of the novel with a series of situations which would fit neatly into the late American writer's explorations of what it is to be human.

In this generic hybridisation, Miéville is following his acknowledged literary forebears of M. John Harrison and Mervyn Peake. Harrison's Viriconium sequence [now brought together as the omnibus Viriconium, in the Millennium Fantasy Masterworks series; see 'Particles'] was set in a city with a similar flavour to this one, although that was a city that mutated according to the needs of the individual narratives. The city of New Crobuzon is a quasi-Victorian one, perhaps even an attempt to reclaim such a setting from the American steampunks, although Tim Powers's The Anubis Gates is a clear ancestor. The streets are crowded, filthy, never very far from the river, full of curiosities and monstrosities, as well as of revolutionaries and spies. Just as

Peake's Gormenghast bears a passing resemblance to his home island of Sark, so this city is a mutated London, perhaps via Joseph Conrad, G K Chesterton or Dickens. It even has its own version of Jack the Ripper. Just as *King Rat* could be followed on

an A to Z map of London, so there is a sense that Miéville's imagination knows and infiltrates every cranny of his fantasy city.

It can't be emphasised enough that this is a fantasy in the tradition of Peake and Harrison, rather than Tolkien and Lewis. There are no elves, no singing around camp fires, no cosy resolutions. Nor is this any kind of hymn to a lost England, or even a lost London. The characters here face real problems, real dangers, and come away from them damaged or not at all. There is a real political bite to the depiction of the cityscape; the dockers go on strike and this is broken up by government forces. Later the strike breaking is depicted as a riot on the part of the workers: spin exists even in Fantasyland. The powers that be keep tabs on their citizens by means of a network of informers and sleepers, rather than by crystal balls.

The other impressive thing is the way Isaac is not an unproblematic hero. He faces a series of choices, which might be

described as moral, that have real consequences for all involved, and he does not necessarily make the right choice. His world view is not the same as that of the garuda, a factor that has an impact on his dealings with Yagharek and the rest of his species. Yagharek is revealed early on to be some kind of criminal, but his actions throughout the novel, whilst generally speaking could be perceived as good, are not necessary and sufficient to redeem him.

But the real star of the novel is the prose, which effortlessly and elegantly takes us into a whole world contained in a city without ever straying into purple prose. Whilst Miéville manages to maintain an increasing pace as the narrative progresses, he still finds time for describing the inner life of the characters, to make a side-track to describe a pertinent detail, or focus on a moment of jaw-dropping beauty or stomach-gripping horror.

I have to confess that I'm not a fan of fantasy per se, and it has to be a special book that will hold my interest for seven hundred pages. This second novel from a new, young, British talent overcomes any objections, and demands to be consumed in a single sitting. Put a weekend aside for it, and start early, and reread it. You won't regret it.

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PERDIDÔ STREET

STATION

Michael Moorcock - King of the City

Scribner, 2000, 421pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-684-86140-2

Take the assortment that makes up The Deep Fix: guitars, drums,

vocals and a fannish hanger-on. Trace their origins and follow the trajectories of their post-group activities in London - elsewhere, too, but predominantly in London. You have there the basic plot and cast. And London, its quarters, its suburbs, its weather, its river, is as much a character here as ever Dickens made it to be. A focal point is Brookgate, a district somewhere north of Holborn, home ground of Dennis Dover, the novel's narrator, who sees and hates its passage from the neighbourly-traditional to the postmodernglitzy. Den has moved from lead guitar to join the paparazzi, and it is the London scene, political, journalistic, social and showbiz, that is witnessed by his cynical eyes. Den has a worshipped cousin, Rosie, who has sung with the band but who goes off to do good in terrible Africa. Den is there, too, to get atrocity pix during the Rwanda killings, and it

is in this part of the story that a castigating indignation, directed against what is seen as being ultimately the effects of free market consumer capitalism, is most virulently voiced.

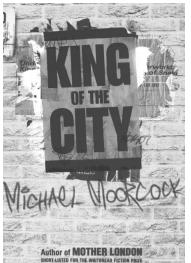
Den's political stance is, however, aired in many of the book's contexts. "Consuming to live, living to consume" is the world plan which the "creaking Whitehall farce" and its Washington counterpart function to maintain. Associated lampooning is

unrestrainedly savage but frequently funny. What saves the book

from appearing tractish is the novelistic development of its own super-capitalist in the person of Johnny Begg, the rock group hangeron, who inherits and, as Lord Barbican, builds up a potentially world-embracing empire, while continuing to interact with and manipulate members of the one-time group. His presence gives rise to several of the set pieces which help to make the novel so compelling a read. One such is the siege of the Red Mill; another the Tower Bridge debacle. Tubby, ex-drummer and reclusive activist, comes into possession of a converted windmill on Tufnell Hill, and, having incurred the displeasure of Barbican, needs to fortify it. The Mill itself is a wonderful creation, and the repelling of an attack on it is bizarrely anarchical. Towards the end of the story, Barbican, planning a charity gig, pressurises or charms members of The Deep Fix to reassemble to perform on Tower Bridge, an elite audience to

Earthlight, 2000, 536pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-671-03728-5

be afloat on pontoons. This is no place to describe the episode. Read it. From it flow all the action, subterfuges, revelations with which the story is wound up, right to Den's concluding half-ironic, wholly relevant, words: "Myths and miracles, pards. What would we do without them?" (Which is a part-reprise and fulfilment of the book's opening sentence.)



Caiseal Mór - The Circle And The Cross 🕮

Reviewed by Sue Thomason

This is Book One of 'The Wanderers', Book Two (*The Song Of The Earth*) is due out in July 2000, and Book Three (*The Water Of Life*) in October 2000.

It's a quasi-historical fantasy-romance, and about what you'd expect for something written by an Australian with a put-on Irish name. The main setting is Dark Ages Ireland, and the book opens (ignoring the map with the mis-spelled Latin title, and the totally irrelevant Prologue) with the arrival (by shipwreck) on Fair Erin's shore of a group of terminally stupid and sex-obsessed monks, led by their bishop, an evangelical psycopath. Sigh. This is the sort of book in which, when a tiny open boat full of monks is dashed to pieces against the rocks, the monks drag themselves off the beach where they've washed up, light a fire (!) with the remains of their boat, spend the night praying the rosary (which I don't think had been invented) and reading the Gospels (they ALL carry a personal copy, which I find astonishing), and then next day prepare to celebrate Mass, using the incense which they've handily retrieved from their boat.

You want to know what the book's about? It's basically about

peaceful, mystical, noble, co-educational, forward-thinking traditionalists, etc. etc. – they are Pagan, and therefore not only the Good Guys but totally wonderful in every conceivable way, okay?), with a few berserker Saxons (mercenary thugs, frequently drunk – Pagan clearly doesn't include Heathen in Caiseal Mór's book) thrown in for variety. There's this charismatic Irish chieftainess called Caitlin, who fancies one of her warriors. He's called Fintan, and he hasn't studied his *Star Trek* history, because he covets (and wears into battle) the bright red cloak of Seginus, one of the monks (Seginus got the cloak from his Daddy, who was a Roman legionary). Well, everybody knows what

Christians (nasty smelly power-mad upstarts) vs. Druids (wise,

(it hasn't started yet, but it's about to, so pay attention) is about these two kids called Mawn and Sianan and some magical rowan-berries. No, I don't really know much more about them than that; you'll have to go and read Book Two (rather you than

happens to people who wear red shirts oops cloaks into battle,

and sure enough Fintan promptly gets killed. But the REAL STORY

John Kenneth Muir – A History and Critical Analysis of Blake's 7, the 1978–1981 British Television Space Adventure McFarland & Company, Inc., 2000, 214pp, £28.90 ISBN 0-7864-0600-3

Reviewed by Gary S. Dalkin

When I was asked to review this book I was concerned it might be rich in academic jargon. Fortunately not; apart from the library binding, the title and the price, this is much more a fan book than anything an academic would endorse.

Part I is 20 pages on the 'Origins and History' of the series, before the majority of the book, 140 pages, offers a detailed episode guide and critical commentary. Part III really should be an appendix, covering 'Fan Clubs and the Internet, Videos, Comics and Books' in a handful of pages. Part IV consists of 25 pages of essays – five of them – on various aspects of the show, from sex to cinematography. Finally there is an epilogue, and appendix on genre conventions in *Blake's 7*, notes, a bibliography, index and videography. This last is next to useless for UK readers, covering

only the first American issues.

I am wary of trusting this book. Perhaps mistakes are inevitable, but I rapidly lost faith in Mr Muir's research when within the first 15 pages I read that the initial *Dr Who* Dalek serial had six episodes (there were seven) and that *Star Wars* was taking London by storm in September 1977 (it didn't open in the capital until Boxing Day 1977). Beyond this, his use of American college terms to designate the various series of *Blake's 7* rapidly becomes irritating. Whoever heard of a TV show having a 'freshman' or a 'sophomore' year?

The style is generally fluent, with some interesting details and a considerable number of not especially startling insights. Muir wants us to take Blake's 7seriously, but doesn't argue sufficiently

well to make a completely convincing case. After noting how media sf is prone to fans supporting one show and attacking a rival, he spends rather too much time attacking *Star Trek* and *Babylon 5*. Which strikes me as what the Americans would call sophomoric.

This is not at all a bad book. I enjoyed it and was irritated by it in roughly equal proportions. The show was a cheap, clichéd pulp with dreadful production values, realistic certainly not being a

word to apply without provoking laughter. Some strong scripts and compelling characters kept us watching, but that really is as far as it goes. I suspect that had the author seen more British TV from the era he would not find *Blake's 7* so remarkable. Even so, if it wasn't for the ludicrous price I'd recommend this to anyone with more than a casual interest. As it is, borrow a copy off your nearest sophomore.

P.G. Nagle - The Guns of Valverde

Tor Forge, 2000, 412pp, \$25.95 ISBN 0-312-86549-X

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

What do science fiction writers write when they're not writing science fiction? Judging from what gets into print, it's mostly crime fiction or historical fiction. P.C. Nagle, who lives in New Mexico, has chosen the latter, with a pair of novels about the most dramatic incident in the American Civil War to have occurred within her home state. The first volume, Glorieta Pass (1999), tells of the Confederate incursion from Texas into Union-held New Mexico early in 1862, their victory over an inferior Union force at Valverde, and their ultimate defeat in the battle of Glorieta Pass. This new volume takes up the story in the aftermath of that victory as the Confederates, faced with diminishing supplies, begin a retreat that is about to turn into one of the great epics of survival in wartime. Their obvious route back to Texas was blocked, and so they had to go by rough mountain and desert trails that would have been difficult for one man and a mule, for an army complete with supply wagons, artillery and wounded, it should have been impossible. Yet they made it back with their army mostly intact, a stunning achievement that provides a suitably gripping plot in this novel.

Meanwhile, the regular army Colonel in command of the Union forces was being undermined by the machinations of a glory-hungry lay-preacher who commanded the Colorado Volunteers, one of the largest units with the Union army in New Mexico. (It is worth remembering that this machinating Colonel Chivington would shortly be responsible for the Sand Creek massacre, one of the most inglorious episodes in the entire sad history of the Plains Indians Wars.)

In the first volume, Nagle decorated her basic story with novelettish sub-plots that were too romantic in approach to sit easily with the gutsy war story she was also trying to tell. Now, with some of the characters from the first volume killed off and a new sub-plot introduced about a scout battling deserts and Indians to bring a vital message to the Union commander in New Mexico, the story overall has a much tougher edge, and since every one of the characters here is involved in battling against the odds and the landscape, the book has been given a much more unified feel.

Kim Newman - Seven Stars

Pocket Books (Simon & Schuster), 2000, 386pp, £6.99, ISBN 0-671-77338-0

Reviewed by Paul Billinger

This is Newman's third short story collection, set in his warped version of a world at a tangent to our own; one which is occasionally glimpsed but which The Diogenes Club are determined to keep hidden.

The first story, 'Angel Down, Sussex', is set in the 1920's and tells of an investigation into the mysterious return of Rose, a child who vanished 50 years ago but appears not to have aged. This contains a typical Newman mix, with versions of familiar characters and others based on real or fictional ones, to give a superbly realised tale.

This is followed by two stories featuring the debonair investigator Richard Jeperson (think part Jason King, part John Steed) delving into reports of skinhead violence in a genteel seaside town (The End of the Pier Show') and then the strange case of an outbreak of madness spreading from a private asylum (You Don't Have to be Mad...'). This being Newman's world, neither is quite what it first appears and both show the importance of The Diogenes Club in securing the safety of Britain.

Next are parts 3 and 4 of the 'Where the Bodies are Buried' sequence (the first two are collected in *Famous Monsters*). These follow the story of a fictional horror film franchise, starring the monstrous Rod Hackwill, from reporter Ian Scobie's investigation of a copycat killer, to the possible expansion of the

franchise into Mimesis, an advanced form of virtual reality. On the way there is an intelligent questioning of the hypocrisy of the media and the establishment towards the effect (or otherwise) of genre fiction.

Which brings us to the final story, the epic 'Seven Stars' following the progress and effect of the mystical jewel of the seven stars from its origins in the tombs of ancient Egypt to its rediscovery in the basement of the British Museum. Then, via the intervention of The Gumshoe in 1940's Hollywood, we finally reach the extreme information age of the near future and the cataclysmic battle to save reality. An amazing tale told in a rapid, episodic, pulp style, with just the right balance of serious and comic (the same can be said for the whole collection).

Individually the stories work brilliantly, the writing always fluid, the settings memorable, the plots tight, but it is as a collection that its real strength shines through. The worrying thing is that Newman gives a strong impression that he has all these parallel-but-connected timelines, inhabited by various versions of the same characters, mapped out. One day we may see the whole of his work fit into place, interlocking together to form... what? Until that day comes I'll continue to enjoy the work of a master storyteller.

Andre Norton and Sasha Miller – *To the King a Daughter*

Tor Books, 2000, 320pp, \$23.95 ISBN 0-312-87336-0

Reviewed by Lesley Hatch

Take two classy writers of fantasy, in collaboration, who have created a believable world full of intrigue and conspiracy, and you get a novel that makes compelling reading.

The novel begins with a heavily pregnant woman on the run from her enemies, accompanied by her faithful retainers. Alditha is the last direct heir of the Ash clan, and she carries a child whose father is the king of Rendel, a man prone to dalliances with any woman who takes his fancy. She dies in giving birth to Ashen, who gets taken in by Zazar, wise-woman to the people who inhabit the Bale-Bog, and begins a life devoted to learning simple magic and healing methods. Not that she is exactly welcome in a community that traditionally feeds Outlanders to the reptilian

inhabitants of the Bale-Bog.

Ashen grows up against a backdrop of a world where volcanoes are erupting without warning, and where various races are waging war on each other. It is this which causes a nation of Sea-Rovers to sail south and settle in the former home of the Ash clan. In Rendelsham, King Boroth is dying, as is the Ash tree (symbol of the clan) that grows in the forecourt of the Great Fane, alongside the Oak, Yew and Rowan trees, all of which are thriving. Inside the Fane, three stained-glass windows are changing their appearance. And Queen Ysa, wife to Boroth and mother to the dissolute Prince Florian, finds herself gifted with the power to rule the kingdom when the four Rings made from the sacred Clan trees magically transfer themselves from Boroth's hands to hers.

Ashen's life changes radically when Zazar escorts her to a place of safety, where she is ultimately found by a noble from the court of Rendelsham and introduced to polite society, an act which causes various reactions amongst the people at court. The noble in question has an ulterior motive, as do so many of the characters in this novel

How all these disparate storylines come together is a cleverly done piece of work; the characters are well-drawn and developed, the background is detailed, and I was kept guessing on what was going to happen from start to finish. And the final sentence is one of the best cliff-hangers I have seen in a long

Frederick Pohl (Ed.) – *The SFWA Grand Masters Volume 2*

Tor, 2000, 432pp, \$25.95 ISBN 0-312-866879-0

Reviewed by LJ Hurst

Andre Norton, Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov, Alfred Bester and Ray Bradbury, each of them awarded the title "Grand Master" by the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, are the second set of authors from whose work the contents of this anthology has been selected. With less than twenty holders of that honour there is only one more volume to come. In his introduction Frederick Pohl describes the role of the SFWA and says that the purposes of the collections are fund raising, as among one of the association's functions is assistance to authors in case of disaster.

A volume like this must have one other major function: to introduce the readers of today to the "Grand Masters", either in the sense of the work of these authors, or in the type of sf they were writing. Anthologies have served this role at several times in the past: in the 1940s when editors such as Groff Conklin put out their massive volumes, and in the late 1960s when Kingsley Amis and Robert Conquest edited the Spectrum series. The main difference between then and now, though, is that those editors were introducing contemporary material to a wider world. Now the classics are having to be re-launched.

The SFWA came into being in the 1960s, but Pohl has made his selection largely from the 1940s and 1950s. This isn't always true: Arthur C. Clarke's material includes 'The Star' from 1952 and 'A Meeting With Medusa' from 1972. On the other hand all the Asimov material is from the 1950s, though it does include 'The Last Question' and 'The Martian Way'.

Andre Norton has both sf and fantasy included here, including the long 'Were-Wrath' (1982), though it is clear she was writing sf such as 'Mousetrap' (1952) and 'All Cats Are Gray' (1953) long before.

It's odd to see how certain themes keep recurring. Such a one is the role of the scavenger ship, and the rogue-ish captains they have. That or something like it occurs in stories by Norton, Asimov and Clarke; while the related idea, that once mankind has made the leap out of Earth, then the whole galaxy will soon become a long-distance commuting space, is something that ties Asimov's 'Martian Way' to Alfred Bester's 'Fondly Fahrenheit'.

'Fondly Fahrenheit' is an odd story, with a weird style of narrative. In his Comment, Bester explains his intention. It is worth reading if only to go back and look at Norton's 'Were-Wrath' again, where, despite a theme of telepathy, it is almost impossible to feel that anything has been transmitted or received by the reader. And by that comparison, ask which author might have achieved their desired effect on their readers.

Robert Reed – *Marrow*

TOR Books, 2000, 352pp, \$25.95 ISBN 0-312-86801-4

Reviewed by John D. Owen

It goes without saying that there is an attraction in the vast for sf authors. After all, if we lift up our eyes from the ground on which we stand and behold the universe, then vastness is all around us. It's the primary "sense of wonder" in science fiction, that depiction of scale, of humanity's comparative insignificance within the universe. Within that vastness, the works of humankind can seem very small indeed, so the urge to enlarge the scale at which we operate is very seductive. From Larry Niven's Ringworld, to Bob Shaw's Orbitsville, to Greg Bear's Eon (with its corridor stretching to the ends of the Universe), to the assortment of artifacts mentioned in David Brin's 'Uplift War' books, the huge, constructed Big Dumb Object is seen as a way of intelligent life leaving a mark upon the Universe.

In Robert Reed's new book, Marrow, the BDO is a vast ship, seemingly made from a Jupiter-sized gas giant in some unknown place and time, found deserted and subsequently taken over by humans. Even after converting the ship into a luxury cruise liner, capable of carrying millions of people from different alien races for a year or a lifetime, the humans don't know all the ship's secrets. When senior members of the human crew are sent to investigate one of those mysteries, namely what lies at the very heart of the ship, it leads to a five thousand year epic adventure that nearly destroys the vessel.

Not content with playing with his glorious ship, Reed decides to give his human characters the means of near immortality, all the better to people the epic story of a world within a ship. Marrow, the place at the centre of the ship, is an unrelentingly harsh environment, where characters are tested to destruction, though many are then resurrected, their bodies rebuilt. The people that return from that adventure are very different folk

Marrow is an ambitious book, full of huge imaginings, and it has a relentless pace and an intriguing story to tell. But it is also flawed. Reed's immortal humans seem to hang in a timelessness built on duty and the struggle against adversity and very little else. It gives the characters a soulless aspect, an inhumanity that left this reader cold towards them and their fate. For me, this makes Marrow an interesting work, but rather arid.

Jennifer E. Porter and Darcee L McLaren (eds) - Star Trek and Sacred Ground: Explorations of Star Trek, Religion and American Culture SUNY Press, 1999, 315pp, \$20.95 ISBN 0-7914-4334-5

Reviewed by Farah Mendlesohn

Star Trek and Sacred Ground is a collection of essays claiming, as the title indicates, to explore the role and interpretation of

religion in the Star Trek universe. This claim is a little disingenuous, as the book almost entirely focuses on Christianity and, to a lesser extent, on the New Age Movement However, this does not devalue the book, merely circumscribes it. The book is divided into three parts, the first consisting of a general overview of the entire canon, chapters 3-6 each taking one of the sequences; the second claims to focus on religious and spiritual themes, and it was here that Christianity took over as the dominant area for discussion, and finally, Part Three considers Star Trek fandom as a religious experience.

One problem for the editors has clearly been judging the classical and theological education of their target audience, so that at one end, we have Robert Asa's overly simplistic discussion of classical mythology in his case study of 'Who Mourns for Adonis?' and at the other extreme Larry Kreitzer, in his consideration of suffering and redemption, assumes we all took at least Theology 101, and proves that working for one's reading pleasure is inherently satisfactory.

Part Two of the book is the least balanced, in that while it acknowledges the humanism of Gene Rodenberry's vision, each of the chapters here falls into the trap of finding what they wish to see-Christianity, but Kreitzer (already mentioned) and Jeffrey Scott Lamp, both do an excellent job of demonstrating, perhaps,

how embedded Christianity is in the cultural discourse of even an evangelical aetheist. To place my assertions in context, one of the most revealing exercises is to work out just how few episodes the authors of chapters 4-10 actually employ. If religion were that embedded, the choice would be wider.

Culture, however, is perhaps the most neglected aspect of the book's title. Although several authors mention (as an aside) the dominant liberal culture of the 1960s, none takes the time to discuss the changed religious context of the 1980s and 1990s. This is particularly lamentable in Peter Linford's otherwise excellent dissection of the difference between faith, which he argues ST:TNG and DS9 (but not Voyager) largely ignore, and religiosity to which it pays homage, as he fails to illuminate the struggles with which liberal American culture has been engaged in attempting to reconcile inclusiveness and tolerance with the demands of an intolerant and exclusive ideologies.

Part Three is comprised of a discussion of the fan community. Interesting, but there is nothing here which readers of *Vector* will not have seen before.

Overall, this is an interesting book, but it is unlikely that any given reader will enjoy all of it, or find more than sections enlightening.

Karen Sands and Marietta Frank - *Back in the Spaceship Again: Juvenile Science Fiction Series Since 1945*Greenwood Press, 1999, \$55.00 ISBN 0313301921

Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

The "juvenile science fiction series" is one of those fields more beloved of collectors than academics, but hardly even then at the centre of an activity. Readers of this review might recall Tom Swift or Danny Dunn, but when, exactly, did you last actually read them? And while we all recall the juvenile sf of Andre Norton or Robert A. Heinlein how many of us have read the 'Animorphs' series?

Sands and Frank examine series sf for children by isolating its characteristics. They look at how juvenile sf "domesticates" space and science, and come up with some convincing answers to why material billed as "science fiction" for children so frequently contains fantastic, non-scientific elements. If sf is the literature of the unknown children's (rather than Young Adult) fiction relies on the safe, comfortable known world - hence the pull towards domesticity and the safely distancing appeal of animal characters (the 'Space Cat' series. While they cover elements such as gender ("No Business in Space?: the Female Presence"), the function of humour, utopianism and the element of "coming of age", in tackling the difficult question of the accuracy of science in children's sf they do tend, ironically, to oversimplify. Children's sf often stems from the desire to teach (and preach): Hugo Gernsback's sugar-coated pill of hard science lives on in Danny Dunn. But while some authors desperately but honourably oversimplify, there are those who either don't know or don't care and have their young space travellers landing on comets and asteroids and stars in an impossible muddle of confused terminology. (The egregious W. E. Johns is apt here, although equally apt is the authors' citation of Johns's environmental utopianism.) Here, I think, the problem of the *writer's* ignorance is skirted, while the sense of wonder in the observable facts of the physical universe which sf can instill in the young reader isn't given its due.

Although this is a slim book (barely 100 pages of text) the extensive bibliography should be a useful starting-point for anyone considering research in the field. The time-span 1945-to present is a large one, and at times there is a sense that more attention could be given to the dynamics of the times: in what ways are contemporary series similar to or different from those of the 1950s? The emphasis, too, is largely American, and while I as a Britisher learned a lot about such talked-about American series as the 'Miss Pickerell' or 'Mushroom Planet' books I was conscious of gaps. While John Christopher's 'Tripods' series (is a serial the same as a series?) and W. E. Johns's 'Rex Clinton' adventures are mentioned, other British series such as William Temple's 'Martin Magnus' books are not. It seems distinctly odd from this side of the Atlantic not to cite Patrick Moore (though no odder than the fact that Moore is not mentioned in the Encyclopedia of Science Fiction's entry on "Children's SF"!).

Robert Silverberg (ed) – *Far Horizons*

Orbit, 1999, 691pp, £7.99 ISBN 185723 968 7

Reviewed by Gary S. Dalkin

Presumably working on the premise that people don't read short stories and novellas are the wrong length for individual publication, Robert Silverberg has commissioned and assembled 11 new novellas into a book the size of a brick. Tacitly assuming that even fans of imaginative sf would sooner read about what they know than boldly go where no writer has gone before, Silverberg has hit upon an idea so obvious it is retrospectively amazing that no editor thought of it earlier. Penning a new Rome Eterna adventure himself, Silverberg has commissioned 10 of the biggest names in sf to write new novellas set in the universes of their on-going series. In order, Far Horizons contains: a new Hainish story by Ursula K. Le Guin, an aside to Joe Haldeman's The Forever War, an Ender tale from Orson Scott Card, David

Brin's latest addition to the Uplift Universe and Silverberg's own 'Getting to Know the Dragon'. 'Orphans of the Helix' continues where Dan Simmon's Hyperon Cantos left off, followed by Nancy Kress' return to the world of The Sleepless, a new Frederick Pohl Heechee story, a visit to Gregory Benford's Galactic Center, a 'Ship' yarn from Anne McCaffrey and finally a story by Greg Bear set in The Way.

In the wordage allocated this review it is impossible to cover each novella in any detail, so I shall focus on just one. As readers of Greg Bear's *Psychlone* will testify, this hard sf writer has the occasional taste for the extremely disturbing, nightmarish horror, albeit couched in scientific rationale. Here he tells a story of The Way, set shortly after the events in the interminable

Legacy. Happily 'The Ghosts of the Way' tells a well paced adventure filled with the sort of mind-bending ideas which made Eon such a stunning book. The story is dedicated to William Hope Hodgson, and is essentially a tribute/homage to his largely unread (and unreadable), The Night Land, with nods to H.P. Lovecraft (At the Mountains of Madness), Arthur C. Clarke (2001: A Space Odyssey) and Robert Holdstock 'Mythago' series). Yet it remains wholly within the parameters of The Way universe, develops the character of Olmy further, and offers an ingenious explanation for the existence of ghosts. Beyond this, Bear offers a genuinely subversive and harrowing vision of religious

transcendence, only faltering at the end with an unsatisfying pseudo-Buddhist glimpse of 'heaven'.

Although introductions are provided, without having read some of the preceding books many of these novellas will be oftentimes if not incomprehensible, then largely baffling. Resonances will certainly go unappreciated, and some key plot points will be spoiled for those intending to get around to reading the earlier instalments later. That said, enjoy a couple of these works and the book justifies the price of admission. Follow several of the series represented here and *Far Horizons* becomes an essential read.

Robert Silverberg – *Tower Of Glass* Eric Frank Russell – *Wasp*

Gollancz, 2000, 206pp, £9.99, ISBN 0-57507-097-8 Gollancz, 2000, 175pp, £9.99, ISBN 0-57507-095-1

Reviewed by Mat Coward

I'm not sure what the correct term is for paperbacks-with-flaps, but that's what these two books are, part of Gollancz's "Collectors' Edition" series, very nicely designed by Sue Michniewicz, in the traditional bright yellow livery.

Tower of Glass (1970), at least, is a novel worthy of such treatment. In the 23rd Century, Simeon Krug is the last of the great entrepreneurs, in a world made almost paradisiacal by science. Instant travel via the transmat has effectively abolished nations, while robotics and eugenics have done away, respectively, with the need and the existence of a proletariat. The final "withering away of the state" is expected imminently.

Krug invented and marketed intelligent androids, to do the work which robots could not do. One of the richest and most powerful men in the world, he has become obsessed with replying to a signal received from intelligent aliens. To this end, he – or rather, his most trusted androids – are building an immense glass tower in the Arctic.

At first, this tachyon-beam device seems to be what the book is about. But gradually, skilfully, Silverberg shifts the focus of our attention, from the technology to the people. While Krug can see nothing but his tower (until it's too late), we are watching the androids. All of them yearn for equality with the "womb-born," all of them believe that they are people, not things, but they are

divided into two camps: some organise, educate and agitate, in the time-honoured fashion, while others rely on religion. Specifically, they pray to their god and creator, Krug, to deliver them from bondage. Krug the man knows nothing of this.

So: it appears there *is* a proletariat, after all, and they are about ready to inherit the earth. You could read all sorts of things into this novel: it's about slavery, capitalism, religion, and the question (an sf favourite, more topical now than ever before) of how we define sentience. But it works so well because at heart it is a finely written and compelling story about unrequited love.

Wasp (1957) seems to me altogether more ordinary, and a rather odd choice for this series. James Mowry is a secret agent sent from Earth to destabilise an enemy planet by carrying out a kind of petty guerrilla warfare, based on the theory that something as small and insignificant as a wasp in a car can be responsible for hundreds of deaths by distracting the driver, thus causing a pile-up.

There are no real characters, no back-story to speak of, little for the reader to identify with or get involved in. It's thoroughly readable nonetheless, and enjoyable enough as a relentlessly straightforward adventure story, but when Terry Pratchett says, in a cover blurb, "I can't imagine a funnier terrorists' handbook", he produces easily the best gag in the book.

Edmund Smyth (ed.) - Jules Verne: Narratives of Modernity

Liverpool University Press, 160pp, £14.99? ISBN 0-85323-704-2

Reviewed by L. J. Hurst

Did you read the recent Pulp Fictions paperback reprints of Jules Verne? Perhaps you wondered, if Verne is the French father, as H G Wells was the British father, of science fiction, why so few of Verne's memorable characters are French? Britons, Germans, Americans – yes, they went around and below the surface of the world, and then from it to the Moon – but where were the French? Or did science make Verne so blind that nationality was of no matter to him?

On the other hand, as several of the essays in this new collection make clear, French literature (at least in the Academie Francais) had little time for Verne, despite his labours. Yet it is interesting to realise, as Verne's answers to his interviewers pop up in essay after essay, that these are from different interviews at different times, conducted in French and English (though Verne admitted he could not read English well enough to follow our literature in the original), showing the early and continuing influence Verne achieved across the English speaking globe.

The authors of these ten essays (including Edmund Smyth's introduction) are principally concerned with tying Verne into the French literary canon. Which means, also, pointing out how far the establishment tended to exclude him. Nevertheless Verne went on writing undaunted. He was a man who could turn the legendary laundry list into art - at least it is claimed that *Around The World...* is little more than an expansion of Thomas Cook's

catalogue, and Timothy Unwin has other examples of what he calls Verne's "near-plagiarism" of technical works.

Despite his addiction to the real, Verne managed to take the wonders of the natural world, and take technology, too, and merge them into something that his readers perceived as much greater. In rather too little detail Daniel Compere points out Verne can use these features in his fantasies; his example comes from *The Floating Town (Une Ville Flottante)* where the traitor is killed during a duel because his sword acts as a lightning conductor. And amazingly for a man known for popularising 'science' Verne's tendency to use natural phenomena as the device by which his story is brought to an end – literally the catastrophe – (the flushing out by lava of Professor Lidenbrook's party and the destruction by maelstrom of Captain Nemo being the best-known examples, though no more than typical) suggest a man who never envisaged the world becoming subject by the technological advances he described.

For an author who could include such contradictions it is no wonder to find his appeal to the surrealists and the other alternative schools of French literature in the twentieth century... Students using this as a reference will need a better reading knowledge of French than me because the authors of these essays tend to make their associations only with French literature and its criticism. For instance, in Sarah Capitanio's

Tor, 2000, 352pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0-312-87206-2

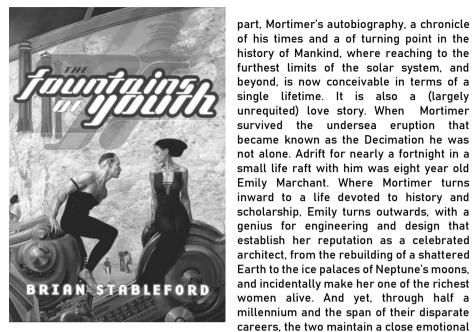
interesting essay on Verne and utopianism her references are restricted to criticism of, and utopiae written in, French, which will restrict this for students who might like to include references to the much bigger world of Utopian fiction. But that is a small point to make.

Brian Stableford - Fountains of Youth

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

In Fountains of Youth, the third in a linked series of novels which include, so, far, Inherit the Earth and Architects of Emortality. Brian Stableford returns to the future history where Mankind is on the cusp of attaining a practical immortality, and the first generation of 'emortals' (they are not immune to accidents or even deliberate acts of violence) are coming to terms with lifespans that may number hundreds or thousands of years. One of them, Mortimer Gray, who only by a freak of chance survives a global cataclysm that wipes out hundreds of millions, decides to devote his life to compiling a history of everything known, imagined and theorised about Mankind's old and now-vanguished enemy, death. Over the next 480 years, Mortimer Gray's History of Death is 'decanted' into the Labyrinth in ten massive hyperlinked volumes, covering plague and disease, faith and religion, burial rites, war, suicide and

murder. Stableford has obviously had immense fun with this, giving free reign to Gray's commentary as each volume is decanted, in a fascinating mixture of fact, theorising and speculation. Fountains of Youth is, in fact, an expanded version of the novella length 'Mortimer Gray's History of Death' (Asimov's, April 1995 and reprinted in Garner Dozois's Year's Best Science Fiction: Thirteenth Annual Collection) and positively revels in the freedom allowed in its greater length. But as well as a story of one man's obsessive magnum opus, Fountains of Youth is also, in



part, Mortimer's autobiography, a chronicle of his times and a of turning point in the history of Mankind, where reaching to the furthest limits of the solar system, and beyond, is now conceivable in terms of a single lifetime. It is also a (largely unrequited) love story. When Mortimer survived the undersea eruption that became known as the Decimation he was not alone. Adrift for nearly a fortnight in a small life raft with him was eight year old Emily Marchant. Where Mortimer turns inward to a life devoted to history and scholarship, Emily turns outwards, with a genius for engineering and design that establish her reputation as a celebrated architect, from the rebuilding of a shattered Earth to the ice palaces of Neptune's moons, and incidentally make her one of the richest women alive. And yet, through half a

bond that is as touching as it is at times exasperating. (You wish Mortimer would realise that Emily has loved him since their rescue from the Decimation.) Paul Kincaid, reviewing Architects of Emortality in V209, said it was a scandal that Stableford's finest work is not being published in Britain. I can only agree. Fountains of Youth, perhaps even more than its predecessor, is one of the best sf novels Brian has written, and its lack of a UK publication undeservedly robs it of a chance at the BSFA Award.

Brian Stableford - Year Zero

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

An immortal but ageing Lilith, together with Belial, Astarte, Mephistopheles, Sammael, Beelzebub and Astaroth are all closeted on the 13th floor of a run down 60s housing block, Arcadia house, where Molly (an ex-whore trying to regain custody of her children) is placed by Social Services. Asmodeus is down the hall

in 1310 but, as Lilith tells Molly, "he doesn't get out much." Having failed to put the frighteners on their new neighbour, the demons are taking tea with her in Lilith's flat and explaining that since absconding from Hell, they are living in somewhat reduced circumstances. Molly would probably be more surprised by this had she not some weeks before, met Elvis at the cheese counter of Sainburys and a fallen angel in the local library. It's going to be a strange year, but, only a few months into the new millennium (or Year Zero as Molly prefers to think of it, holding that the millennium doesn't properly begin until 2001), Molly doesn't know how strange. But she's already kicked Death's ass (and has his bathrobe hanging on the back of her door) and banged on Lilith's door to angrily return his

scythe. Elvis's immortality serum, though, seems to be wearing off, or at least it's proving more effective on his internal fauna than on his outer flesh, and his accelerating decay has forced Molly to break off their relationship before it goes any further or Sarob Press, 2000, 221pp, £22.50 ISBN 1-902309-10-3

he falls apart completely. What she now needs is a good (or at least steady) job so she can persuade the DSS that she is a fit mother to have her children back out of foster care. Which is not a good time to suddenly get abducted by alien greys and then have her apartment raided by Men in Black working from Croydon.



Molly's new life is certainly getting more interesting than playing dominatrix to middle businessman Torquemadam's aged in Caledonian Road dungeon. Even if the warrior princess costume does come in handy when Dark Tom (saving her from another "interrogation" by a Man in Black) informs her one of her daughters has been stolen by the Queen of the Fays. How much of this is real, and how much is a side effect of Molly's job as a medical test subject for Peaslee Pharmaceuticals that leave her losing 48 hours of her life at a time, apparently spent in obsessive bouts of housework? And what about the Devil's threat, shortly before steering 14 year old joyrider Dean into a brick wall, that he doesn't need his old washed-out lieutenants, he has a better army now to bring on the coming

Apocalypse? Does this mean Molly is the Anti-AntiChrist, or just that the combination of Dr Wingate's treatments and her old LSD habit have irredeemably fried her brain?

I've always suspected Brian of having a wry and irreverent

sense of humour, but here, in his 50th and Sarob's first novel, he just lets rip to beat Robert Rankin and Tom Holt at their own game to wonderful effect, and still manages to insert a sharp and

unexpected twist at the end.

[Limited to 300 signed copies @ £22.50 + £2.50 p+p from Sarob Press, "Bryderwen", 41 Forest View, Glenboi, Mountain Ash, CF45 3DU]

Freda Warrington – *The Sapphire Throne*

Earthlight, 2000, 527pp, £6.99 ISBN 0743408268

Reviewed by Iain Emsley

The Sapphire Throne is the second part of the Jewelfire trilogy, begun with The Amber Citadel. The focus of the novel is moves away from the city of Parione and the Tower to the realms of the Aelyr and the Bhadradomen as the main characters of the previous novel, Rufryd, Tanthe and Ysomir, follow separate paths

Having disappeared into Verdanholm, the Aelyr home, Tanthe discovers her Aelyr heritage and meets her family, including Falthorn, the Valahyr's leader. After escaping, she joins the envoys to Verdanholm, although they become involved in Falthorn's plans to protect his home from the Bhadradomen.

Embittered by Tanthe's relationship with Saphaender, Rufryd volunteers to be the envoy to Vexor, home of the Bhadradomen. However, when Rufryd reaches the island, Zhoaah, the overlord, humiliates and abandons him there.

Following King Garnelys's murder, his granddaughter Helananthe takes the throne in Parione and begins to rebuild Aventuria. Ysomir, Garnelys's wife and murderer, is sentenced to life imprisonment. In her incarceration, she begins to speak with the voices of dead monarchs as Helananthe tries to find the weapons that had previously defeated the Bhadradomen.

The characters become more developed as they are separated from each other. Pursuing her visions from the first volume, Tanthe finds more about her own history, dispelling her illusions of the Aelyr. Rufryd, feeling abandoned by Tanthe, moves through a series of destructive relationships and is left completely isolated, emotionally and physically.

Initially the focus of the novel is drawn away from the events of *The Amber Citadel* as the subplots are developed, but they are eventually linked back to the Tower. The pace quickens as further twists are added to the plot and the various characters, often casting doubt about assumptions that had been previously made. By fleshing out the stories behind the first part of the trilogy, Warrington has set things up for a real climax in the third volume.

Kathryn Wesley - The 10th Kingdom 🕮

HarperCollins Entertainment, 2000, 421pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-00-710265-8

Reviewed by Carol Ann Kerry-Green

Do you believe in Happy Ever After? The world of the Nine Kingdoms is the world of fairytales where everyone always lives happy ever after. Or do they? It's the world where Snow White's grandson, Wendell, is about to be crowned King. But Happy Ever After isn't all it's made out to be.

Virginia lives on the outskirts of Central Park, with her father, Tony, who is a janitor/handyman, where she works as a waitress in a cafe in Central Park and dreams of escape. Relish is the Troll King with a penchant for shoes, especially magic shoes that make him invisible. Wendell is a Prince, who cares for nothing but enjoying himself. The Queen is the wicked stepmother, well not the wicked stepmother, but her protégé, her replacement. And Wolf? Well, Wolf is half-human, half-wolf (with a real tail) and he falls in love with Virginia.

Stopping at the Snow White Memorial Prison to see his stepmother, Wendell is captured by the Troll King and his children, Blabberwort, Bluebell and Burly. However, discovers that the Queen is no longer being held prisoner but has managed to ensorcell the Troll King and is determined to wreak her vengeance on the House of White. For a start, she turns Wendell in to her dog, and her dog into Wendell, it is her intention to set the

Dog Prince up as King in Wendell's place.

Through sheer luck, dog-Wendell manages to give his captors the slip by running through a magic mirror to a new world, the 10th Kingdom – New York's Central Park, where he is run over by Virginia on her bike on her way to work. Not knowing or guessing who or what the dog is, Virginia takes him to work with her and her adventures into the Nine Kingdoms and the land of fairytale begin. Her father soon follows, having being given a wishing bean by Wolf which has disastrous consequences.

There follows a pleasant romp through the Nine Kingdoms as Virginia, Wendell, Tony and Wolf try to avoid detection by the Trolls and at the same time work towards getting Wendell back to his own body and his Kingdom. But, there is no real tension in the novel, no one really gets hurt that much. The novel lacks something that I can't quite put my finger on. It's not a comedy, nor I think meant to be one, yet it reads almost as though it is. It's based on a TV mini-series which I haven't seen (it been shown on Sky). If you enjoyed the TV series it will be a good complement. If you've not seen it, then it makes a pleasant couple of afternoon's reading, but don't expect deep significant meaning from the book.



James Barclay - Dawnthief

Millennium, 2000, 527pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-860-4 **James Barclay** – *Noonshade*

Gollancz, 2000, 484pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-06895-7 The second volume, plus the first, released in mass market pb, of Barclay's 'Chronicles of the Raven', about the adventures of a band of mercenary warriors. *Dawnthief* was reviewed by Vikki Lee in V208 as "one of those books you either love or hate...a rewarding romp of almost non-stop action".

with a high body count as the Raven are caught up in the hunt for four artefacts needed

to activate the ultimate, and possibly world-threatening, magical spell, Dawnthief.

Greg Bear - Beyond Heaven's River

Millennium, 2000, 256pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-85798-978-3

Greg Bear - Tangents

Millennium, 2000, 290pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-979-1

Greg Bear - Queen of Angels

Millennium, 2000, 474pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-943-0 Three further volumes in Millennium's reissue of Bear's back catalogue. In *Beyond Heaven's River*, WW II Japanese sailor Kawahita is plucked from the sea of Midway by aliens, who offer him a world in which he can recreate and alter history. *Tangents* is Bear's first story collection, which includes the title story, the classic 'Blood Music' and 'Sisters' first published in the original 1989 edition of this collection. *Queen of Angels* (1990) is still regarded (by this reviewer at least) as Bear's best work and, in JILL, one of the most intriguing treatments of a self-aware Al consciousness.

Terry Bisson – In the Upper Room, and other unlikely stories

Tor Books, 2000, 284pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0-312-87404-9 A collection of sixteen stories, from places as diverse as Omni, SF Age and Playboy, and equally diverse in tone, from a linked pair of almost Lafferty-esque 'tall tales" ('Edge of the Universe' and 'Get Me to the Church on Time') to the disturbing and provocative 'macs', in which clones of convicted serial murders are parcelled out to the victims' families for revenge. All four of the *Playboy* stories here, and particularly the title story, show a curious and detailed obsession with the finer points of women's lingerie. A couple of stories are built around intriguing ideas ('Smoother' and '10:07:24') but not developed much beyond short exercises, while 'First Fire' leaves you wondering if Bisson really set this up just to play out on a nod to Clarke's 'The Nine Billion Names of God'. A curious, but ultimately somewhat uneven, collection.

Steven Brust - To Reign in Hell

Tor Orb, 2000, 286pp, \$13.96 ISBN 0-312-87049-3 A reissue from 1984, and with a glowing Foreword from Zelazny, this is an absolute gem. Brust's story of the fallout among the Firstborn of Heaven, and a tragic misunderstanding, brought about by the selfseeking machinations of a lower angel, between Yaweh and Satan Teading to a revolt in Heaven, is a hugely entertaining tale, told with panache and sharp wit. There are some wonderful touches. Early in the book Yaweh invites Satan to stay over one evening, "We'll be having some pin dancing. I would be pleased", while later Beelzebub, protecting his master from the loyal but not intellectually gifted Michael, calls to Satan, "Milord, get thee behind

Brust, as Zelazny points out, is an accomplished prose stylist, with a wonderful feeling for dialogue and character (Beelzebub, in the form of a Golden Retriever, talks in Elizabethan cadence, Ariel is constantly switching – not always successfully – between verse forms, from rhyming couplets to iambic tetrameter, much to the exasperation of Mephistopheles and the amusement of Leviathan.) Brilliant.

John Crowley – *Little, Big*

Millennium, 2000, 538pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-711-X Crowley, perhaps more than anyone apart from Neil Gaiman, has a deep and abiding fascination with the notion of Story as a force that imbues, shapes, and gives meaning to life and the characters it set upon its stage. That fascination (almost a preoccupation) is here worked out, as it is in his sf novels *The Deep* and, almost

explicitly, Engine Summer, in one of the most magical, delightful and intensively beautiful and moving fantasies yet written. This is the story of Alice Dale ("Daily Alice") Drinkwater, who resolves that she will marry Smoky Barnable, a young clerk, and bring him to her family home of Edgewood. But it is also the story of the house (which is actually many houses, all inside each other), and the man who built it, and of its place between two worlds, and the Story which imbues it, and is passed back and down from generation to generation of those who come to live there. There aren't enough superlatives to do this book justice. If it doesn't move you, make you laugh and cry often at the same time - then it's worth checking your pulse.

Philip K. Dick - *Minority Report*

Millennium, 2000, 380pp, £7.99 ISBN 1-85798-947-3
Philip K. Dick – We Can Remember It For You Wholesale

Millennium, 2000, 395pp, £7.99 ISBN 1-85798-948-1 Volumes 4 and 5, concluding Millennium's reissue of The Complete Short Stories of Philip K. Dick, complete with introduction (by Tiptree and Disch in these volumes) and Author's Afterwords on each story. As mentioned before, pretty essential to any serious sf collection but a joy in their own right for Dick's quirky, absurdist, off-the-wall stories, which mix (often in the same story) the surreal, the hilarious, the deeply disturbing and the provocative.

Debra Doyle, and James D. MacDonald - Earth Final Conflict: Requiem for Boone

Tor Books, 2000, 253pp, £13.95 ISBN 0-312-87461-8
Third and concluding (?) novelisation based on
the Gene Roddenberry TV series, one of which
(*The First Protector*, reviewed by Vikki Lee in
V209) was the last work of the late and muchloved James White.

Graham Edwards - Stone And Sea, Book Two Of The Stone Trilogy □

Voyager, 2000, 439pp, £5.99, 0-00-651071

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

Of the several ways in which an author can convey information about a fantasy world to a reader, the one that works least well, the infodump, is the method chosen by the author of this book: and there is a great deal of information to be conveyed. In the preceding volume of the trilogy Jonah Lightfoot was transported from nineteenth century Earth to "charm" saturated world of Stone, discovering it to be one vast vertical wall created to store the memories of all time in "memory rods" which Jonah can manipulate. In this volume. Stone is revealed as not a wall but a cone. New characters are introduced, and they all have a history to relate or information to pass to Jonah. The most irritating of these is a talking tree who alters the syntax of the English language by placing verbs at the end of sentences - but not all the time. Meanwhile, the evil dragon Archan threatens Stone's very existence. Fortunately "Stone enjoys coincidence", for the resolution of the plot depends upon it.

Joe Haldeman - Mindbridge

Gollancz, 2000, 185pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-07114-1

Fritz Leiber – *The Wanderer*

Gollancz, 2000, 346pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-07112-5

Walter M.Miller - The Best of

Walter M. Miller, Jr

Gollancz, 2000, 472pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-07119-2

John Sladek - The Reproductive System

Gollancz, 2000, 191pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-07116-8

Jack Vance – *Big Planet*

Gollancz, 2000, 218pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-07117-6

Roger Zelazny – *This Immortal*

Gollancz, 2000, 174pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-07115-X titles from Gollancz's 'vellowback' Collectors' Edition reissues, handsomely presented in almost-uniform editions, but, one feels, overpriced at a tenner-especially given most of these, with the exception of the Miller omnibus, are on the shy side of 200 pages. However, it's nice to have back Sladek's farcical romp in which the world is in danger of being eaten (or, perhaps, "assimilated") by selfevolving small grey boxes (whose first independent action was to disable their 'off' switches) and classic stories by Haldeman, Zelazny and others. (There are sixteen titles in the series at the last count. Bishop's No Enemy But Time, Silverberg's Tower of Glass and Russell's Wasp are reviewed in this issue's 'First Impresions'). Walter M. Miller is probably best known for his novel A Canticle for Liebowitz, although many of the stories collected in The Best of Walter M. Miller (such as the 1955 Hugo Award winning novelette The Darfsteller', 'Dark Benediction', 'Conditionally Human' and , 'Crucifixus Etiam', point equally to a profound interest in religion allied with a unique sf style and sensibility.

M. John Harrison - Viriconium

Millennium, 2000, 563pp, £7.99 ISBN 1-85798-995-3 An omnibus edition, seventh in the Fantasy Masterworks series, that includes Harrison's ground- breaking and genre-subverting fantasy novels The Pastel City, A Storm of Wings and In Viriconium plus the stories collected in Viriconium Knights. A big influence on China Mieville's Perdido Street Station (see 'First Impressions' this issue). Written over a period of 15 years, the three novels in particular show a deliberate development and exploration of style and technique that push (and at the same time deconstruct) the conventions and boundaries of the 'sword and sorcery' genre in a way possibly only rivalled by Delany's 'Nevèrÿon' sequence. They are also, in their own bleak, absurdist way, incredibly funny, an inherent aspect of the genre overlooked by most of its practitioners apart from a few notable exceptions like Moorcock and Fritz Lieber. Unique and brilliant, this fully deserves its place as a Fantasy Masterwork.

Brian Herbert and Kevin J. Anderson - *House Harkonnen*

Hodder & Stoughton, 2000, 626pp, £17.99 ISBN 0-340-

The second of a trilogy of prequels (this is subtitled 'Prelude to Dune II') to Frank Herbert's classic sf saga, based on the notes, outlines and correspondence left after his death. House Harkonnen, the previous House Atriedes (reviewed by Andrew Seaman in V210) and the forthcoming The Spice War (2001) tell the story a generation before the opening of Dune, as a bitter enmity develops between the two Houses and Jessica's betrayal of her Bene Gesserit sisterhood by allowing herself to fall in love with Duke Leto

Mercedes Lackey and Larry Dixon - Owlsight

Millennium, 2000, 389pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-861-2 A sequel to *Owlflight* in Lackey's 'Valdemar' series, this was reviewed in trade paperback by Lesley Hatch in V208. Keisha, the new Healer, and Darian, an apprentice Mage, are thrown together to combat a new threat of a fatal illness brought to Errol's Grove by a barbarian clan and, four years older, are now at an age where they start to take an interest in each other. Disappointingly, in Lesley's view, the book suffers from "too much talk and not enough action, a characteristic of Lackey's work when she has a co-writer".

Orson Scott Card – Earthfall 🛄

Orbit, 2000, 370pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-85723-977-6

Orson Scott Card – Earthborn 💷

Orbit, 2000, 430pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85723-982-2 First UK publication of volumes four and five (both originally published in 1995) of The Homecoming', begun with *The Memory of Earth*, as the Oversoul of the colony planet Harmony readies the Children of Wetchik for a decades long star journey which will carry it back to long-lost Earth.