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Barrington J. Bayley at Novacon 18 in 1988. Photo by Roger Robinson and courtesy of Beccon Publications.

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Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial

The View from the Fort Lauderdale Airport Hilton

Sometimes my job stinks. The week before my college broke for Easter I was forced to abandon teaching to go to Florida. No, really, it gets worse. I was forced to sit by a swimming pool (more precisely by a bar by a swimming pool bumming off other people's expense accounts) and talk about science fiction and fantasy. Oh, the infamy.

Let me hasten to add that this was not me getting fat at the BSFA's expense, although donations will obviously be considered. This was at least in part about International Relations between editors of critical journals. These are usually thought to number three – the veteran Extrapolation, the British Foundation and the US-Canadian Science Fiction Studies. Of course there's also Vector, healthily bumping along at forty-something and 220-odd issues.

On the other hand, some months ago I thought I'd stumbled into an alternate world when, searching for reviews of the not-then-but-is-now-award-winning *Omegatropic*, I discovered a web page that told me:

The British Science Fiction Society, Ltd. [...] is a new organisation that hopes to emulate the older and more venerable British Fantasy Society (which see) but promoting science fiction instead of fantasy and horror. To this end they are emulating the BFS's publishing program, although it must be admitted that in format and general design we are more reminded of PS than BFS. [...] We were amused to see huge stacks of them behind Andy Richards' dealer table at the 2001 World Science Fiction Convention where the book basically was debuted in the midst of which was Stephen Baxter, furiously signing them. [...] The BSFA claims for itself the inheritance of Arthur C. Clarke's early British SF fan legacy and with Baxter leading its indeological [sic] soul it just might be at that. They have a web site and clearly aren't going to stop with one book, or, most likely, with just books.

After pondering for ten minutes about precisely which organisation I'd been working with since October 1995, and which journal I'd co-produced a fortieth anniversary/200th issue of, I tracked down an email address to send a complaint to, correcting seven of the more obvious errors. (Venerable is a matter of taste, older a matter of fact.) Eventually the webpage was corrected:

You might think that the British Science Fiction Association, Ltd., was a new organisation similar to the British Fantasy Society (which see) but promoting science fiction instead of fantasy and horror, but you'd be wrong. While the BFS dates back to 1971, the BSFS [sic] actually dates back to 1958 and has been publishing Matrix, a news magazine and Focus, a magazine for writers, for many decades and has given annual awards since the early 1970s. It did not, however, have a true book division until now (although they have done pb nonfiction on Keith Roberts, Bob Shaw, and a history of British sf/fantasy) when it was launched at the Celebration of British Science Fiction, Liverpool Foresight Centre, June 2001, where Stephen Baxter was a guest of honor. [...] They have a web site and clearly aren't going to stop with one book now this one is out. We are trying to track down information on the earlier booklets and will add those when we have it.

This 'trying to track down' didn't, alas, consist of asking me if I had any information on them – which of course I did after a) checking my shelves, b) checking the Library of Congress and British Library online catalog(ue)s and c) asking Paul Kincaid about them. I pass over the absurdity of "You might think that the British Science Fiction Association, Ltd., was a new organisation" in virtual silence.

But I digress. Alongside the three academic journals and Vector, there are also The New York Review of Science Fiction edited by David Hartwell, Kathryn Cramer and others (including L.W. Currey, Samuel R. Delany, Robert J. Killheffer, Gordon Van Gelder and Donald G. Keller), and the Journal for the Fantastic in the Arts or the JFA. I confess I'd never very often come across the JFA, and not been much taken by what I'd seen in the handful of issues which had made it across the water. I presumed it had bitten the dust, although Chris Reed of BBR used to advertise subscriptions in his various catalogues; perhaps he still does. (Journal completists should know there is also FEMSPEC, a specifically feminist journal for academic and artistic materials about science fiction and the fantastic, which makes the dubious claim that it's the only journal to publish feminist materials on sf.)

What I hadn't noticed, because I wasn't paying attention, was that the *JFA* was published by the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts. You might think that the IAFA was a new organisation, except that they've chalked up enough annual conferences to reach the Burroughsian 23. Clearly what I couldn't afford, I couldn't notice. But times change and back at the Celebration of British Science Fiction in Liverpool Veronica Hollinger and Joan Gordon (of *SFS* and the IAFA) were doing a sterling job of twisting arms for British people to go to the IAFA's conference, the ICFA. (Are you coping with all these acronyms? There will be a short test later.) After all, the Celebration was conceived as a British equivalent to the ICFA, except smaller and with fewer alligators.

I cunningly realised that the SFF (Science Fiction Foundation, keep up) and ARPF (Association for Research into Popular Fiction) co-sponsored conference on Children's Fantasy at Bulmershe College, Reading in January 2002, and the emphasis at the 2002 on YA/Children's fantasy, offered me a rare chance to give the same paper twice and save some valuable research time, not to mention the chance to rehearse and revise the paper from a smaller to a larger conference. So I sent off the same proposal for papers on Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials trilogy and waited for the conferences to come round.

11/9 came and went, with attendant lunacies, and had the effect of lowering airfares to Miami. A slogan, usually attached to a depiction of the Stars and Stripes, that "these colors don't run", began to do the rounds, curiously omitting the fact that these colors don't get on transatlantic flights either (a conference in Greece having lost several of its American guests of honour). The same colours in various cross formations are rather more used to terrorist outrages, and so at an ungodly hour a gang of us assembled at Heathrow airport's Terminal 3, ready to hit the ICFA.

The conference itself seemed to have anything up to

eight streams, despite being the third of a size of a British Eastercon (programming committees take note). Most of these would be academic papers, in varying degrees of quality; the better papers I saw were some of the best I've seen in over a decade of conference-going and the worst, well, I'll draw a veil. Alongside these sessions were panel discussions - I appeared on a lively discussion of Philip Pullman's works and a rather less successful examination of the new British sf boom - and author readings. Sadistic time-tabling meant that none of our party could go to each others' sessions unless we were chairing or co-presenting, so there was no space for moral support and planting a friendly comment in the audience. I needn't have worried: the audiences were some of the most discerning I've encountered, although a near-riot seemed to develop after my paper on Pullman.

And in the interstices there was socialising and networking and tequila drinking of the most pleasant kind. One evening Arthur Evans, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr and Rob Latham of *SFS*, Javier Martinez – the new editor of *Extrapolation* – and I piled into a car to drive down to the beach for a meal. Modesty aside, this was a remarkable

collection of movers and shakers within the academic end of science fiction criticism, and had the car gone out of control, the field would suffer. If we were the royal family, we'd have had to get special permission for such a gathering. A query the next day from Farah Mendlesohn as to whether I was okay after the car-crash might suggest to the conspiracy-minded an attempt by *Foundation* to wipe out the opposition.

Would I go back? Well, controversy rages over loutish behaviour at the closing awards banquet, so I'm not sure what form the event will take next year, or whether the people I hung out with will go. But the combination of sun, sea, science fiction and, er, tequila, was a very appealing one, and I feel the call to go back to Fort Lauderdale. Except that next time I think I'll lay off the tequila. Yeah, right.

The BSFA award-winning Omegatropic is available from the BSFA, 1 Long Row Close, Everdon, Daventry, Northants, NN11 3BE, £20 for hardback, £8 for paperback, postage free to members. For more details see www.bsfa.co.uk.

Andrew M. Butler, High Wycombe, Spring 2002

One of the people that everyone from grad students to taxi-drivers to professors to publishers wanted to meet at the ICFA in ft. Lauderdale was china miéville. Vector spoke to him by the swimming pool.

Beyond Consolation

An Interview with China Miéville by Andrew M. Butler

Andrew M Butler: Since Vector last spoke with you officially you've won the Arthur C. Clarke Award and British Fantasy Award, been shortlisted for several others, jointly won the Vector reviewers' poll, been involved with two large Marxism conferences where you've talked about Marxism and fantasy, had a couple of short stories published, stood for election, completed a Ph.D., had an academic paper given by Joan Gordon on your work, and completed a new novel, The Scar. Which of these are you most proud of?

China Miéville: Sorry to be boring, but this is (of course) an impossible question to answer – it's not really comparing like with like. My responses to the various things were incommensurable. But broadly, the one that made me feel most immediately proud and gave me the biggest jolt of joy and personal triumph was winning the Clarke. When I apply a bit of ratiocination to it, I'm also tremendously proud of what we did in the election, in that we worked our arses off.

Having said which, I'm pretty damn happy about all of them.

AMB: Given that the Clarke Award is supposedly for the best sf novel, were you surprised to win?

CM: Yes, I was astonished. I expect some sf purists have been grumbling. I was elated, and not only for the obvious reason: also because I think it's spurious to make a sharp distinction between sf and fantasy, so I think that (questions of quality aside) books like *Perdido Street Station* should be able to win. I was just delighted to win it along with the

British Fantasy Award, and a small part of that pleasure (beyond the obvious personal happiness) is that winning the two with the one book so starkly made the argument about genre-blurring that I've been plugging at for years.

AMB: I've not heard any grumbling, compared to the years that *Body of Glass* or *The Calcutta Chromosome* won.

Let's say a bit more about fantasy. John Clute has recently been backing away from the model of fantasy he and others outlined in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (1997) – as being too much dominated by a model of Christian fantasy as practised by C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, a fantasy of consolation. This isn't the kind of fantasy Philip Pullman appeared to be writing, and it isn't the kind you're writing. Would you care to say something about the idea of consolation?

CM: My feelings about consolation are hugely influenced by Mike Moorcock's writings on Tolkien, in *Wizardry and Wild Romance: A Study of Epic Fantasy* (1987) in particular. The point is that Tolkien, in 'On Fairy Stories' (1939) suggests that the *purpose* of fantasy is consolation. Now, allowing that he uses the word in a fairly specific way, this still posits a model of consolatory fantasy *as a statement of policy*. In other words, it is deemed that to *do* fantasy properly, you must be doing consolation. That doesn't mean implying that everything happens for the best, or that the world is okay: what it means is saying that *if* the world is not okay in the here and now, consolation exists in a realm of fantasy and morality that acts as a balm.

In other words, any fantastic literature that picks at the scabs of modernity, that rubs reality the wrong way, that has a relationship to the status quo that is neither quiescent nor tragic, is deemed to be failing as fantasy.

My problems with that should be fairly self-evident. Apart from anything else, apart from an external critique, the model is self-defeating. Even internally, it is inconsistent: it relies on a notion of 'escapism'(which Tolkien famously defended) which is simply a theoretical dead-end. However 'escapist' your fiction, you can't actually escape the context in which it's written and read – so to kid yourself that you have escaped it is to be all the more ideological, in that you think you're somehow 'pure'. It is much more honest to have a fantasy that may be completely secondary-world based, but that knows it is being written and read through a social filter. That doesn't

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mean you have to be polemical, but it does mean that if you have a critical view of reality, you are at least likely to avoid consolation. This doesn't necessarily mean no happy endings – a tragic ending can be socially consolatory, just as a happy one can be critical.

AMB: I was surprised how many people at Marxism 2000, and to a lesser extent Marxism 2001, seemed to be springing to Tolkien's defence when you dissed him. These and several others seemed to think that Tolkien, and fantasy and sf

were 'just entertainment', and somehow beyond critique. Can anything be 'just entertainment'?

CM: Well, that may well be the intention of the writer, and that may be how many people read it, but everything that's a product of our culture contains all manner of assumptions and counter-assumptions and bits and pieces of cultural detritus, so the short answer is no – nothing is 'just entertainment' in the sense that that's all that can be (or should be) said about them.

AMB: Is your problem with Philip Pullman's *The Amber Spyglass* (2000) to do with consolation?

CM: Partly – though I realised that more when other people (particularly you) put it in those terms. For me, I was conscious of the problem more in terms of Pullman moving from a more organic, contingent and narrative logic to a mythic and, worse, a moral logic, for his structure. There are plenty of examples: to give just one (and warning – this includes spoilers), look at the way he treats the dead in the book. In the (brilliant) first book, Northern Lights (1995), the death of Lee Scoresby and his daemon is almost unbearably moving – it is truly, truly gut-wrenching to read. These characters have been taken from us, and we have behind our own backs, by the logic of the story – grown to love them. Then in the third book, Lee Scoresby is back. Dead. Dead, and seemingly there, as are all the dead, to serve a purpose, which is to riff off various morality tales and myths, to tell us stuff like 'Stories Are Vital And Can Free Us'. Now, that's a pretty trite moral, particularly for a writer, but even if it were profound I'd rather not have characters treated as pegs for messages. It seems to me disrespectful. See Lyra and Will, who apparently have A Love Too Pure To Last.

Also, as soon as the mystery of death is taken away,

then the loss is totally lessened. Even if characters are revealed to be in a terrible hell, that is *still* a consolation, because the terrible mystery, the *loss*, is gone.

AMB: Beyond the ending of *King Rat* and the strike sequences of *Perdido Street Station*, for some the weaker sections of the books, you avoid politics in your long fiction. The short story 'An End to Hunger' is probably the most political fiction by you I've read. Is it a struggle to avoid being party political?

CM: I don't avoid politics at all. The problem is, though, that we have a terribly narrow notion of what politics *is*, in fiction, most of the time. What's true is that although I don't go out of my way to avoid depicting 'narrowly' political things, I don't have a lot of sloganeering in the books. But, for example, in *Perdido Street Station*, the model of human consciousness described in the final showdown scene is

political, as is the analysis of the class basis of fascism, described when Lin goes shopping, as is the constant description of 'atypical' non-humans. The point is obviously that politics goes a lot further than talking about struggles – though I do that too. I don't 'avoid' being political: it's not negative, it's positive. I'm constantly aware that my job is to tell a story so that people want to keep turning the pages. One of the ways I do that is to put texture into the books, to make it more interesting – and much of that texture is political.

That's why I don't try to make polemical political points as the purpose of the fiction – it generally makes for bad fiction and simplistic politics. Having said which, I'm not someone who thinks that *no* agit-prop can be art, or vice versa. I wrote 'An End To Hunger' as a piece of agit-prop, and tried to make it both a good story, and politically polemical. But it's an exception.

I'm a bit sad to hear that you know people who didn't like the strike section of *Perdido Street Station*. I've only ever had good feedback about that section. I liked it a lot – I thought it worked because if you were interested in the politics, then the point was plain, but if you weren't, it still added texture to the city.

AMB: I liked it... some others didn't. Let's move onto the 2001 election where you stood as a Socialist Alliance candidate. In the impossible scenario of you having won, would you have taken up your seat?

CM: Yes. But all Socialist Alliance candidates were committed to only accepting the average wage of a skilled worker in our constituency.

AMB: *The Evening Standard* called you "the sexiest man in British politics". Is this something you find flattering?

CM: Of course. Who wouldn't? Though the competition is hardly stiff.

AMB: The completion of the Ph.D. must be a relief. Could you summarise your thesis for a lay audience?

CM: It looks at theories of international law, and argues that law is a process which is a function of the generalisation of commodity production, and is i) inherently indeterminate (so you can't look to the 'rules' to tell you if something is legal or not) and ii) intrinsically part of the conflictual process which leads to the very social problems the law claims to regulate. So don't expect international law to solve international problems – it's part of the problem, not

the solution.

AMB: Is finishing the doctorate the end of your academic career, for now?

CM: Well, I won't be a working academic so long as the writing career continues well. But I'm on the editorial board of the journal *Historical Materialism*, and I intend to continue publishing academic work, so it's not the end of research for me.

AMB: You go to the SWP event Marxism, you've been to a couple of academic conferences about sf and fantasy, and you've been to several Eastercons, among other conventions. Which is the most useful for you? And the most enjoyable?

CM: Again, you can't really compare. The most useful in a meaningful sense is Marxism, because of the wealth of knowledge and intellectual tools it can give me to make sense of the world. But in terms of my writing, I find the

academic sf conferences fascinating and extremely fecund. And I enjoy them both pretty much equally. I like conventions too, but I must admit I prefer conferences.

AMB: Joan Gordon's paper I'm sure is the first of many interventions on your work – and of course there have been many reviews of the novels, mostly pro but some con. Have you learnt anything from the critics?

CM: Yeah, I do. Quite a lot. Sometimes I read a review or a criticism I just think is asinine or insulting or whatever, but more often I think they've made fair points, and occasionally they're extremely illuminating.

AMB: Has the praise, nominations and award wins made writing *The Scar* more difficult? Did you sense a greater

pressure? After all, for most artists there's that difficult second album syndrome, and I think for most people *Perdido...* was your first book.

CM: Yes. I found writing *The Scar* terribly hard. I felt great pressure because of the wonderful feedback I'd had for *Perdido*. It felt very much like the second book, for the reasons you outline. I think that's partly why the book has a slightly contrary attitude to its readers – though not, I hope, in an annoying or disdainful way.

AMB: The Scar as a nautical book is very different from the city-bound Perdido Street Station. How deliberate was the avoidance of the consolation of giving us a straightforward sequel?

CM: It was entirely deliberate. I knew that the worst thing I could do was to try to write *Perdido Street Station 2*, so the book is very different. I thought of it as an anti-sequel. It shares the world, and some characters, and some events, but it is completely a standalone. And what's more, it inverts a lot of what was popular in *Perdido* – so I took away stuff like the city, that people had loved.

AMB: The influences here seem to be fantasies of the sea – The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (1798), The Hunting of the Snark (1876), The Voyage of the Dawn Treader (1952), maybe Moby Dick (1851) and Billy Budd (1891) – anything else for us to look out for?

CM: William Hope Hodgson, The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig' (1907) and Haunted Jarvee. Jules Verne, 20,000

Leagues Under The Seas (1872). Walter Moers' 13½ Lives of Captain Bluebear (1999). Various short stories, including some by Edgar Allan Poe and José Marcía Gironella.

AMB: I wondered if the floating city owed anything to the Raft in *Snow Crash* (1992)?

CM: No. I haven't read it. It bears a remarkable resemblance to a book called *The Drift* (1969), by Lloyd Kropp, which I hadn't read at the time of writing either, but which I'm now looking at.

AMB: I was fascinated by the way the book constantly wrong-footed me as to what it was going to be about – of course *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* was a series of failed intentions, but I also thought of the sequence in the *LA Confidential* movie (1997) when the narrator is casting around for a plot, and plays with the audience.

CM: There are such strong tropes about maritime literature, that you can't really avoid them. The only thing you can do

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is be aware of your relationship to them. There are equally strong tropes to fantasy literature, of course, and I'm always very conscious of them. I try to structure the books so that the narrative appears to slot into one or other of these tendencies, and then shies away from it, so that expectation is taken out from under you. And there are different layers to this. So on a fairly straightforward level, maritime books are often quests, so it was important to undermine the quest narrative. But at a slightly more sophisticated level, a lot of more recent books maritime have undermined the 'journey of discovery' type narrative by exposing the truths about the brutality of the maritime discipline and colonialism underpinned them. I knew that as a

writer known to be left-wing, it would be fairly tempting to see this book as doing that sort of thing. And that's a totally honourable narrative, but these days, it's not a terribly original one. So I tried to do a sort of 'second-order' feinting – undermine the traditional quest, but then undermine the structure of the very 'post-colonial critique' that is often the source of the undermining of the traditional parrative

The book is structured by a series of apparent hooks, which are then withdrawn. It's a series of false starts, and manipulations.

AMB: The next book is another New Crobuzon one, yes? How long do you want to mine the franchise?

CM: You make it sound so cynical!

AMB: I'm a cynical person...

CM: I want to write lots of books set in this world because I love this world, and the process of creating it is constantly enjoyable and fascinating. So there will be at least one more: another standalone, but one which riffs off the previous two. So you can read them in any order, but they'll constitute an anti-trilogy. And then that's the end of my conscious plans, but I'll be very surprised if I don't go back to that world again.

AMB: What do you have against whimsy and sentiment?

CM: There are grey areas – some people would consider Lewis Carroll's Alice books to be whimsical, or the Beatrix

Potter books, but I don't, and I love them passionately. Similarly some of the fantasy in video games like *Oddworld* – if that's whimsy, then I don't have a problem with all whimsy. However, a lot of fantasy stuff that people recommend to me I find I have problems falling in love with because of the whimsical tone. Edward Gorey's art, for example, I've never felt much for. Nor Tim Burton's work, on the whole. And though I've not read it, the description of *The Eyre Affair* (2001) and similar slipstreamy/surrealist/comic novels leave me utterly cold.

With sentiment it's easier to work out – I am very sentimental in real life, and I have to be pretty ruthless with myself not to let the sentiment bleed out and ruin my work, so I'm not very forgiving of it in other fiction either. Whimsy, though, is more complicated.

I think it boils down to the fact that whimsy is a way of distancing the reader or viewer, the recipient of the art, from the fantastic elements of it. And that isn't reducible to humour. Pratchett's books are very funny, but they do not use the humour as a way of winking at the readers behind the back, so to speak, of the fantastic elements. I feel about whimsy very much as I do about many of the books by mainstream writers dabbling in sf - The Handmaid's Tale (1985), for example. They are ill-at-ease with the fantastic, so they consciously and heavy-handedly distance themselves and their readers from it. Mainstream writers tend to do it by making their allegories intrusively loud, so that the fantastic is clearly signalled as not its own end. In a similar way, whimsy is often a way of degutting the fantastic elements of a text and refusing to grant it its own integrity. The quirky is by its nature anomalous - if the fantastic is the source of quirky, whimsical

humour, it is constantly pathologised. I prefer work which is unabashed about revelling in the *internal logic* of whatever fantastica are introduced, and granting those elements absolute integrity. I like fantasy and sf with a kind of neurotic rigour in their own creations – though not necessarily rationalist/scientific rigour – Max Ernst's *Semaine De Bonte* is utterly surreal and non-linear, but completely rigorous according to a somewhat opaque logic. Whimsy seems to undermine any such rigour, and to treat the fantastic as a game – whether played for laughs or chills or whatever. The derivation of whimsy from 'whim' in this context seems to me misleading, because the kind of whimsy we're talking about has nothing of the contingent or organic in its logic – it is *mannered*.

I don't like mannered art, or films, or literature, very much.

AMB: Has going full-time as a writer affected your writing pattern? How do you write?

CM: I haven't yet settled into a pattern – I'm too all over the place. When I'm in the zone – in the middle of a novel, for example – I can easily write six-ten hours a day. Otherwise, I may spend two days not writing, then do three

hours, then twelve... It varies. The main problem I have is that I have far too many other things to do, so I still can't prioritise the writing as much as I'd like.

AMB: Finally, there's been much talk of a boom in British sf and fantasy – or at least I've been going on about one in Vector editorials for ages, and American critics such as Charles N. Brown and Gary K. Wolfe seem to be noticing one as well. Is there a British boom, and if so how would you characterise it?

CM: There certainly seems to be something of a boom. To a certain extent these things are always artefacts – there's no objective criteria by which one can judge 'boom-ness' (boomitude? Boomosity?) – so the fact that everyone's talking about it is to a certain extent definitional of the fact that something's going on.

I can't talk about why it's happening (in some ways a

more interesting question) because it's much harder to answer. But given that it exists, as evidenced by the increasing numbers of great books coming out of Britain, it is marked out by a few characteristics.

- i) Generally, good to excellent 'literary' quality. Very hard to judge, I know, but we're not for the most part talking about the kind of sf (that we grew up on and probably still love) that has wonderful ideas ploddingly put.
- ii) A disrespectful relationship to generic and thematic boundaries see the discussion about sf/fantasy earlier. Other books, like Mary Gentle's *Ash* (2000), do a similar job to *Perdido Street Station* in this regard.
- iii) A loving but critical relationship to, and impressive knowledge of, the traditions of the fields. The wave of Space Opera, for example, that people like Al Reynolds (and now M. John Harrison) are associated with is the best

kind of revisionism.

iv) A cultural milieu in which 'mainstream' literature is containing ever-growing numbers of books, often by younger writers, with fantastic or sf tropes, that are not hamstrung by the generic embarrassment of earlier half-arsed forays into the fantastic. Writers like David Mitchell and (sometimes) Will Self, for example, use tricks and ideas from within the field, and though they often don't do it in the way we would, nor do they ham it up and fuck it up like the highbrow have tended to do (the only precursor of this sort of thing – fantasy external to the field but deftly managed – I can think of is Angela Carter). An optimist would say that that means in terms of storming the mainstream, that we're pushing against an open door. A pessimist might say they're stealing our ideas.

I don't know what I say. Except that these moments are cyclical. We're lucky enough to be in a time when sf is loud and proud and exciting. It won't last forever. It's fun milking it while it lasts...

AMB: China Miéville, thanks very much indeed.

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I am very
sentimental in
real life, and I
have to be
pretty ruthless
with myself not
to let the
sentiment
bleed out and
ruin my work

AFTER YEARS OF WORRIES ABOUT THE DISAPPEARING BACKLIST, WE'VE HAD AN ABUNDANCE OF RICHES LATELY — THE MILLENNIUM SCIENCE FICTION MASTERWORKS AND THE GOLLANCZ YELLOWBACKS, REPRINTS FROM HARPERCOLLINS VOYAGER, AND, POST-TAKE-OVER, FANTASY FICTION MASTERWORKS FROM GOLLANCZ. SANDRA UNERMAN EXAMINES THE LIST.

Several Worlds

A survey of the Gollancz Fantasy Masterworks series by Sandra Unerman

Here we are all by day; by night we are hurled By dreams, each one into a several world

Robert Herrick

Introduction

Journalists who have written about the two big films of winter 2001-2002 give the impression that the fantasy genre has a narrow range. They refer to J. R. R. Tolkien, imitators of Tolkien, and the Harry Potter books, with the occasional mention of Terry Pratchett and Whitbread prizewinner Philip Pullman. The Gollancz reprints published in the Fantasy Masterworks series present a much richer and more interesting picture of twentieth-century fantasy fiction.

The series so far has twenty-four titles, with dates of first publication ranging from 1905 to 1991. So far, all the works are fantasies of the English-speaking world, with no translations from other languages. This is not surprising, given the limited readership for contemporary fiction in translation both here and in the USA, compared with the demand for fiction translated *from* English elsewhere in the world. More puzzling is the presence of only three women among the authors in the series (Hope Mirrlees, Sheri S. Tepper and Patricia A. McKillip). It seems unlikely that there is a lack of worthwhile books by women available for reprinting. But perhaps the balance will change later on the series.

Members of the BSFA are not likely to believe that the only fiction worth reading is of the realistic school. But some may look down on fantasy compared with science fiction for lack of serious scientific underpinning or speculative ideas about society. I don't think the border between the two genres is all that significant. Some of the books in this series were first published as science fiction and Roger Zelazny has a book on this list, The Chronicles of Amber (1970-1978; 1979), and one in the Gollancz SF masterworks series, Lord of Light (1967). The plot of Lord of Light involves the introduction of advanced technology and its effect on society, as the motive for the guarrels between the main characters. But, to my mind, the similarities in the themes Zelazny explores and the moods he evokes are more striking than the differences. The authors of the Masterworks series use fantasy to deal with themes which could not be tackled - or not so directly - in a realistic novel. Whether the setting is a wholly invented world or an alternative version of the world as we know it, the fantasy mode enables authors to explore human nature and the environment in the past or the present, in ways which may be thought-provoking, moving, entertaining or all three.

The books in the series have no introductions or commentary, except for the choice of the pictures on the front covers. Some of these are direct illustrations of the contents, others are reproductions of nineteenth century paintings which may mirror the mood of the books within –

Edward Burne-Jones for Tepper, Gustave Moreau for Michael Moorcock's *Gloriana* (1978). Apart from these hints, readers are left to their own thoughts about the books, what makes them masterworks or at least worth reprinting and rereading. I've found some of them much more enjoyable than others but they have all been worth digging into and all offer food for thought. All the writers create their own worlds of the imagination but some common themes can be discerned, both because later writers respond to the work of earlier ones and because different writers share the same preoccupations.

Period Pieces

Lord Dunsany's *Time and the Gods* is a collection of short stories, originally gathered in six books published between 1905 and 1916. They are written in a style now out of favour, ornate and distant. Dunsany is not interested in the struggle between good and evil but in the desire for the unattainable, the dangers and pleasures of the imagination and the tricks of fate. His best stories are not the ones set in wholly invented worlds but those which give glimpses of haunting emotions in the ordinary men of his own time. Try, for example, the story of the unreachable city of the golden dragons in 'The Wonderful Window,' or the fate of murderous sailor in 'Poor Old Bill'.

E.R. Eddison's novels also require some perseverance from the modern reader. *The Mistress of Mistresses* (1935) revolves round strong men and beautiful women who are all reflections or incarnations of the same eternal natures, however different they are on the surface. This theme gets in the way of his storytelling and makes it difficult to care what happens next. But *The Worm Ouroboros* (1922) is a more straightforward tale of rivalry between heroes and their wives or sisters, who behave extravagantly and dramatically, like a combination of a Norse saga and a Jacobean revenge tragedy. Eddison's characters are not admirable but they are interesting and they strike wonderful attitudes.

The pages of Robert E. Howard's Conan Chronicles (1932-1936) are overloaded with adjectives: lurid lights, steely muscles, vast corridors, mysterious rustlings, as well as too much action and not enough dialogue or character development. I found it difficult to appreciate the adventures of the barbarian hero who despises civilisation and the preposterous odds he overcomes. But the stories are worth sampling, for the sake of their cult following and their later influence, if only as something to react against, as Fritz Leiber and Michael Moorcock both do. Moorcock's Elric is a sort of anti-Conan, highly civilised and barely able to survive without drugs or the assistance of his soul-drinking sword. Leiber's Fafhrd is an intelligent barbarian, fascinated by civilisation although seldom contented with what he finds.

The rest of the books in the series have not dated in the same way. They make easier reading on the surface and share assumptions about how to engage with a reader that Dunsany or Eddison might have quarreled with. But some of them still take for granted attitudes or assumptions which are more off-putting now than when they were written. For example, the adventures of Harold Shea, the American psychologist and his friends in *The Compleat Enchanter* (1940-1991) by L. Sprague De Camp and Fletcher Pratt, written in the 1940s and 1950s are good humoured and light hearted. But their behaviour stays much the same in the different magical worlds through which they travel and they solve all their problems so easily. It is hard not to think of them as cultural tourists, who learn little wherever they go.

Quests

Fantasies are supposed to be about quests. And so are many of these, although not usually of the obvious kind, where a band of companions journey to collect plot tokens and save the kingdom, or the world from evil. Fritz Leiber's heroes, Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser, go in search of booty or love but are never satisfied with what they find, although in their own way

they succeed and prosper. By contrast, the quests in the tales of M. John Harrison's Viriconium (1971-1985) are seldom productive for the guesters or for anyone else. Gene Wolfe's Severian, in The Book of the New Sun (1980-1983) goes in search of his duty but is continually forced to change his understanding of what that is. In Tepper's Beauty (1991), the heroine spends most of the novel on a quest to avoid her destiny. She is the daughter of a medieval duke, who has been cursed to fall asleep for a hundred years on her sixteenth birthday. She diverts the curse onto someone else, who becomes the Sleeping Beauty in her place. Beauty herself is drawn into a series of adventures, partly in a dystopian twenty-first century, partly in Faery and in hell. Eventually she finds a way to save the environment from the future as she has seen it but this requires her to go into the enchanted castle and replace her substitute, going to sleep maybe for many centuries.

Places

Fantasy is often thought of as a backward-looking genre, full of nostalgia for a rural way of life. But the books in this series are full of cities, from Amber to Viriconium by way of New York and London. Some are just convenient settings for adventure, like the Lankhmar of Fritz Leiber's tales, but in others, the city is a strong presence which matters to the story. Some books picture cities in decay, like Viriconium and Gene Wolfe's Nessus. In Jack Finney's Time and Again (1970), there is an intense reconstruction of New York in the 1880s as perceived by the hero, who has moved back in time from the 1970s. This is indeed a work of nostalgia but for a quieter, less crowded version of a great city, not for the pre-industrial past. When the hero decides to stay in the past, he does so partly in order to avoid the meddling with history, which he regards as a dangerous experiment, as well as unfair to the people he has come to know. But the most frightening place in all the

books is the American small town of Jonathan Carroll's Land of Laughs (1980), because its surface is so ordinary and so misleading.

There are not many wilderness adventures or countryside idylls in these books. The Mississippi is a powerful presence in George R.R. Martin's Fevre Dream (1982), but in the background. In John Crowley's Little, Big (1981), the house of Edgewood is the centre of the story, although important episodes take place both in the city of New York and in the woods around the house. But the further we read, the more these settings have a tendency to turn into one another, as though the differences between them matter less and less. The world of The Riddle-Master's

Game (1976-1979) by Patricia McKillip is closer to that of the conventional fantasy, where most people live in villages or castles, governed aristocrats. And one of the strongest qualities of this book is the evocation of the land and the seasons. Morgon the hero learns to turn himself into an animal which can survive a harsh winter or a tree in the mountains. As we watch his struggles, we feel what it might be like if we could do the same or could shout the Great Shout which causes landslides.

...lurid lights, steely muscles, vast corridors, mysterious rustlings...

Supernatural Powers

Many of the characters in these fantasies have powers beyond the ordinary. One of the pleasures of Zelazny's Chronicles of Amber comes from the enjoyment with which Corwin, Prince of Amber, rediscovers and exercises his supernatural powers, to ride between the worlds, to fight all day, to remember life in sixteenth century London or in Napoleon's army. But Zelazny is unusual in allowing his characters to relish their powers without being weighed down by guilt or tragedy. More often we see characters brought up against their limits, more memorable in defeat than success. Immortals who lose their powers or their dominions are a recurring theme. One of Dunsany's stories, 'The Exiles' Club', concerns a man invited to dinner at the club of a king who has lost his throne. The guest admires the magnificent dining room, in the basement of the clubhouse, and enjoys the reminiscences of the other exiled royals gathered there. Only when he asks to see the rest of the house does he discover that he is dining not with the members of the club but the waiters, who serve the even more exalted exiles upstairs. In Crowley's Little, Big, like the humans in the novel, we never receive a full explanation of the supernatural creatures at the heart of the novel or anything but brief glimpses of them at work. But they have a powerful effect on the lives of the humans, all the more compelling because they are seldom able to communicate directly.

People

C.S. Lewis argued that fantasies ought not to include deep or sensitive characterisation, unlike realistic novels, because the more unusual the scenes and events of a story, the more ordinary those who must react to them should be: those who are to see strange sights should not themselves be strange. This series does not bear out his argument. In some of the works, the central characters must hold our attention if we are to follow the complications and confusions of an elaborate plot. They do not have to be likeable but if they are not interesting, we may struggle to keep going. The books are full of reflections on what it means to be a hero, male or female, and the difference, if any, between that and what it means to be human. The characters of Michael Moorcock's fiction are usually unhappy and often unsuccessful in achieving their desires, even when outwardly triumphant, like Gloriana herself in the novel bearing her name. They move in a world which combines glamour with decay and disaster, epitomised by the labyrinth of caves below Gloriana's palace.

George R.R. Martin's Fevre Dream opens with an encounter between Abner Marsh, captain of a steamboat, and Joshua York, a man who eats dinner at midnight and has a need to travel the river in privacy. The tension between these two and the way they struggle to come to terms with one another and the boat they build is what makes this novel worth reading, even by readers who usually avoid vampire fiction, as I do.

Carroll's Land of Laughs has a first person narrator whose perceptions are the most important thing about the book: they may be its only reality. We begin to know him through his mildly unusual interests, his collection of masks, his devotion to his favourite author, and gradually learn more as the story he tells becomes stranger and stranger, building to a sinister end. Another, even more intense voice is that of Gene Wolfe's narrator in the four volumes of The Book of the New Sun. Severian the torturer has a much more complicated story to tell than in the Carroll book and he describes a world far removed from our own. Appearances shift round him, as he fails to stick to the standards of the guild which has brought him up, struggles with women who love or hate him, with magic and with high politics. Even so, it is Severian who holds our attention, not the events among which he moves. By the end of the fourth volume, the changes to him matter more than what he has achieved or any external resolution of the plot.

One of the unlikeliest heroes is Nathaniel Chanticleer of Hope Mirrlees's Lud-in-the-Mist (1926). He is a prosperous, somewhat pompous, middle-aged man, who from childhood has been beset by melancholy and the fear of losing the daily comforts of his life. And we are shown both the delights and the limitations of that life in a quiet town full of old houses and romantic gardens. Nathaniel is forced into behaviour which frightens his wife and angers his friends when his son goes missing. In the search which follows, as well as solving an old murder, he struggles with the gap between words and meanings, exposed in the legal language used to cloak uncomfortable truths; and he suffers the humiliation of being treated as legally dead, so that he can be deposed as Mayor. By the end, he has gained much more than he has lost, but life has become more dangerous as well as more interesting for everyone in his town. He is not a grand hero but one of those I would most like to meet as well as read about.

Conclusions

There is more to twentieth century fantasy fiction than J.R.R. Tolkien and J.K. Rowling. However, the Gollancz series does not provide a comprehensive survey of the rest of the genre. Apart from classic works in print elsewhere, like those of T.H. White and Mervyn Peake, there are other forgotten fantasies worth reviving, such as those of John James (Votan (1966) and All the Gold in Ireland (1968)) or those written in the 1920s by Margaret Irwin. Her Still She Wished for Company (1924) is a timeslip story with an intriguing evocation of an English country house in the eighteenth century and a charming, unworthy hero. And there are other books published for children which create worlds as much worth visiting as those of the series, including the works of Joan Aiken and Ursula K. Le Guin. But there is plenty here to explore and plenty worth trying out. For any reader who does not know where to start, this series would be a good introduction to the fantasy genre.

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Sandra wrote on Dragons in V211 (May/June 2000) and Unicorns in V212 (July/August 2000). Please note items 28-31 have not appeared at the time of writing

Personal Hygiene, Writing Habits and Dune

An interview with Science Fiction authors Brian Herbert and Kevin J. Anderson by Sandy Auden

rank Herbert's *Dune* (1965) is a household name these days. It's a science fiction phenomenon that has spanned decades already and is now experiencing a resurgence as the *Prelude to Dune* trilogy concludes with *House Corrino* (2001), written by Brian Herbert and Kevin J. Anderson.

Brian Herbert (Frank's son) brings a formidable depth of knowledge to the *Prelude* partnership and their books have encouraged a whole new generation to discover the delights and harsh politics of the *Dune* universe for themselves. Prelude to Dune has undoubtedly distinguished Brian Herbert as an author in his own right. And the story isn't over yet...

When Kevin J. Anderson collaborates with Brian Herbert, they make the worlds of *Dune* resonate to an exciting new note. Anderson brings his experience of many science fiction novels to the partnership – from the *X-Files* and *Star Wars* universes, to his own genre fiction. The collaboration has been long and successful and shows no signs of losing any of its enthusiastic momentum – their work on *Prelude to Dune* is complete with *House Corrino* (2001) and the new trilogy, the *Butlerian Jihad*, is well under way, mapping the early years in the *Dune* universe. So let's discover some of Kevin and Brian's personal writing habits...

What did you want to achieve with the Dune prequel trilogy and do you think you have achieved it now?

BH: There had been more than a decade since the publication of the last Dune series novel by Frank Herbert, and a lot of demand built up during that time.

More importantly, the expectations were enormous, as the fans wanted – and deserved – new novels that would do justice to the extremely high standards that had been set for this series.

We wanted to write a book that my father would be proud of, and the reception we have received indicates that we are doing that.

KJA: With such a vast and complex project, we had many things we wanted to accomplish. First of all, we wanted to write something that would be worthy of our great predecessor and mentor and I think we have achieved that. Another important goal for us was to rekindle interest in the original *Dune* novels. As soon as *House Atreides* (1999) was published, the sales of Frank Herbert's *Dune* books literally *tripled*. Numerous fans of my *Star Wars* or *X-Files* books have told me that they had been intimidated to read the original *Dune*, but picked up *House Atreides* because they liked my other work – and then they proceeded to devour Frank's series. That has certainly worked.

The Dune series was a big act to follow. Were there any times when you wished you hadn't started?

BH: The only hesitation I had about continuing the series occurred before I met Kevin J. Anderson, and we began to explore the incredible possibilities that still remained in the *Dune* universe. For years before meeting Kevin, I had been thinking that the series would end with *Chapterhouse: Dune* (1985) and the wonderful tribute that my father wrote to my mother, Beverly Herbert, at the end of the novel. They were a remarkable writing team.

KJA: Honestly, there was never a time when I wish we hadn't started. Many times, perhaps, when Brian and I might have felt overwhelmed, taxed to the limits of our writing abilities, but we always worked through it, picking up each other's slack when other deadlines loomed. Nobody placed more pressure on us than we imposed on

ourselves. As a writer, I feel I should challenge myself with each new project, and the *Dune* books have been an enormous and complicated work. But I can't imagine a series I would rather be working on.

And what about the times when you were glad you had started?

BH: It has been a joy to work with Kevin. We spin ideas off each other and build on them. Although our basic writing styles are similar, our backgrounds are different, which adds to the richness of the material we generate together. The whole process of creation in the *Dune* universe is extraordinary, and allows me the benefit of understanding my father more than ever before.

KJA: Brian and I have a great rapport working together. We complement each other's strengths as writers, and these novels are better than anything we could have done individually. The first weekend we got together to brainstorm the *Prelude to Dune* trilogy, we got very little sleep, bouncing ideas back and forth like a tennis match. We were both invigorated and exhausted by the time I went home. It was very exciting.

How does it feel to know that you have overcome the original scepticism and actually done an excellent job in promoting Dune in all its incarnations?

BH: Only a very small minority of *Dune* fans were sceptical, while the vast majority of them were optimistic. Still, we felt all along that the initial scepticism was appropriate, since fans have every right to expect excellence. Frank Herbert's fans have a stake in the *Dune* universe, and I believe we have demonstrated to them that we share their concerns, and their love, for the most imaginative realm in the history of science fiction. Both Kevin and I are *Dune* fans ourselves.

KJA: I must say, some of the 'surly fans' showed us their worst side when news of this project came out; many of them posted hideous reviews of our novel (months before the book was published, so none of them had read it – one reviewer even said, "I don't have to read this book to know that it has to be pure crap.") So, there was a large barrier for us to climb – but we knew we were doing our absolute best work. Now, there's no way you can please an 'unbiased' person who says he doesn't even have to read a book to 'know'... but we have certainly won over the vast majority of devotees to the series and brought new fans to *Dune*.

And, can any interview be complete without an enquiry about Dune 7?

BH: *Dune* 7 – under a different title, of course – will be the grand finale of the saga. We are building toward it, but have not decided when it will be written and published.

KJA: Heh, heh... Yes, that is certainly in the works. We have Frank's original detailed outline for *Dune 7* – and it is such a shame that he didn't live to write it, because the story wraps up everything, not only all the way back to the first *Dune* novel, but to the events of the Butlerian Jihad. However, that was meant to be the last *Dune* novel, and Brian and I want to finish laying all the groundwork first.

Now that the Butlerian Jihad trilogy is a work in progress, can you share any new details?

BH: We are now on the fourth draft of the first Butlerian Jihad novels, and I can tell you that it contains many surprising twists and turns... the sort of things that *Dune* fans expect. This is a mythical time in the *Dune* universe,

set ten thousand years before the events in the novel *Dune*, so some of our characters bear resemblances to gods.

KJA: Set ten thousand years before *Dune*, The Butlerian Jihad goes back to the origins of the most familiar things in the *Dune* universe. The primary story, of course, is the war against the thinking machines, but we have been careful to include the familiar ingredients of a *Dune* story too, including how the Fremen came to settle on Arrakis, how spice was discovered, and the origins of the Bene Gesserit, the Swordmasters, the Mentats, the Spacing Guild and the Navigators. And, you will see the events that caused the titanic feud between Atreides and Harkonnen.

Moving on to your personal writing habits... what do you think about when you brush your teeth?

BH: In the morning, I think about what I'm going to do that day. In the evening it's the reverse. I think about how much progress I made towards my personal and professional goals.

KJA: I'm usually plotting the chapter I'm going to write as soon as I rinse my mouth out. My most productive time is in the morning, and I make sure I get my writing done first thing.

What is your worst writing habit?

BH: Sometimes it's difficult for me to get going during the day. Since I have goals each day, this can force me to write into the wee hours.

KJA: Writing, I suppose. Always writing. Obsessively writing. Never getting to sleep because I want to be writing. Avoiding dull and tedious things like, oh, holidays or parties or visiting with relatives because I'd rather be writing. What else is there to do?

When do most of your ideas come to you?

BH: Ideas occur to me at all times, but some of the best ones are when I am just drifting off to sleep or just waking up, when my mind is relaxed. Good ideas also occur to me when I exercise, and when I brainstorm stories with my wife, Jan, or with Kevin and his wife, Rebecca.

KJA: Usually when I am awake, but sometimes when I'm asleep. If not during the daytime, then at night. Ideas don't punch a time clock; they just come whenever you have the correct two brain cells firing at the same time.

How enthusiastic are you at the end of a project compared to the beginning?

BH: In the beginning of a project I am filled with enthusiasm, and a sense of direction I think the novel will take. As it progresses, there are always surprises and even lulls when I think something in the story needs to be improved. By the end of the project, after the finishing touches have been put on it, there is still a feeling of enthusiasm, as I am optimistic about how it will be received. I'm also – pursuant to my father's advice – busy on the next novel so that I do not sit around worrying.

KJA: I'm very enthusiastic both at the beginning and at the end – it's the giant unexplored wilderness *in the middle* that is often difficult, when you have been writing hard for a long time, about 70 chapters into the 118-chapter novel, and it seems like you'll never get to the end. But I always do, and then I foolishly start the process all over again.

Do the seasons affect your writing patterns?

BH: The seasons do not affect my writing patterns, but I exert some control over that. I prefer the cooler maritime climate of the Pacific Northwest, since I feel somewhat lethargic in the Tropics.

KJA: Yes, but not in ways you might think. I live in the Rocky Mountains and I love to go out hiking while I write. I have a tape recorder and I dictate my fiction as I walk. Summer time is terrific, because then I can go out to fabulous waterfalls, climb mountains, explore interesting canyons... all of which I find inspirational. During winter, though, sometimes it gets too cold or miserable to go hiking, and then I feel constrained in what I can write. However, last year I got a new pair of snazzy high-tech snowshoes, and so I can go off trudging through forests and along trails, even after a blizzard.

What would you most like to change in your life?

BH: My father and I were very close in the last fifteen years of his life, but I wish I had understood him earlier, during my childhood. We were not always close, and I did not really discover what a wonderful man he was until I was a young adult and I began to unravel his complexities.

KJA: My undergarments. I try to do so regularly.

Would you ever stop writing?

BH: I do not feel good unless I am writing, so I do not foresee retiring from the profession. There is always a new project that interests me, something new and wondrous to learn and explore.

KJA: As numerous authors have shown, even death does not necessarily stop a popular author from producing new work. If you're asking would I ever *voluntarily* retire and stop producing new work... well, I can hear my wife chuckling at the very suggestion. When I see Tom Hanks in *Castaway* (2001), all I can think of is how many novels I could have written in the sand, before the tide washed it all away.

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In the last couple of years, we have begun to remember the work of M. John Harrison, perhaps the finest fantasist to emerge out of the British New Wave and the scene surrounding New Worlds. Mark Greener uncovers another writer of that period, no less deserving of our attention.

The Knight Of The Limits: Has Barrington Bayley's Time Come? by Mark Greener

n The Best SF Stories from New Worlds 8,1 editor Michael Moorcock chose a story each from Harlan Ellison, M. John Harrison, J.G. Ballard and John Brunner. But Moorcock chose four by Barrington J. Bayley. Yet Bayley, despite being as innovative, intelligent and articulate as any of the 1960s British New Wave's big names, remains the most underrated of the movement's major writers. Indeed, as Rhys Hughes comments in an excellent essay, Bayley "is the most underrated British sf writer since David Masson was forgotten in the 1960s".2

Hughes believes that Bayley's mix of traditional and New Wave sf inhibited his acceptance by a wider audience. He argues that Bayley's "unwillingness to betray space-opera keeps him from the attention of those biodegradable thirty-something readers who fawn over Ballard". In other words, Bayley is too avant-garde for the traditionalists and too subtle for the New Wave. But times change. And I believe that this synthesis of traditional narrative and New Wave makes Bayley's work ripe for rediscovery in this post-cyberpunk, post-*Star Wars* age.³

My copy of Bayley's collection *The Knights of the Limits*⁴ exemplifies this dialectic. On the cover, a male and female astronaut some distance from a flying saucer look on, as a winding, enormous tentacle slithers towards them. The image would seem almost anachronistic on a cover of *Astounding* in the late 1950s. But *Knights of the Limits* was published in 1980. And the stories, which date from 1965 to 1978, challenge the nature of the sf genre in ways as profound as Moorcock, Ballard or M. John Harrison ever did. However, Bayley tends to be far more subtle than any of those three writers – and, therefore, often more subversive. As Hughes adds, Bayley's short fiction threatened "to push the genre over the edge of its own spectrum".

'The Radius Riders' offers a good example of the duality that underpins much of Bayley's fiction. At first sight, 'The Radius Riders' is a classic sf yarn in which adventurous explorers take a 'Journey to the Centre of the Earth' complete with a 'subterrene vessel' and aggressive subterranean creatures. However, 'The Radius Riders' isn't a pulp adventure. Ultimately, the story examines humanity's technological hubris – a key concern of the New Wave and beyond.

Similarly, in 'The Ship that Sailed the Ocean of Space' a couple of deadbeat space jockeys – in a story that speaks to punk slackers and Generation X before many of us were long out of nappies – encounter a large alien artefact that has no shape and seems not to contain any space. The tip of a drill goes in four inches and emerges the same distance the other side. It ends with a cracking punch line that turns 'The Ship that Sailed the Ocean of Space' from a routine Golden Age encounter with a traditional big dumb object to a witty, contemporary parable.

But Bayley could follow the New Wave and, later, the *Interzone* formulas with the best of them. 'Double Time', for example, picks up on two New Wave obsessions: entropy and the possibility of multiple realities. A scientist, Professor Sloan, discovers a way to make a large mass "pass at right angles to time". In the process, he kills his wife. But he discovers another version of his wife elsewhere in the multiverse. Through his explorations in alternative reality, Sloan receives redemption from his obsessive jealousy. In a similar New Wave vein, you're never quite sure whether 'The Exploration of Space' is a drug-induced phantasm, brought on by the "pleasant reverie" of a "second pipe of opium" or a true close encounter in which the drug has pulled open the doors of perception.

'The Big Sound' is similarly quintessential New Wave,

encapsulating the movement's love of music in a story with a strong Ballardian flavour. A composer creates a work that exceeds "the extant of normal music" (italics in original), to contact an extra-terrestrial race. Ultimately, the experiment forms "a crystal of pure sound [...] the hardest of all substances". Music, it seems, can transcend the nature and limitations of our reality.

Despite Bayley's obvious pleasure in the space opera – exemplified in his recent book for Games Workshop *Eye of Terror* (1999) (well worth reading, even if you're not into RPGs) – his narratives can be as intelligent as anything by

Christopher Priest, John Sladek or Kurt Vonnegut. Indeed, Bayley's study of the nature of space-time in 'The Exploration of Space' is as clever an sf story you're likely to read. It's one of those multi-layered short stories that you find more in each time you read it. There's more to think about in 'The Exploration of Space' than in many novels. If sf is the literature of ideas, 'The Exploration of Space' is one of its finest examples.

Indeed, Bayley is one of the most overtly philosophical writers with the field of science fiction and

his stories often have a strong metaphysical flavour. This sets him apart from many other 'literary' sf writers. Thomas Disch notes in *The Dreams Our Stuff Is Made Of* that much sf "is not about predicting the future but examining the present". But Bayley doesn't just examine our superficial societal, political and technological concerns; he evaluates the nature of the underlying ideas. For example, stories in his collection *Knights of the Limits* cite Aristotle's ideas on the nature of matter, Nietzsche's concepts of eternal recurrence, and the often-acrimonious debate between British empiricism and American pragmatism. However, Bayley never lets such intellectual speculations get in the way of the story. He doesn't wear his intelligence on his sleeve as Sladek, for example, could do at times.

Nevertheless, Bayley is a post-modernist writer – at least in the sense that his fictions undermine sf's traditional forms and values. Bayley's fictions highlight the convergence of numerous intellectual precedents: rather than being either nostalgic or contemporary, they're both. This postmodernist synthesis of the nostalgic and the contemporary leads to new narratives that change our understanding of the genre. Obviously, numerous writers change our idea about what constitutes sf and fantasy. However, Bayley is subversive from within the cultural stream of traditional sf, rather than standing on the banks as

an overtly 'New Wave', 'cyberpunk' or 'slipstream' writer trying to make waves by lobbing stones.

As noted above, critics tend to regard this almost unique combination as the main reason behind Bayley's traditional under-recognition: he's difficult to pigeonhole in any subgenre. I've already quoted Hughes's argument that Bayley's "unwillingness to betray space-opera keeps him from the attention of those biodegradable thirty-something readers who fawn over Ballard". There's an element of truth in this. Bayley was too avant-garde for the traditionalists; his punch lines and his ideas too subtle for those who enjoyed the

simplicities of E.E. 'Doc' Smith, A.E. van Vogt or Isaac Asimov. On the other hand, his books aren't peppered with the overt intellectualism, eroticism and bad language that are supposed to be the hallmarks of the avant-garde.

However, I suspect Hughes might be a decade out. Indeed, I believe that because Bayley straddles sf's traditional and modern trends, his fiction is ripe for rediscovery. There's an entire readership of 'thirty-something' readers raised on the space opera of *Star Wars*, *Doctor Who*, and *Star Trek*, who love 'traditional' sf, provided it has been given a sophisticated, contemporary

spin – a synthesis arising from the thesis of traditional sf, clashing against its New Wave antithesis, if you will.

So, on the one hand, Bayley is part of the intelligent, sophisticated, streetwise postmodernist trends that form the foundation of the New Wave and slipstream. On the other, he meets the nostalgic desire for a stable, comprehensible, emotive narrative. By synthesising the two contrasting forms, Bayley is very much a writer for the twenty-first century. Bayley is surely sf's knight of the limits.

Notes

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- 1. Best SF Stories from New Worlds 8 edited by Michael Moorcock (London: Panther, 1974).
- 2. 'Annihilation Factotum' posted on the website Fantastic Metropolis http://www.sfsite.com/fm/.
- 3. I'll look at his short fiction simply because it is easier to pull out themes and trends. And it's a selective look so sorry if I've missed your favourite story!
- 4. The Knight of the Limits (London: Fontana 1980).

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'[T]he mad faceless God...'1

Calvinist and Anti-Catholic Discourse in the Fiction of H.P. Lovecraft by Scott T. Merrifield

Religious discourse is a subject that is rarely touched upon in Lovecraftian studies; but, nevertheless, a subject of immense importance as it is central to any understanding of Lovecraftian ideology. However, this is

somewhat at odds with Lovecraft's own explicit claims of being a mechanistic materialist (Joshi, 1997: 11).

The religious ideology that permeates Lovecraft's work is one of a profound understanding of Calvinist doctrine.

The preoccupation and extrapolation with the Calvinist body of Reformed Christianity, within his fiction, has its origins in Lovecraft's reading of *Melmoth The Wanderer* (1820), the epitome of Gothic fiction written by the Irish Calvinist minister Charles Robert Maturin. Alongside the Calvinist influences propagated by Maturin's writings there is also an intense feeling of anti-Catholicism within Lovecraft's fiction; this too would appear to be a literary 'influence' of Maturin's, an influence that is all-pervading in Lovecraft's literary canon, and one which needs a thorough investigation.

Lovecraft was, I will argue, a Gothic writer who was profoundly, and spiritually, influenced by the writings of Charles Robert Maturin, especially the discourses of Calvinism and anti-Catholicism within *Melmoth The Wanderer*.²

The discourse of Calvinist belief is predominantly occupied with "[e]ternal election, by which God has predestined some to salvation [and] others to destruction" (McKim, 201: 111). In other words, God has chosen man before birth, as to whether he is destined for Heaven or for Hell. Calvin argued against Saint Augustine's teaching that only those who have belief are chosen; Calvin believed that a person is chosen in order to believe, and is thus a member of the Elect (saved) or damned.

This element of Calvinist discourse is central to Lovecraft's fiction. Calvin argues in *The Institutes* that his religious discourse is firmly "based upon the exposition of the Scripture; and the exposition of Scripture is based on exegesis, that is, the understanding of the actual text of the Bible" (Parker, 1975: 87-88). Everything that humanity needs to know about God's mercy is within the scriptures and one must not research into the theological aspects of Predestination because "the sacred precincts of divine wisdom" (McKim,

2001: 112) will be violated. If such an investigation is carried out, destruction of one's being will soon arise. Even those chosen by God, the Elect, are not allowed access to the hallowed halls of divine wisdom. These aspects discussed above are firmly incorporated into Lovecraft's fiction; especially in Lovecraft's Cosmicism (or in August Derleth's phrase "[t]he Cthulhu Mythos" (Derleth, 1994: 9)). However, before an investigation into the 'Calvinist Cosmicism' can be undertaken it is essential that we turn our attention to Lovecraft's essay on 'Supernatural Horror in Literature', written between 1926-1927. This profound essay is pivotal to understanding Maturin's influences on Lovecraft's writing.

'Supernatural Horror In Literature' is interesting in that it gives the reader a clear understanding of how well-read in weird fiction he was. Whilst on the surface it looks like a rambling monologue of the books Lovecraft has read, it does show us some of the themes in Gothic fiction that he thought important to incorporate into his own work; for example, the futility of religion and its oppressive and destructive role on the human psyche; good and evil; God/s and his relationship with man; and his profound understanding of the basic emotional construct that rules the human psyche, fear. This, Lovecraft believed, is where

our religious belief stems from, a fear of one's place in the universe, and a fear of scientific rationalist thinking.

Lovecraft was a great mechanistic rationalist; in other words, he believed that the universe is a mechanism that runs to fixed laws (Joshi, 1997: 1-12) – although humanity does not know all of these rules. Whilst Lovecraft believed that religion has its roots in fear, he also theorised that religion was a deep 'psychological pattern' in the human consciousness that was a part of our biological heritage. Such religious belief also has its roots in "man's first instincts and emotions [that] formed his response to the environment". A response to the 'unknown', the 'unpredictable' an overwhelming sense of omnipotence that belongs to "spheres of existence whereof we know nothing and wherein we have no part". Lovecraft wrote, on the saturation of religious belief and superstition within the human psyche, that

'as a matter of plain scientific fact, [can] be regarded as virtually permanent so far as the subconscious mind and inner instincts are concerned... And more than this, there is an actual physiological fixation of the old instincts in our nervous tissue, which could make them obscurely operative even were the conscious mind to be purged of all sources of wonder' (Lovecraft, 1994: 424-425).

...nearly all of Lovecraft's fiction sprang from his hallucinatory nightmares.

Here, Lovecraft is arguing that religious belief is essentially biological and a part of a human being's make-up like the colour of one's eyes or hair. Such belief cannot be eradicated. "Man's very hereditary essence has become saturated with religion and superstition" (Lovecraft, 1994: 424). It was no accident that Lovecraft shaped his Cthulhu Gods to fit "all manners of notions respecting a man's relation to the stern and vengeful God of the Calvinists, and to the sulphurous adversary of that God" (Lovecraft, 1994:

468). One way that the subconscious mind can manifest a suppressed belief in religion is through dreaming. This is a pivotal factor when dealing with Lovecraft's fiction – as the bases of nearly all of Lovecraft's fiction sprang from his hallucinatory nightmares.

Lovecraft's explicit religious beliefs are contrary to what I am suggesting; he was an enthusiastic and unabashed atheist of Protestant ancestry, and, as Clive Bloom in his essay on Lovecraft, 'The Revolting Graveyard of the Universe', points out he was also an ardent anglophile (Bloom, 1996: 193), and a staunch conservative. I would argue that Lovecraft consciously repressed his religious belief, but unconsciously his religious beliefs found escape through his dreams. It is for this reason I want to suggest that Lovecraft was a religious writer, and a writer who wrote partly out of a fear of Catholicism, primarily due to the influence of Maturin on his writing and thinking.

Lovecraft's reaction to *Melmoth the Wanderer* was extremely favourable. On the one hand he deconstructs the book, its stylistic and narrative structure, but on the other he appraises the book with a sense of fervour like he does no other in his essay. Lovecraft's reading of the book would appear to be one of profound spiritual enlightenment. So, where does the link come between

Maturin's belief in Calvinism and Lovecraft's fiction? The best place to look would be Lovecraft's creation of what is commonly called the Cthulhu Mythos.

Victor Sage writes in his book Horror Fiction in the Protestant Tradition that horror fiction descends from Protestantism and incorporates a common set of doctrines that "hold[s] English culture together" (Sage, 1988: xiii). Sage suggests that theology is essentially conservative and therefore "must preserve itself and its limits" (Sage, 1988: xiii). Protestant theology is therefore a...

...social cement, it must be recognisable and it must transmit a set of values from generation to generation. This is true of both established and dissenting Protestantism. On the other hand, Protestantism in its social and political aspects is notoriously hydra-headed' (Sage, 1988: xiii).

This is true both of Maturin and Lovecraft. Maturin was a Huguenot by descent who was brought up a Calvinist, and became a Church of Ireland clergyman. He believed in the suppression of Catholics and Catholicism, and the continuation of Protestant domination. Lovecraft, with English ancestry, was a Protestant, conservative and a promonarchist who firmly believed that the thirteen colonies of North America should have remained in English hands under the rule of George III.

Therefore, Maturin's religion and hence the reason for

his anti-Catholic rants - which culminated with Melmoth the Wanderer in 1820 (nine years before Catholic Emancipation in Ireland) was to uphold British cultural, political, monarchical and religious dominance within Ireland. Protestantism, as Sage eloquently puts it, is "the badge of identity in English culture... if opposed to Catholics." (Sage, 1988: xv) It was to be a badge which both Maturin and Lovecraft wore with pride.

There are several major parallels between Calvinistic belief and Lovecraft's fiction; such as the

malevolent God/s who appear to be horrific and resentful of mankind, and the discourse of predestination. The majority of Lovecraft's main protagonists are usually chosen by their gods to believe in them - belief never comes first, or if it does then there are usually catastrophic results for those concerned.

The deities that were conceived by Lovecraft for his Cthulhu Mythos are called the Great Old Ones, or the Ancient Ones. The Ancient Ones are essentially malevolent, manipulating their chosen followers to spread their doctrine throughout the Cosmos and to eventually reclaim Earth and once again be the omnipotent rulers of

August Derleth, Lovecraft's friend and fellow horror writer, has made some penetrating comparisons between the Lovecraftian Cthulhu Mythos and Christian theology although he never develops the analogy any further. Derleth writes:

It is undeniably evident that there exists in Lovecraft's concept a basic similarity to the Christian Mythos, specifically in regard to the expulsion of Satan from Eden and power of Evil (Derleth, 1994: 9).

It is, however, Calvinist Christianity that Lovecraft parallels, and it is not just the nature of power and evil that Lovecraft looks at, but man's relation with his deity.

Lovecraft's seminal story, which maps the foundations of the Cthulhu religion, is 'The Call of Cthulhu'. 'The Call of Cthulhu' is similar in narrative structure to that of Maturin's Melmoth The Wanderer – a Chinese puzzle box, narrative within narrative, albeit on a much smaller scale. 'The Call of Cthulhu', like Melmoth, tells the story through manuscripts such as medical reports, newspaper cuttings, shipping logs, and various academic documentation. The basic premise of the story, which derives its conception from one of Lovecraft's many nightmares, is about the nephew of George Gammell - a professor Emeritus of Semitic languages at Brown University, where Gammell is a noted authority on ancient inscriptions.

On Gammell's mysterious death the nephew, who is executor of his grand uncle's estate, inherits all his research. The nephew examines the papers and whilst doing so stumbles across a large, locked box; when opened it contains several documents relating the history, as much as is known, of the Cthulhu Cult. Along with the documents, press cuttings etc. is a small clay bas-relief of a Cthulhu God with hieroglyphics etched beneath it.5

> A young artist, who, having envisioned the God in a hellish nightmare, carved out the deity thinking it might be some form of mythological creature. He takes the bas-relief along to the Professor to see if he can tell him from what culture it derives. The Professor cannot and so carries out his own investigation into the cult of Cthulhu. His researches lead him into very dark territory, dying mysteriously perhaps encountering the very being he is researching.

The nephew, having learnt much more than his grand uncle did, sets out to find more information about the cult. The story is left with the nephew, having learnt too much, fearing the horrific deity Cthulhu, in fear of his life - the nephew is waiting to die, perhaps by the same method by which his grand uncle perished. What both discover in their theological exploration is truly horrific.6

Once again we have the horrific Calvinistic God, whose actions and motives are hostile to their followers. What should be stressed here is the element of Calvinist predestination; the Professor was not chosen by the deity to believe in the cult, but chose to 'believe' in the existence of the God and so went looking for it. Only he learned what he was not supposed to and is, presumably, damned to whatever hell the great Ancient Ones have created. The Professor violated "the sacred precincts of divine wisdom" (McKim, 2001: 112) and progressed one step further and attempted to find God.

It should be stressed that the characters who end up envisioning the Gods, whether in reality or through various dreamscapes, are only able to do so when the Gods choose to reveal themselves; never do the characters have prior

Lovecraft ...

that ... North

English hands

belief in the Cthulhu Gods. In the story 'The Statement of Randolph Carter'; the main character, Harley Warren, goes looking for the Ancient Ones underground in a New England cemetery. Warren disappears in the catacombs below leaving his partner, and not believing in the Ancient Ones, with the cries of:

"God! If you could see what I am seeing."

And:

"Don't! You can't understand! It's too late – and my own fault. Put back the slab and run – there's nothing you or anyone can do now!" (Lovecraft, 1999: 11).

Whilst Warren perishes, Carter survives. Warren broke the Calvinist doctrine, he chose to believe first. While Carter did not believe at first, he ends up a convert to the Ancient Ones – because the Gods manifested themselves to him. A kind of Calvinist cosmicism, if you will.

We also see this breaking of Calvinist doctrine in Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* when the monk Alonzo Moncada escapes from the monastery through the catacombs. When Moncada rejects Catholic monastic ideology he becomes imprisoned, physically and mentally. It is then that he manages to reflect upon the nature of religion and his place in the greater scheme of things. Moncada reiterates Pontius Pilate's rhetorical question "What is truth?" (Maturin, 2000: 9). This is a question which reveals a lack of moral Catholic commitment on the part of Moncada.

Moncada's problem lies in the fact that Catholic doctrine has been foisted upon him by his parents and those in the monastic enclave. Once again we come back to predestination, Moncada was forced to choose a belief in God, and not vice versa. Escape from the monastic enclave also proves problematical for Moncada; he escapes

one form of imprisonment and ends up in another, into the hands of the Spanish inquisition – Christians who have been perverted through their belief and who can see no way of release from their own religious hell of torture, cruelty and doubt, 'the enemy of souls' (Maturin, 2000: 261).

The discourse of Catholic fear in Lovecraft's work (once more a legacy from Maturin's Melmoth The Wanderer) is a Calvinistic fear of Catholicism and one which rears its religious hydra-headedness through Lovecraft's creation and use of the Necronomicon. The Necronomicon is, I would argue, a metaphor for the Bible. The Necronomicon was written by the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred who lived in Yemen, sometime around 700 AD. Apparently Alhazred retrieved the book, which is bound in human skin, from Babylon in Memphis where he travelled for six years learning the unspeakable truths of the Ancient Ones. But the mad Arab disappeared, possibly attaining ascension or damnation at the hands of the Ancient Ones. The Necronomicon exists to allow man access to the Ancient Ones – only when they have been chosen by the Gods to read from its pages. The Gods must choose their followers or those who read the manuscript would die of sheer terror if they were not predestined to do so.

Lovecraft shrewdly gives the fictitious book an historical lineage, like the Bible, and by so doing lending an air of historical and theological credibility:

Translated into Greek as the Necronomicon, A.D. 950 by Theodorus Philetas.

Burnt by Patriarch Michael A.D. 1050 (i.e. Greek text... Arabic text now lost).

Olaus Wormius translates Greek into Latin, A.D.1228. Latin and Greek editions suppressed by Pope Gregory IX, A.D.1232.

Black letter edition, Germany – 1440? Greek text printed in Italy – 1500-1550. Spanish translation of Latin Text – 1600?

"...and things

have learnt to

walk that ought

to crawl."

(Derleth, 1994: 11-12).

The Necronomicon and its theological contents about the Ancient Ones, like the Bible, remains harmless in itself until it is read aloud from by a select and chosen few; those who control its readings and distort its original meanings.

One of the first mentions of the Necronomicon in Lovecraft's fiction occurs in 'The Festival', which was written in 1923. 'The Festival' relates the story of a young man chosen by the Ancient Ones to attend a religious festival at Christmas in a small town in New England. It is here that the protagonist encounters the Necronomicon for the first time. With the other followers he descends into a subterranean cavern where the religious rite is to take place – during the festival one of the Ancient Ones will be evoked. But the reading becomes distorted and everything

descends into Chaos. The priest conducting the rite removes his mask and cowl and reveals that he is one of the Cthulhu gods. The protagonist flees screaming insanely and dives into the underground river to escape, but he is never psychologically right again. The story ends with the character muttering a passage from the Necronomicon "...and things have learnt to walk that ought to

crawl" (Lovecraft, 1999: 118). Lovecraft is hinting here about the tenebrous link between religious truth and religious falsehood, implying the slimy and dangerous manipulation that Catholicism has caused Christianity.

It is this distortion of Biblical reading, by the Catholic faith that so incensed Maturin, which in turn influenced Lovecraft. In the novel Maturin has Melmoth speaking to Imalee, warning her of the dangers of the Catholic faith and the nature of Christian truth. Maturin uses Melmoth to extrapolate upon the discourse of religious truth and religious falsehood:

They have such a religion [the Catholics], but what have they made of it? Intent on their settled purpose of discovering misery wherever it could be traced, and inventing it where it could not, they have found, even in the pure pages of that book, which, they presume to say, contains their title to peace on earth... The book contains nothing but what is good, and evil must be the minds, and hard the labour of those evil minds...

Thus some forbid the perusal of that book to their disciples, and others assert, that from the exclusive study of its pages alone, can the hope of salvation be learned or substantiated... But I weary you with this display of human wickedness and absurdity. One point is plain, they all

agree that the language of the book is 'love one another', while they all translate that language, 'hate one another' (Maturin, 2000: 341-342).

Maturin and Lovecraft fiercely believed that the true terror of religion lay not in religion itself, but in the doctrination of Christianity led by a select corrupt orthodoxy, in this case Catholicism. Catholicism for both writers becomes the enemy of Christianity.

If the argument of Calvinist and anti-Catholic discourse in H.P. Lovecraft's fiction (as a direct result of reading Maturin's *Melmoth The Wanderer*) is acknowledged, then the repercussions of Calvinism upon one of the leading proponents of twentieth-century Gothic Cosmicism cannot be ignored. Furthermore, the impact of Lovecraft's Calvinist and anti-Catholic writings upon his fellow contemporary writers, such as Robert E. Howard (creator of Conan the Barbarian), cannot remain underestimated and uninvestigated, as the discourse of Calvinism and anti-Catholicism pervades a great deal of 'popular' Gothic fiction of the 1920s and 1930s. Indeed, the literary discourse of Calvinism and anti-Catholicism in the works of H.P. Lovecraft continues into the birth of the twenty-first century.

Notes

- 1. Lovecraft, H.P. 'The Rats In The Walls,' in Lovecraft, 1999: 107.
- 2. The synopsis of the novel runs as follows: "Melmoth is the tale of an Irish Gentleman who, in the seventeenth century, obtained a preternaturally extended life from the Devil at the price of his soul. If he can persuade another to take the bargain off his hands, and assume his existing state, he can be saved; but this he can never manage to effect, no matter how assiduously he haunts those whom despair has made reckless and frantic." Lovecraft, H.P. 'Supernatural Horror in Literature' in Lovecraft, 1994: 441.
- 3. Lovecraft, H.P. 'Supernatural Horror in Literature,' in Lovecraft, 1994: 424.
- 4. Lovecraft writes: "The framework of the story is very clumsy; involving tedious length, digressive episodes, narratives within narratives, and laboured dovetailing and coincidence; but at various points in the endless rambling there is felt a pulse of power undiscoverable in any previous work of this kind a kinship to the essential truth of human nature, an understanding of the profoundest sources of actual cosmic fear, and a white heat of sympathetic passion on the writer's part which makes the book a true document of aesthetic self-expression rather than a mere clever compound of artifice.. Fear is taken out of the realm of the conventional and exalted into a hideous cloud over mankind's very destiny... Without a doubt Maturin is a man of authentic genius..." Lovecraft, H.P. 'Supernatural Horror in Literature,' in Lovecraft, 1994: 441-442.
- 5. Lovecraft describes the God thus:

The bas-relief was a rough rectangle less than an inch thick and about five by six inches in area; obviously of modern origin. Its designs, however, were far from modern in atmosphere and suggestion; for although the vagaries of cubism and futurism are many and wild, they do not often reproduce that cryptic regularity which lurks in prehistoric writing. And writing of some kind the bulk of these designs seemed certainly to be; though my memory, despite much familiarity with the papers and collections of my uncle, failed in any way to identify this particular species, or even to hint at its remotest affiliations.

Above these apparent hieroglyphics was a figure of evidently pictorial intent, though its impressionistic execution forbade a very clear idea of its nature. It seemed to be a sort of monster, or symbol representing a monster, of a form which only a diseased fancy could conceive. If I say that my somewhat extravagant imagination yielded simultaneous pictures of an octopus, a dragon, and a human caricature, I shall not be unfaithful to the spirit of the thing. A pulpy, tentacled head surmounted a grotesque and scaly body with rudimentary wings; but it was the general outline of the whole which made it most shockingly frightful. Behind the figure was a vague suggestion of a Cyclopean architectural background (Lovecraft, 1999: 14l).

6. 'These Great Old Ones... were not composed altogether of flesh and blood. They had shape – for did not this star-fashioned image prove it? - but that shape was not made of matter. When the stars were right, They could plunge from world to world through the sky; but when the stars were wrong, They could not live. But, although They no longer lived, They would never really die. They all lay in stone houses in Their great city of R'lyeh, preserved by the spells of mighty Cthulhu for a glorious resurrection when the stars and the earth might once more be ready for Them. But at that time some force from outside must serve to liberate Their bodies... Even now They talked in Their tombs. When, after infinite chaos, the first men came, the Great Old Ones spoke to the sensitive among them by moulding their dreams; for only thus could Their language reach the fleshly minds of mammals. The time would be easy to know, for then mankind would have become as the Great Old Ones; free and wild and beyond good and evil, with laws and morals thrown aside and all men shouting and killing and revelling in joy. Then the liberated Old Ones would teach them new ways to shout and kill and revel and enjoy themselves, and all the earth would flame with a holocaust of ecstasy and freedom. Meanwhile the cult, by appropriate rites, must keep alive the memory of those ancient ways and shadow forth the prophecy of their return' (Lovecraft, 1999: 154-155).

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Scott T. Merrifield's last article appeared in these pages in V217 (May/June 2001), writing on "Niggers, all of them...": Revisiting the Racial Ideology of Robert E. Howard". Mark Greener's 'Inside Lovecraft's Mind: The Importance of Style' appeared in V220 (November/December 2001).



First Impressions

Book Reviews edited by Steve Jeffery

All novels marked: are eligible for the 2002 BSFA Award for Best Novel.

All collections and anthologies marked: contain stories that are eligible for the 2002 BSFA Award for Best Short Fiction.

Chris Amies – Dead Ground 🛄

Reviewed by Kathy Taylor

Big Engine, Abingdon, 222pp, £8.99 ISBN 1-903468-01-9

Dead Ground is set in 1931 in the Condals, a group of Pacific islands that are a small and unimportant part of the British Empire.

Cosima Garton has organised expedition to The Condals to investigate the half-submerged Temple of Kawehe. "She was one of those who believed themselves born with spurs on their ankles, and the mass of humanity saddled and ready to ride." Cosima is portrayed convincingly as an intelligent, no-nonsense, efficient woman who is very much a product of her times. She believes strongly that in the face of the inferiority of natives the mystique of the white man must be maintained, and has little patience for dissenters or those who 'go native'. One character that thus earns her disapproval Willerby, is District

Commissioner for the Condals. Willerby warns the expedition members of the tabu around the temple, linked to the shark-toothed *tiki-nui* statues dotted around the island, a warning that Cosima characteristically dismisses as superstition. Allan Delmar, a member of the expedition,

decides to consult the local people about the background to the temple, beginning with the local poet Tolu Marangi, whose work contains a lot of the history of the island. The first death

start to grow.

CHRIS AMIES DEAD GROUND

Chris Amies makes an excellent job of building the tension and plot in slow layers to a satisfying climax. Each incident adds to the growing unease, and clues slowly emerge as to who or what is causing the deaths. Those looking for death and gore will find it in abundance towards the end, but by this point these horrors seem inevitable rather than gratuitous. In style the book is an adventure rather than a horrorfest, one whose setting and style is reminiscent of the works of Rider Haggard.

follows not long afterwards and the strains

The period feel of the book is marvellously done, from the initial description of the aeroplane travelling in stages to reach the Pacific, to the role of the District Commissioner and Magistrate. It upholds the values of this period of the British Empire, those of 'mucking in' and doing the best you can, 'getting on with it', stoicism and courage under adversity. These, despite the feeling of Imperial decline and exhaustion that permeate the novel, enable Allan Delmar and some of the people to survive the events that come.

Craig W. Anderson – Science Fiction Films of the Seventies McFarland Classics, 2001 (1985), 262pp £23.75 ISBN 0-7864-1197-X Reviewed by Colin Odell and Michelle Le Blanc

Clearly written with genuine enthusiasm for the subject, Science Fiction Films of the Seventies provides a chronological analysis of the decade's key films. Never seeking to be exhaustive. Anderson's reviews are a hodgepodge of historical information, anecdotes and criticism which make for occasionally eclectic reading. Surprisingly, for a book so temporally close to its subject (originally published in 1985), this approach hasn't dated too badly and for the most part his observations are at least backed up. The author is clearly passionate about sf and wastes no time piling on the praise or vitriol. He also spends time examining the literary precedents for much of the work presented, including some unusual or surprising sources, that shows a rounded knowledge of the genre. Occasionally, though, his enthusiasm mars the academic intent, leading to some selections rambling and others infuriatingly underdeveloped – his (justifiable) praise for A Clockwork Orange or Dark Star borders on the sycophantic; while his derision (only partly justified) of, say, Rollerball is almost rabid. That said, the results are never bland, even if you disagree with the sentiments.

Where the book does fall down though (apart from its price – McFarland's pricing policy puts their books outside the wallets of many) is in the introduction, which comes close to killing the project stone dead. Anderson's opinionated views are given unbridled rein as he vents his spleen against personal bugbears of the genre covering the history of the science fiction film, presumably to provide a

context. In the body text this is countered by differing opinions in the form of contemporaneous quotes but here they are presented as facts, not opinions. Thus Roger Corman is blamed for the 'curse' that killed off the sf film for a decade ("hideous" and "terrible" are words he uses to describe the man behind such classics as Man With the X-Ray Eyes, Little Shop Of Horrors, Poe adaptations, etc.). Godzilla is singled out as being representative of films that have no political or cultural subtext (presumably environmental concerns, threat of nuclear contamination and the worries about cultural identity in Japan after WWII don't count) and the pondering thought that "Perhaps science fictional musicals simply will not work" (Rocky Horror, Lizstomania, Phantom of the Paradise etc., all filmed in the 1970s, seem to have slipped his mind). Even worse he falls into the common trap of assuming that generally 'effects = budget = quality', and that only now can science fiction films attempt to match a novel's vision. This is a normal trait in sf film criticism, ignoring the temporal context of a film and neglecting to see continued improvements in effects technology. However, these pitfalls form a minor part of what is generally an insightful, thought-provoking, if rambling, read and a useful reference work.

Steve Aylett – Only an Alligator 🕮

Reviewed by Gary Wilkinson

This slim volume is subtitled 'Accomplice Book 1' — the first volume in a series. Accomplice is a tropical city republic that sits over an underworld populated by demons. Barry, friend of animals, enters one of the "demonic transit tunnels" and rescues an alligator, which annoys, and earns the enmity of, the demon Sweeny.

A simple overview (plus a look at the map at the front) would make *Alligator* sound rather like *Perdido Street Station*. But instead of a near masterpiece this is a pulp nightmare with everything turned up to eleven. This is my first exposure to Aylett who seems to take rather a blasé attitude to written English giving us a surrealist fever dream that fires off bizarre images with every paragraph. But it is

all too much. On the first page alone you have a mascarawearing dog called Help, a grandfather clock perched on a pile of emeralds and: "Of course he was instantly assailed by searing pain, sticked spinelight and corrosive etheric bile, but he was thinking about his dad's birthday"! At one



Gollancz, London, 2001, 133pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-57506-906-6

point when I picked it up on a bus journey I actually thought I had had some sort of brain haemorrhage because I found it so completely unreadable. The text is too opaque to generate much sympathy for any of the characters in any way; the detail is too dense to be able to visualise a coherent whole and allows no room for anything as conventional as a story. This kind of avant garde stuff is possibly palatable, even dazzling, in a short story, but in a novel, slim as this one is, it's sensory overload.

That said, some of it is pretty funny – Aylett has a way with the one-liner – but it's hard work to mine the gems from the gaudy dross.

In some ways Aylett reminds me of the writer in the film *Wonderboys*: instead of writer's block he has the opposite; he cannot throw any idea out, everything has to be included. On page thirteen, one of the characters comments, "I don't know how to write a book" Too true, Steve, too true.

Ben Bova – The Rock Rats: The Asteroid Wars II 🕮

Hodder & Stoughton, London, 2002, 440pp, £18.99 ISBN 0-340-76958-0; Tor, New York, 2002, 384pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0-765-30227-6

Reviewed by Mark Greener

After the shocking conclusion of The Precipice: The Asteroid Wars I (which I reviewed in Vector 217), Amanda Cunningham marries the geologist Lars Fuchs. And, to everyone's surprise, evil entrepreneur Martin Humphries offers the happy couple a wedding present: Starpower 1, a fusion-drive spaceship. Amanda and Lars begin a new life as rock rats, prospecting for asteroids rich in minerals needed on Earth, still struggling for economic and social survival following the environmental devastation wrought by global warming.

However, Humphries remains besotted with Amanda. And he plans to push the rival company Astro Manufacturing, which now includes Amanda's old friend Pancho Lane as a director, to the wall. When Amanda and Lars set up a trading company on the asteroid Ceres and plan to build a L5 colony around the planetoid, Humphries seizes his chance to destroy Fuchs, gain a monopoly supplying the asteroid prospectors and forcibly take Amanda's hand in marriage. Aided by his nefarious, manipulative PA Diane Verwoerd, Humphries hatches a violent plot to discredit Lars and the L5 colony. The Asteroid Wars begin in earnest...

Rock Rats shares The Precipice's strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand, Bova is a masterful storyteller and the narrative is compelling, almost hypnotic. On the other, the characterisation remains wafer thin. Only Fuchs has any sense of ambiguity as he evolves from an easy-going, peaceful geologist to a violent outlaw. However, the characterisation isn't strong enough to explore Fuchs' changing psychology in any depth. And as with The Precipice, you cannot help but notice the unrealised potential for a deeper, more thoughtful backplot. To take one example: Bova mentions the ethical and scientific controversies surrounding human cloning. However, Bova uses the cloning controversies solely to show that Humphries is a total bastard.

However, Rock Rats is a more enjoyable read than The Precipice, largely because it is set almost entirely off-Earth. In the first book, Bova seemed itching to free his characters from Earth. As Rock Rats is set on the Moon and around the asteroid belt, Bova's endearing enthusiasm for space exploration and technology pervades every page.

In The Dreams Our Stuff Is Made Of, Disch comments that sf's Golden Age is 12 years, when we are "wonderstruck" by new worlds, aliens, rockets and robots. Bova's enthusiasm in Rock Rats reminds me of why sf appealed to me as a pre-adolescent. You feel that Bova would love to be a rock rat. He remains wonderstruck. And he communicates this feeling to the reader. In these days of post-modern cynicism, that makes a refreshing change. Indeed, by the end of Rock Rats, I wouldn't have minded joining him in the asteroid belt.

Like The Precipice, Rock Rats is space opera: pure, simple and unadulterated. I usually enjoy more sophisticated, literary sf. But that's not Bova's agenda and it would be churlish to expect a novel to match Priest, M John Harrison or Vonnegut. Almost despite myself, I'm looking forward to the next instalment of the Asteroid Wars. And that's testament to Bova's brilliance as a storyteller. Switch your brain off and enjoy the ride.

David Brin - Kiln People

Reviewed by Stuart Carter

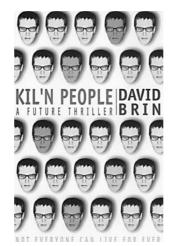
My first thought on David Brin's latest novel is how much more 'literary' the UK version looks than the US. The US printing is mostly a lovely metallic blue colour, but it features a lifeless interpretative painting of the contents that

would scare off many who might otherwise be suckered into buying the UK edition.

I hope some non-BSFA mortals are thus suckered, because Kiln People is an interesting and clever book, not too demanding, but adventurous, well thoughtout and something a little bit different for David Brin.

Kiln People is set towards the end of a 21st century that has developed the technology to imprint a person's memories into a duplicate made, primarily, of clay (hence the title, and the theme for endless small jokes throughout the book). These fullyaware and intelligent "dittos" last for just 24 hours, however. Their only way to avoid

death - or rather achieve 'continuity' - is to reload their memories back into their "archie" (archetype) before they die.



Tor New York, 2002, 459pp, \$25.95 ISBN 0-765-30355-8

Albert Morris is a successful private investigator in this heady new world, although he spends most of his time at home, sending out his dittos to do the boring, dangerous or inconsequential work, the same as everyone else does.

> Albert's day gets rather more interesting than most when, of the three dittos he has made, one sent to do the shopping goes "frankie", deciding a day at the beach would be more fun. Another, sent on an investigation, disappears and the third independently takes on a case with a confidentiality clause that means it can never inload back into the real Albert.

> One of Kiln People's great strength is its convoluted narrative that follows all four Alberts throughout this one single day. It's a fascinatingly dextrous attempt to convey the complexity of thought that has gone into Brin's creation, all the more enjoyable for the fact that he manages to hold it all together with a conventional first-person

narrative(s). Well, mostly conventional – some sections are briefly reminiscent of the syntactical fireworks of Bester's The Stars My Destination, but never quite flare up as flamboyantly. And the writing in Kiln People is incredibly fresh; you really wouldn't guess that Brin has been writing successfully for years. We know he's an excellent writer, but it's nice to see him stretching himself stylistically.

Flashy narrative aside, this is also a great story in the classic sf sense: beautifully-reasoned ideas pour out

unstoppably once the basic premise has been established, and I particularly liked Brin's Egan-esque suggestion that science, just as it has done in other areas, will roll back the secrets of the human soul.

Did I mention that I liked this book a lot? I liked this book a lot.

N.M. Browne – Hunted 🕮

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

enables the reader to suspend disbelief

This novel reads as though it is aimed at young teenagers. This would not necessarily be a point in its disfavour, but unfortunately it is rather badly written, whatever its target age group. It begins by transporting its heroine, Karen, from this world to a mock-Medieval fantasy world by having her attacked by a gang of teenage girls, beaten, and in a coma, her spirit waking up in the form of a fox. As a method of getting your protagonist into another world, this is as good

as any other, but from then on it is all downhill, the novel

singularly failing to provide that sense of wonder that

At first, Karen cannot remember anything of her former life, but she knows that something is wrong and she has not always been a fox. She is befriended by Mowl, a young man wrongly accused of treason and on the run, who recognises her as an "arl", a being from another tier of existence. After an "Adept" enables Mowl and Karen Fox to communicate telepathically, both of them become involved in an attempt to overthrow a usurping king and his evil advisor. There is a great deal of hiding from the Militia, meetings with double agents and armies of "mountain"

Bloomsbury, London, 2002, 336pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-7475-5519-2

men," and escapes along magical secret passages. Mowl is an introspective fellow who weighs his situation over in his mind very often – which, as a device to advance the plot, makes the reader want to scream out the old adage "show, don't tell." The novel's greatest defect is stylistic, its short sentences, with one thought or one action described one after the other, making for ungainly, grating prose. Mowl and Karen spend a great deal of time travelling about the countryside from villages to towns, but there is little sense of place, and the stolidly named, and two-dimensional characters - Mowl, Blud, Ponn, Kreek - reflect the plodding nature of the book. The reader is told that Karen will die if she cannot transform into her true form, but somehow the outcome of this threat is never in doubt. The sections of the book set in a hospital in this world, where Karen's grandparents keep a vigil over her comatose human form, fail to create any additional tension. I really cannot recommend this novel, but full marks to the illustrator for the eye-catching cover.

Avram Davidson (ed. Grania Davis & Henry Wessells) - The Other Nineteenth Century

Tor, New York, 2001, 327pp, \$27.95 ISBN 0-312-84874-9

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

I've come rather late to the discovery of Davidson (1923-1993), apart from the occasional anthologised short story and the chance (re)discovery of his quirky combination of humour and the fantastic in an paperback copy of his 1962

collection Or All the Sea With Oyster.s (How can you resist a title like that?) The Avram Davidson Treasury (1997), edited by Grania Davis, universally praised by reviewers from Gene Wolfe to The Des Moines Register, was instrumental in bringing much of his work back into print. This present volume collects 23 stories from 1960-1988 (with one story, 'Mickelrede', posthumously completed by Michael Swanwick, © 2000), mostly fantastic mysteries and humorous tales set in, as the title suggests, an alternative 19th century - ranging from the gaslit salons of London to the frontiers of the Americas. 'O Brave New World', however, opens some 50 years earlier and asks 'what if' Frederick, Prince of Wales, dissolute son of George II,

did not die in 1751 of being struck by "an insufficiently fatal tennis ball", but was sent to convalesce in the Americas. It is the making of Frederick. He falls in love with the Americas, and they with him. He builds a house, comes to love frontier life – even corn chowder and beans

and refuses to return, even on the death of his father.
 Which puts Parliament in a quandary. If the new king will not come home, they must go to him. And so the seat of government moves to America and things are never the same again (although with some quite

same again (although with some quite wonderful resultant historical inversions).

'One Morning with Samuel, Dorothy and William' is a similar sideways look at the famous interruption of a poet's reverie by "a person from Porlock" while 'Traveller in An Antique Land' is a darker crime story of the death of a famous English poet in a sailing accident off the coast of Italy.

'The Montevarde Camera' and 'Twenty Three' are both weird tales in the spirit of Poe and Lovecraft, while 'The Odd Bird' is a tall tale that brings to mind Howard Waldrop's classic 'The Ugly Chickens'. This latter is one of Davidson's Doctor Eszterhazy tales (which Ruritanian tall tales were collected in *The Enquiries of Doctor*

Eszterhazy (1975, rev.1990 as The Adventures of...). One of the longest stories is 'El Vilvoy De Las Islas', in which the story of a "wild boy" from the jungle who rescues a young lady of Ciudad Ereguay from the attentions of a ruffian grows and grows in the telling until "El Vivloy" becomes a



national hero and almost Arthurian figure. One of the later stories in this collection (1988), it is suffused with the memories of a more innocent and graceful age and the spirit of South American magic realism. In the pages of *Vector*, we (and I include myself) have often praised several writers as "consummate storytellers", but here is the Real Thing.

Greg Egan – Schild's Ladder 🕮

Gollancz, London, 2002, 400pp, £16.99 hb, ISBN 0-575-07068-4; £9.99 tpb ISBN 0-575-0723-0

Reviewed by Andrew Seaman

For the last twenty thousand years the laws of physics have been dominated by the Sarumpaet Rules, a spectacularly successful Theory of Everything. As Egan's new novel opens, the physicist Cass prepares to initiate an experiment to investigate possible alternative states of the quantum vacuum that underlies reality. Her experiment proves too successful, creating a stable novo-vacuum expanding inexorably into normal space. Centuries later the anomaly has engulfed numerous planetary systems, and Egan's

future society, represented by the residents of the starship *Rindler*, has become divided into two factions: the Yielders, who seek to save the vacuum for study, and the Preservationists who wish to destroy it. The debate between the groups becomes even more polarised when signatures of possible intelligence are detected beyond the boundary. In a galaxy seemingly devoid of anything more than primitive life the vacuum soon assumes an importance far beyond mere scientific curiosity.

Egan's stock in trade has always been a gimlet-eyed lack of sentimentality about humanity, scientific endeavour and technological progress, but *Teranesia* proved that he could also write a novel with

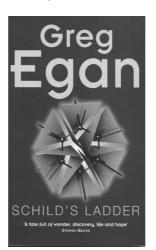
real characters. *Schild's Ladder* is painted on a huge conceptual canvas, but the (post) human core of this story, one that literally and metaphorically adds heart to the scientific and political debate spawned by the novovacuum, is the love affair between the characters Tchicaya and Mariama, resumed after a 1,200 year hiatus imposed by light-speed limitations that even the magical technologies of the far-future cannot overcome. In a novel of fearsome vistas of time and space this relationship gives

rise to humane moments of sly humour and unexpected poignancy.

Making no concessions to the reader, Egan hits the ground running and then progressively trumps what has gone before on the way to a startling conclusion. Having a copy of Lee Smolin's recent science book *Three Roads to Quantum Gravity*, which deals with some of the mind-stretching physics explored by Egan, might prove useful. *Schild's Ladder* has been touted by Gollancz as the author's

breakthrough novel, intended to appeal to a wider audience beyond his current readership, but this is no comforting space opera of escapist wish-fulfilment. Instead, it's a work of radically strange and estranging ideas whose currency lies in dizzying shifts of perspective from the sub-microscopic to the cosmological, a world where characters can die a 'local' death. but resurrect themselves either physically or virtually, and where personal physiology, psychology and gender are endlessly mutable. If the novel has a flaw (and maybe this is a deliberate observation on the part of the author) it's that events in Egan's future ultimately generate no real sense of danger. Characters cannot truly 'die' - at worst, they lose a few hours worth of ante-

mortem memories – and even the inexorable spread of the novo-vacuum cannot threaten the survival of humanity (at one point a character suggests moving the white dwarf Sirius B to snare the sun and launch it to safety!). However, that's just a slight cavil in what's otherwise a dazzlingly imaginative and stimulating addition to Egan's already formidable canon of work. If you're prepared to put in the effort, then the climb up this particular 'ladder' is more than worth it for the exhilarating view from the top.



David Gerrold – Leaping to the Stars

Tor, New York, 2002 316pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0-312-89067-2

Reviewed by Kathy Taylor

Leaping to the Stars is the third book of the Charles Dingillian family series. It isn't necessary to read Bouncing off the Moon and Jumping off the Planet first; the book fills in information well enough. However if you plan to read the series it would be much better to read them in order. Some of the events and revelations in the later books would give away plot-lines in the earlier ones.

Leaping to the Stars starts with the Dingillian family on the Moon trying to decide which of various colony worlds to emigrate to. Charles has possession of a harlie, a prototype of a highly sophisticated machine intelligence that would be of immense benefit to whichever group has access to it. Various factions on the Moon and Earth as well as the colony worlds are desperate to gain harlie to try and stave off the disasters and food shortages that will result from the Earth's fall into social, political and economic chaos.

The plot is that of a decent adventure story whose fast pace maintains interest. The characterisation of the major protagonists is superb. The novel is written from the viewpoint of thirteen-year-old Charles Dingillian and he thinks and acts like a thirteen year old. Indeed all the characters think, talk and act within a consistent and credible framework of wants, needs and confusions.

Like its predecessor, *Leaping to the Stars* manages to fit quite a bit of physics in around the story. For the most part this is unobtrusively done, although my eyes did glaze over a bit at a prolonged section on delta velocities. It is in his consideration of the social sciences that Gerrold produces something exceptional. One of the major themes of this book is group identification. To what extent do we define ourselves by our peer or friendship groups, our place in a

family, our religion? These difficult topics are tackled well via the experiences of Charles. They also form part of a fascinating series of philosophical discussions he has with harlie. None of these slow the book down, and indeed some are pivotal to the plot.

Leaping to the Stars is an excellent young adults novel that I can strongly recommend to not-so-young adults also. It would make a good book for a reading group to discuss.

Karen L. Hellekson – The Science Fiction of Cordwainer Smith

Macfarland, Jefferson and London, 2001, 158pp, £27.10 ISBN 0-7864-1149-X

Reviewed by K.V. Bailey

This is a revised version of a master's degree thesis. Its structure and style observe academic conventions, and its freight of appended material occupies one third of the volume. Cordwainer Smith aficionados will certainly find it none the worse for having those characteristics. A comprehensive glossary of terms used by Smith, as well as being an invaluable reading companion, offers memorable word-sketches of person or creature – of Lord Crudelta, for example; of the Norstrilian sparrow and of the robot Livius and the manikin meees of 'Under Old Earth'. We learn the slender but important distinction between scanners and habermen, and the respective functional implications of spaces one, two, and three.

Basic research was done in Kansas University's Spencer Research Library, with its wealth of published and unpublished Linebarger manuscripts. There is a fascination in seeing how unpublished stories and drafts are developed: how, for example, drafts of the (then unpublished) story 'The Colonel Came Back from Nothing-at-All' were reworked into 'Drunkboat', along with the transforming incorporation of Smith's 'englishing' of Rimbaud's 'Le Bateau Ivre'. The chapter (5) 'Star-craving Mad' similarly reveals how the cluster of drafts making up that unpublished work transformed into *Norstrilia*. That exposition traces how, in the six years separating the

works, a new novelistic maturity had arisen, indicative of Smith's personal and restorational psychological growth. Whereas 'Star-craving Mad' exists on the level of simple adventure, *Norstrilia* has elements of the *bildungsroman*.

Karen Hellekson's opening chapters consider the events of Linebarger's life as they affected the nature of his literary output. His endlessly peripatetic childhood contributed to a feeling of rootlessness and uncertainty of identity, his eventual multiplicity of authorial pseudonyms being symptomatic of the prolongation of such alienation into adult life. In part, a nom-de-plume ensured the (to him imperative) separation of story-writer from academic, but, in an unpublished ms, Linebarger wrote that he had come half to believe in the "dim individualities" of his "literary sub-souls". While 'Cordainer Smith' remained an sf constant, he used other pseudonyms for Ria and Carola, his earlier psychological novels of gender confusion, and for his spy-thriller, Atomsk. Karen Hellekson, through summary and analysis of these, and of important unpublished stories and novels, provides sfnally relevant insights otherwise hard to attain. As she observes, these mainstream works "explore themes that his science fiction picks up later: the human heart; gender; self-determination; and how one's life fits together into a whole".

Tom Holt – Falling Sideways 🛄

Reviewed by Jon Wallace

Fantasy is still big business these days – take a glance in Waterstone's if you don't believe me – and comic fantasy still seems as healthy as ever. And so here we have Tom Holt publishing his nineteenth comic fantasy (at least by my count of the list on the flyleaf). Except it's not

really comic fantasy.

These days, Tom Holt is specialising in what can best be described as comedy-of-errors. You know the sort of thing. Young man meets girl, they fall out, get separated, get confused, get back together in the end and they all live. Sometimes happily ever after. This is one of those. Except that things are even less like what they seem on the surface... In Shakespeare, that last statement would mean that, oh, she was a princess pretending to be a pauper, and he was a pauper

pretending... you get the idea. But on the back of this book, it says "Orbit comic fantasy" (I'll come back to that...) so that means that we have the whole gamut of fantasy thingies that everyone can be instead of who they really are. And Holt likes to set his books in modern times and to fling in some science, so we have sfnal things to deal with as well. Complicated stuff...

Orbit, 2002, 406pp, £16.99 ISBN 1-84149-087-3

This time around we have a young man obsessed with a long-dead witch, the multitudinous brothers who claim to be descendants of said witch and an old shed containing a cloning machine that is ridiculously easy to use. Stir that lot

together and you get this book. Well most of it anyway. You really have to add in intergalactic travel, theology and frogs (read it and see) to get this book. (Which doesn't really have much fantasy in it. If you get picky, then you could call it "fantastic literature", because it's not really sf either.)

Holt covers a vast amount of space, time and general incomprehension on the part of all the protagonists, before the eventual resolution of his plot, and along the way he says some things about art auctions, British

Columbia, dodgy dealers in clapped-out old vans, cloning, frogs (and cloning frogs) and one or two other bits and pieces. He finds the time to make most of this if not downright knee-slappingly hilarious at least amusing. He doesn't bother with deep meaning, or at least if he does, I missed it, (sorry). It's quite a thick book, so it does while away the odd hour, but it's more a book to take with you on that proverbial caravan holiday than great literature.



John A. Keel - The Mothman Prophecies

Hodder and Stoughton, London, 2002, 336pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-340-82446-8 (Originally published 1975, and 1976 UK as Visitors From Space

Reviewed By Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc

Re-released to coincide with the film by Mark 'Arlington Road' Pellington starring the permanently angst-ridden Richard Gere, The Mothman Prophecies comes wearing its film tie-in badge with pride. The author even manages a condescending afterword especially for this edition. The film is surprisingly decent and unexpected (as was Pellington's previous film – obviously a man who needs to sort out the person who cuts his trailers), managing to maintain a sense of anxiety and dread - all the more compelling because the events are "Based Upon A True Story", in this case Keel's 1975 book. By depicting contemporary events but referring to occurrences in (mainly) the 1960s, the film carefully introduces a layer of license with the work, distancing it from the source text. Pellington approaches the supernatural (for want of a better term) with a lighter touch than the bombastic and selfobsessed outpourings of Mr Keel. You will find precious little in the way of flying saucers, cattle mutilation and 'ultrasonic zones of fear' that make up the majority of the

book. It's as though the sheer number of mystery events coupled with occasional refutations constitutes a bona fide argument. In normal book-vs-film debates, aficionados usually insist that the book is the better option. What is remarkable here is how someone could make such a reasonable film, with a coherent script, identifiable characters and a genuine sense of community, out of such a rambling tome. Keel's dour descriptions, his total disregard for temporal causality and dull earnestness would be enough for most people, but he tries to treat his subject as though it's a real page-turning novel, something that just doesn't work. Long asides and endless lists of boring people being visited by boring entities in boring places bludgeon any sense of will to live from the reader. The potential for a good read is in there somewhere but Keel does his damnedest to ensure you don't find it. Also, for those curious to see the film, he gives the climax away in a throwaway paragraph in the first chapter. Avoid.

Megan Lindholm – Harpy's Flight

Reviewed by N.M. Browne

This is a reprint of Megan Lindholm (Robin Hobb's) debut novel, originally published in 1983 [a second book in the series, *The Windsingers*, has also just been published – ed.]

Ki's husband and children were slaughtered by harpies, and in avenging their death she leaves a maimed adult harpy still alive and intent on killing her. Ki is devastated by the deaths of her family and cannot live either with her own adopted people, the Romni, or the family of her dead husband, Sven. Although she tries to keep the truth of Sven's death and of her revenge from his family, they learn of the former in the 'Rite of Loosening' and eventually some of them learn of the latter. Her presence divides their community, who worship harpies, and her shared memory of the harpies' cruelty prevents communion with them. This is important because Sven's people believe that through the harpies they meet and talk again with their dead. Ki flees before the harpies discover her identity as a killer and makes a living as a trader until she is betrayed by one of Sven's people and narrowly escapes with her life. Along the way she forges a relationship with a would-be thief and

Voyager, London, 2002 (1983), 412pp, £5.99 ISBN NO 0-00-711252-1

finally comes to terms with her bereavement.

I'm not sure why I didn't enjoy this book; the world is interesting and believable and the characters are strong. In fact Ki's numb grief and alienation from the world is so well-portrayed that it almost hinders involvement in her story. The novel is written from Ki's point of view and structured so that the story of her encounter with her husband's relatives is told in flashback as she travels across an difficult mountain route through 'The Sisters' to deliver gems to a trader. It is a clever way of unfolding a plot, particularly one in which the idea of memory is so important, but I felt that the book might have had more tension if her bloody revenge for the killing of Sven and her children was as much a shock to the reader as it was to Sven's family. The book begins with her revenge and after that I found the rest of the plot a bit of an anticlimax; it starts with a bang and ends with a romance, but don't let my personal prejudices put you off - it's probably worth a read.

China Miéville – *The Scar* Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

Macmillan, London, 2002, 717pp, £17.99 ISBN 0-333-78174-0

The Scar opens just after the close of the events in *Perdido Street Station*, with a sort of normality (if anything can be said to be normal in New Crobuzon) returning to the city. One of the outcomes is that former friends and associates of scientist Isaac Dan Der Grimneblin are being rounded up by the city militia for 'questioning'. Some are not seen again.

Bellis Coldwine decides it would be very prudent not to be in New Crobuzon for a while and uses her skills as a linguist to take a crash course in the language of Salkrikaltor Cray, to act as ship's translator in return for passage to the colonies of Nova Esperium. Then, in a few years, five at most, she can return to the city she knows, loves and feels intimately part of. She settles down to write a farewell letter, although still undecided who to post it to. Things go awry from the start; the ship leaves early, the captain agitated and objectionable, and even more as they come into the Cray's half-underwater city of Salkrikaltor to find one of the massive New Crobuzon offshore mining rigs missing, and a government agent, Silas Fennec, commandeers the ship to return him immediately to New Crobuzon. They never get there; the *Terpsichoria* is taken by pirates, the captain slain out of hand, and the passengers, crew and transported slaves are told that they

(along with their ship) are to become part of the floating city of Armada, never to leave.

If we're disappointed that we will see little more of New Crobuzon, apart from Bellis's last glimpse of the dwindling lights of the prison ships in the Iron Bay, then the mile-long city of Armada makes up for it. It's another vividly realised and exotic city, with its own customs, language, quarters (it even has a park) and vividly polymorph inhabitants. Bellis is having none of it though; to her, it's "a curio... a sideshow", something patched and lashed into a stolen

parody of a real city like New Crobuzon. To others, particularly the freed, biologically Remade slave Tanner Sack. Armada is the best thing to have happened to them. Tanner even has himself more radically Remade (turning a cruel punishment into a badge of loyalty) to better adapt to his job as a diver. Even so, the stigmata of biological transformation is strong enough that Tanner has problems when young Shekel, his friend and former jailer, falls in love with the even more drastically Remade Armadan woman, Angevine. This three-way relationship is one of the most affecting parts of The Scar, and stands in direct contrast to the cold, self-serving relationships between most of the other characters, Bellis included. All the while, Bellis continues adding to her letter, without

knowing anymore who it is for, and which has now taken on the aspects of a confessional and journal.

Things are about to get odder. The couple who rule Armada, known only as the Lovers, and who daily scar each other as a sign of their love, have an ambitious plan to raise and harness a giant sea beast, an avanc, to tow the city to a region known as The Scar. There they plan to

harness the power of that immense rift in the world and reality itself, caused by the crash-landing of a ship from the long-dead Ghosthead Empire – an infinitesimal part of which resides in the "possible sword", *Mightblade*, of their bodyguard and assassin, Uther Doul.

The Scar, for all its catalogue of strange wonders (we have not mentioned the duelling scabmettlers, the almost throwaway sense-of-wonder of Machinery Beach, the haunted Ghost Quarter, or even Doul's rival and nemesis, the vampire Brucolac) is a more assured – and yet,

paradoxically perhaps, more frustrating – book than *Perdido Street Station*. It defies much of the narrative movement of the previous book to set up an ebb and flow of repeated offerings and withdrawals, of anticipations that are never quite fulfilled, or are refused at the last moment. In this, as elsewhere, we can again see Miéville's acknowledged debt to M. John Harrison (perhaps particularly the latter's *A Storm of Wings*), and one made explicit in the geography of Armada by naming a common meeting place the Place of Unrealised Time.

There is far more going on here than this review can do justice to. *The Scar* is an altogether different book from its

predecessor; it is a refusal of expectations at more than one level: of narrative and structure, of the conventions of quest fantasy and resolution, of being *Perdido Street Station* Part 2. At the same time it is every bit as rich, complex and detailed, as full of both wonders and horrors, and still with hints that there is much more to this world than can fit inside its pages, or might, in fact, ever be told.



L.E. Modesitt Jr. - The Shadow Sorceress: Book Four of The Spellsong Cycle

Orbit, London, 2002, 532pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-84149-089-X

Reviewed by Alan Fraser

News of this book at the time I reviewed Book Three of The Spellsong Cycle was that it was not a direct continuation of the previous story, although set in the same world of Erde where music is magic. Also, it would not feature Soprano Sorceress Anna Marshall, the transported American voice teacher and former opera singer, who by the end of the third book *Darksong Rising* had become not only Regent of the nation of Defalk, but also the strongest sorceress helping the forces of Harmony in the world of Erde subdue the forces of Discord.

This story was not entirely correct; Anna does appear at the beginning of the book, which takes place some twenty years after the end of *Darksong Rising*. She suffers an untimely death – although she's still youthful in appearance, her lifespan has been shortened by the use of sorcery, especially by that with the power required to maintain regular contact with her daughter here on Earth. Anna's death severely weakens the sorceresses of Defalk, and her assistant Secca is still only part-trained. Unfortunately, with the Sea Priests of Sturinn mounting a new assault upon the continent of Liedwahr, and its countries with no defence after years of Anna's peace, Secca is the only person who can stand against them,

trained or not. She must develop her full powers under fire to defeat the invasion of the Sea Priests.

Like the rest of this series this book is overtly feminist in tone — Erde is a male-dominated world (the enemy Sturinnese literally keep women in chains) where women are valued only as partners ("consorts") and mothers, not in their own right. Anna played a major role in changing these perceptions (more by force than by persuasion), and Secca continues her work.

Others have found Modesitt's work "competent yet pedestrian" – I found the first part of the book leaden and if I had not been writing this review, I would probably have set it aside. However, it does pick up in the second half – events become more exciting when Secca comes into direct conflict with the Sea Priests. Another minus point – Anna was a complete outsider in Defalk, who came both to the world and to musical sorcery late in life and by complete surprise; Secca is native-born and came to sorcery at an early age. Although the major theme of this book could have been to show how differently these two women react to overwhelming threats, I found it impossible to distinguish any difference between the ways in which Anna and Secca behave.

There are two changes here that suggest points made in

my earlier reviews were felt more widely: I teased Modesitt for giving the future Lord of Defalk a silly name ("Jimbob"); on his succession Modesitt has him change it to Robero to sound more imposing. Also, I complained that we were told over and over again that the pencil-thin sorceresses are forced to eat gargantuan meals, here it's mentioned but not

dwelt on.

Book Five of the series, Shadowsinger, a direct sequel to The Shadow Sorceress, in which Secca takes the war to the Sea Priests in their home islands, is already published in the USA.

Richard Morgan – Altered Carbon 🛄

Gollancz, London, 2002, 404pp, £10.99 ISBN 0-575-07322-5

Reviewed by Stuart Carter

Altered Carbon seems to be the book of the moment, and, believe me, the dense clouds of hype are billowing from a genuine four-alarm fire, not dull-glowing embers. This unbelievably, Richard Morgan's first novel - is as bright and sharp as a hypodermic needle oozing something unspeakably addictive from the tip.

In the 26th century the UN Protectorate rules Earth and

a clutch of interstellar colonies, keeping a fierce grip on her distant children through the Envoy Corps, an intensely trained and highly skilled peacekeeping force (emphasis on the 'force', to quote Joe Haldeman). Everyone is, quite rightly, scared of the Envoys - even the Protectorate - such that retired Envoys are prohibited from holding positions of power in society.

Takeshi Kovacs is a former member of the Corps and so has precious little choice but to become the 26th century equivalent of a private dick. Morgan has obviously read his Raymond Chandler because, despite the 26th century icing, this cake is basically hardboiled noir thriller.

Kovacs is an outsider, born on Harlan's World. After he is killed, his stored mind is transmitted many light years back to Earth, to be 'sleeved' in a new body in the service of a 400-year-old billionaire who has been murdered (or was it suicide?) and wants to know why.

Unfortunately, Kovacs's unfamiliarity with Earth, Earth's suspicion of Envoys (former Envoys especially) and the

burgeoning unpleasantness of the case he has been forced into taking all conspire to make his first time on the mother world a grim and increasingly desperate one.

Altered Carbon is remarkably violent; people are gunned down, blown up, stabbed and disintegrated with lusty abandon. This violence, whilst not always strictly necessary, serves to turbocharge the action: this is a classic

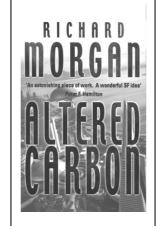
> sf future world of amazing technology, but one where the very worst in humanity continues to thrive beneath the glossy superficial sheen of hi-tech wonders. It's sadly ironic that one of the nicer characters in Altered Carbon is the AI of Kovacs's hotel, the Hendrix (yes, that Hendrix).

> This is what I thought Alastair Reynolds' Chasm City should have been: a ceaseless, permanently off-balance sprint through an alltoo-grimly-familiar future where miraculous technologies are degraded through everyday use and abuse.

> Altered Carbon is also full of teasing glimpses of disturbing background details that demand a fuller explanation. Important shards

of (future) history that have decisively shaped this world are tossed casually into the conversation, never to be heard of again. I hope Richard Morgan will use these enigmatic bits and pieces in his next novel, because his universe has me desperate to know more.

Go and buy Altered Carbon now before the BSFA makes possession of a copy mandatory for all members!



Grant Morrison, Chas Truog, Doug Hazlewood, Tom Grummet – Animal Man

Titan/Vertigo/DC Comics, 2002, £14.99 ISBN 1-84023-460-1

Warren Ellis, Darick Robertson & Rodney Ramos – Transmetropolitan: Gouge Away

Titan/Vertigo/DC Comics, 2002, £10.99 ISBN 1-84023-394-X

Warren Ellis & John Cassaday — Planetary: The Fourth Man (Vol 2) Titan/Wildstorm, 2002, £10.99 ISBN 1-84023-323-0 Chris Warner, Drew Johnson, Ray Snyder, Al Rio & Neil Nelson – Star Wars: Infinities - A New Hope

Titan, 2002, £10.99 ISBN 1-84023-432-6

Titan, 2002, £16.99 ISBN 1-84023-400-8

Jim Woodring, Ron Marz & various – Star Wars Tales Vol. 1

Reviewed by Gary Wilkinson

Back in 1987, well before Grant Morrison went off the deep end and started writing the wacko The Invisibles, he was asked to revive the minor superhero character Animal Man. This is a welcome reprint of the first volume (to be followed by others). Buddy Baxer is the Animal Man, able to take on the characteristics of any animal he comes into contact with. As Moore did with Swamp Thing, this is a radical reinterpretation. The first issues have a powerful anti-vivisection story-line although there is humour at the expense of Baxter's third-league-hero/Z-grade celebrity status. There is also a poignant tale of a super-villain who always wanted to a flying superhero but was saddled with a

'death touch' power and a lot of crappy robots. But we also have thankfully restrained touches of Morrison madness with a later story that features a Scottish super-villain who can step out of any mirror, and another story that is a sideways look at a certain cartoon by the recently departed Chuck Jones.

Warren Ellis is a writer who has done good work in the past with Hellblazer and others for the majors, and more recently the excellent wide-screen 'super-teams' series of Stormwatch and The Authority for Wildstorm, which I've missed until recently. Planetary is set in the same 'universe' as Stormwatch and The Authority, and features another

team of superheroes, but is much different in scope. This small team are investigators, in fact 'archaeologists', of a hundred-year secret history that is just starting to emerge. The stories, whole in each episode but forming an ongoing series, have reinventions of Hellblazer, the origins of the DC trio of Superman, Wonder Women and the Green Lantern and 1950s sf movies (including giant ants and radioactive mutants). The final result is spare, harsh and brilliant. There is some fine artwork and all the excellent original issue covers, unique in layout and style for each episode, are included. This demands rereading - and also, unfortunately for my bank balance, probably buying all the rest of Ellis's Wildstorm work.

Again from Ellis, in Gouge Away, gonzo crusading journalist extraordinaire Spider Jerusalem has become as famous as his subjects. He is the news - they've made a television adventure show about him (and a sleazy porno flick). But he soon pulls himself together and kicks ass to get the story, setting his bowel disrupter to "Fatal Intestinal Maelstrom". We also have a couple of transitional issues

including the proverbial 'episode starring a minor character', this time Jerusalem's two girlfriends. There is a strong dose of satirical bile here and it proves that comics are defiantly not for kids: there's not many media that would feature the President of the United States (who resembles a certain Mr Blair) masturbating into the Stars and Stripes. My first encounter with Jerusalem and now I'm going to have to read all the rest of these as well.

Infinities is a series of alternative histories deriving from the Star Wars films. A New Hope ponders what might have happened if Luke Skywalker's torpedoes had not blown up the Death Star. It actually holds its own against Empire and its ending is a lot better than Return of the Jedi, with Leia turning to the Dark Side...

Tales is a mixed bag of graphical short stories, set across the whole timeline of the Star Wars universe. Some are awful, some quite good and I have to admit to really enjoying the supremely silly 'Skippy the Jedi Droid'.

Andre Norton - The Gates to Witch World

Tor, 2001, 461pp, \$27.95 ISBN 0-765-30050-8

Reviewed by Penny Hill

This reprint of the first three volumes of the Witch World series has an enthusiastic introduction by C.J. Cherryh. Coming to them fresh as an adult, I found they made reasonably enjoyable reading but I couldn't quite see what all the fuss was about. If, however, I remember back to my interests and reading habits as a young adult, I'm sure I would have really enjoyed these books then.

We are introduced to this world by Simon, the viewpoint character from our world who chooses adventure and the unknown over death and/or disgrace. As his knowledge and assumptions are close to ours, we discover how magic operates and what the rules of the world are as he does. Which turn out to be a fairly straightforward and traditional genre choice between magic and technology, with technology seen as the lesser of the

Within this fairly traditional set-up, it was encouraging to see some strong and vivid female characters. Jaelithe the witch has to choose between magic and sex, while Aldis is the archetypal temptress, ruling through her sexual hold over the male power. Loyse, however, with her determinedly less attractive looks and insistence on independence, attempts to break free of the stereotypes, although disguising herself as a boy to escape and choose her own destiny is a trope that was old in Shakespeare's

There is a complete change in tone and style between the first two books and the third. The first two are thirdperson omniscient narrators - so that the audience knows Briant's real identity long before Simon works it out - and are told in a modern idiom. The third switches to a first person narration which unfortunately uses some of the archaisms that can make fantasy so tedious. Fortunately, the story being told is so gripping and enjoyable that I found myself forgiving the tone and enjoying the resonances with old fairy stories such as 'East of the Sun and West of the

How important a work is this in the development of the genre? Elements of this world are certainly clichéd but still come across vividly. It doesn't strike out on any new paths but perhaps is a work of consolidation, bringing together pre-existing themes and creating an enjoyable story-telling experience rather than a work of great or definitive literature.

What prevents this work from attaining any greater depth is the lack of any strong ethical conflicts or personal dilemmas. Our characters are not presented with any moral choices to make but merely a series of tasks which we can guess they will have just about enough strength to carry out - a far less interesting scenario.

Philip Reeve – Mortal Engines Reviewed by Farah Mendlesohn

Scholastic, 2001, 239pp, £12.99 ISBN 0-439-99345-8

Writing science fiction – as opposed to fantasy – for children is difficult and relatively uncommon. There seems to be a tension between the expectations of comprehension and the demands of science fiction. Heinlein, with his argument that the ability to do higher math conferred adulthood, may have inadvertently pointed to something rather significant in the nature of sf. It is quite possible that science fiction demands a particular level of cognitive sophistication that ensures that sf written for younger children rarely gets beyond meeting the aliens or staving off disaster. Fully conceived worlds with complex political problems require complex language and a developed world-view. By the time a child has that, they are more than capable of reading most of the classics of the genre, so in a time in which there is no longer an obvious marker of adult reading (sex) there isn't much marketing space for children's or young adult science fiction. When it does appear the tension I've outlined is evident. As with the Web series, Mortal Engines details extremely sophisticated political and moral dilemmas with language that strains at

the leash. The result is uneven, but the unevenness itself creates a jagged, staccato touch to the novel, which heightens the narrative tension.

Mortal Engines is a post-catastrophe novel. We know we are in the far future because the Guild of Historians possesses thirty-fifth century china. The world is a mass of mud and traction cities traverse the world, looking for minerals to mine. As these are exhausted, they turn to other towns and suburbs to plunder. But prey is now so short that the Municipal Darwinism of a city-eat-town world is degenerating into straightforward cannibalism. From the

beginning we are aware of a thinning of the underpinnings political of the apparently hegemonic polity. Into this wrongness enters Hester Shaw, searching for her parents' murderer, and Tom, an orphaned apprentice third class in the historians' guild, in a world in which one's position in life is bought by parental wealth.

The plot of Mortal Engines is superficially simplistic. Hester aims to kill the murderer. Tom loses his place in the great Traction City of London and is drawn into her quest. Katherine, daughter of the murderer, becomes a determinant in her father's downfall and is aided by a young apprentice engineer, Bevis. But Philip Reeve's novel rises above these

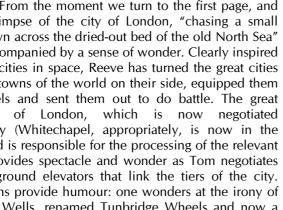
sparse outlines both in the psychological complexities of the novel and the vivid brilliance of the future which he describes. From the moment we turn to the first page, and catch a glimpse of the city of London, "chasing a small mining town across the dried-out bed of the old North Sea" we are accompanied by a sense of wonder. Clearly inspired by Blish's cities in space, Reeve has turned the great cities and small towns of the world on their side, equipped them with wheels and sent them out to do battle. The great metropolis of London, which is now negotiated horizontally (Whitechapel, appropriately, is now in the bowels and is responsible for the processing of the relevant refuse), provides spectacle and wonder as Tom negotiates the underground elevators that link the tiers of the city. Other towns provide humour: one wonders at the irony of Tunbridge Wells, renamed Tunbridge Wheels and now a small pirate town, and how it will cross the Atlantic. Science fiction is often described as a discourse: authors borrow ideas and motifs, embroider a little and pay homage to their predecessors. This can get tedious and there are whole tranches of sf which merely mine the traces of fool's gold at the heart of the genre, but when such borrowings are done with love and panache, the result is far more than the sum of its parts. Mortal Engines is full of such borrowings: as well as Blish, there are clear hints of Waterworld and Mad Max, but Reeve's inventiveness refreshes and re-visions even the stock figure of the Robocop/resurrectee, empowering them with new horror and intense emotion. This highly creative 're-mixing', as Andrew Butler has observed, seems to be a hallmark of

recent British sf.

In this book there are no evil characters, only the evil of absolutist morality and of self-interest. With both Tom and Katherine as viewpoint characters we are moved gently from a celebration of London's manifest destiny as the great city of the plains, through growing identification with its victims. Unusually for what is after all a children's novel, politics is central to the psychology of the child protagonists: fascism is not the ideology of the enemy, but blossoms in the eager celebration of the patriot. Casual hereditarianism is mocked without any lengthy lectures, and romance is written delicately and tenderly to reverse

the young reader's expectations without any grand moment of epiphany.

Mortal Engines is an anti-quest: what is reached promises a very different future from that which was planned. Its science fiction qualities appear at first to be window dressing: the madness of the traction cities and the destroyed world in which they travel. But Reeve presents a true 'what-if': the consequences of world catastrophe are a poisonous ideology and a rigidly divided world between tractionists and the static cities. The consequences of this is an ever-deepening ecological catastrophe, and from there the emergence of small groups of the inventive who live in the interstices of the hegemonies. The result is richly textured: at the end of the novel the binary division of the world is clearly collapsing but it is unclear whether we can expect a sequel. Although the ending is ambivalent on this score, the glorious ambivalence of the book on so many subjects ensures that this uncertainty is appropriate.



Kim Stanley Robinson – The Years of Rice and Salt 🕮 **Reviewed by Steve Jeffery**

Voyager, London, 2002, 669pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-00-224679-1

The 'novum' of The Years of Rice and Salt turns on a classic alternate history hinge factor: 'what if' the Black Death had so devastated the whole of medieval Europe that it never recovered, leaving the way and territory open for expansion from the flowering Islamic cultures on the one side and the Chinese on the other? Our first hint of this is the return of the scout Bold, a soldier in the army of Temur the Lame, to report the devastation that lies ahead. Temur, displeased, orders Bold and his companions slain, but is killed by a freak accident before the sentence can be carried out. Bold escapes, only to be captured and sold into slavery, finally ending up on a ship bound for China, where he meets the young African slave Kyu (whose graphic

castration is one of the most disturbing things in the book). After nursing Kyu back to health, the two end up together working in a restaurant run by Shen and his wife I-li. (Note the initial letters of all these names; they become an integral plot device as the book progresses.) The disturbed Kyu burns down the restaurant, and he and Bold make their way to the capital where Kyu is instrumental in unleashing a tide of distrust and devastation amongst the Imperial

Then the book breaks off – into the first of many such interludes - with Bold and Kyu meeting again in the bardo, the realm between life and death where souls await karmic rebirth.

Book Two, 'The Haj in the Heart', quickly confirms the pattern. In two short episodes set in Indian villages, a tragedy of death and revenge is played out between two

young women, Bihari and Kokila and the corrupt headman Shastri, and another in the relationship between the tiger Kya (who sometimes dreams of being a young village girl) and the villager Bistami. Each episode ends back in the bardo, as a commentary on the effects of earthly actions on the karmic fate of a 'jati', a group of souls reborn together time and again.

Through the rest of the book, Robinson combines these two elements of the counterfactual alternate history and the karmic cycle of rebirth to examine the forward sweep of history from the fourteenth century to the present from the perspective of a small group of

souls who comprise the jati, reincarnated time and again in different permutations as men, women and children. The discovery of the Americas, printing, science and alchemy, industrial technology, the struggle for women's rights, to the inevitable clash of cultures that leads to the billion dead of the 70-year Long War. And then beyond, to what is now an almost typically Robinsonian utopian scenario (strongly echoing the constitutional conference sections of the *Mars* books) in the final book 'The First Years', as a new scientific

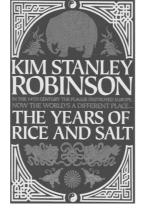
democracy and League of All Nations replaces the fall of the exhausted Qing dynasty. Which closing section also embeds a nice self-reflexive joke where, amongst the

thousands of books amassed by the philosopher historian Zhu, is described a curious volume by 'Old Red Ink':

...who had collected the lives in his reincarnation compendium using something like the clinamen moment to choose his exemplars, as each entry in his collection contained a moment when the subjects, always reincarnated with names beginning with the same letter, came to crossroads in their lives and made a swerve away from what they might have been expected to do.

As, indeed, The Years of Rice and Salt might be regarded as Robinson's clinamen

moment, a swerving away from what might have been expected. And yet at the same time, in its overarching historical sweep, its emphasis on individual lives and relationships, and the minor subtle pressure points of history – above all, in its scientific utopian response to conflict and immense tragedy – it is a thoroughly Robinsonian novel, ambitious and discursive, erudite and playful, and a book that will almost certainly inspire argument and debate on both its form and thesis.



Harry Turtledove - American Empire: Blood and Iron Hodder & Stoughton, London, 2001, 503pp, £18.99 ISBN 0 340 71551 0 Reviewed by Mark Plummer

In a recent essay on Turtledove's work, former *Vector* reviews editor Paul Kincaid argued that the relative lack of alternate histories of the First World War – as opposed to, say, those based on the American Civil War or Second World War – can be attributed to both the lack of obvious turning points and the absence of any 'dramatic effect' consequent upon them. Harry Turtledove is a notable exception here, but even his version of the Great War – in which the North American continent is decimated by a second (actually a third) Civil War fought out with steel helmets and tanks, aircraft and machine guns – is originally founded on a point of divergence point in the 1860s.

How Few Remain (1997) was the novel that set up this scenario. It was followed by three fat volumes of the Great War sequence (1998-2000) and now a new sub-series begins, taking us on to the post-war years. The United States, allied with the Central Powers, had achieved the long-sought breakthrough in the trench war and thus they are the victors at the War's conclusion in 1917. The Confederacy is left shattered by the war effort and internal slave revolts — a situation made worse by crushing war reparations and rampant inflation — and a large number of veterans return home, angry with the failure of the government to manage the war properly. Even the most casual student of history will recognise a fertile breeding ground for the rise of an intensely nationalistic and violent

political faction, especially given the presence of a large minority community against which to target the fury.

Readers of recent Turtledove novels will immediately recognise the structure of this book. 20-odd narrative viewpoints compete for space, telling their stories in fourpage bursts, building up a wide-screen picture of a 1920s post-war America. It's a format that brings both strengths and weaknesses. The big picture makes for a true alternate history, showing all the dimensions of the creation. The disparate stories connect, merge and drift apart – and the number of viewpoints allows a few to grind to a halt entirely as the characters die or are killed. The trade-off is the loss of a certain degree of narrative pace, as the story cuts from one viewpoint to the next before it ever really has the chance to get going.

Turtledove is at his best when he's being genuinely inventive; somewhat weaker when his alternative is simply our history with the names changed. Returning to Paul's point about 'dramatic effect', the upshot of the Great War's 'American Front' is the rise of a gang of butternut nazis, primarily differentiated from the real-world German equivalent by the fact that their leader is a former sergeant rather than a corporal. This is, however, a first volume of a new sequence, so there remains the possibility that this will develop into a genuine alternative.

Harry Turtledove – *Rulers of the Darkness* Reviewed by Lesley Hatch

This is the latest in Harry Turtledove's series of novels concerning a world war and the effect it has on the various

Tor, New York, 2002, 576pp, \$27.95 ISBN 0-765-30036-2

nations involved, both on a large and small scale. For the armed forces (on land, sea and in the air) the fight

continues much as it has done for a number of years, with gains and losses on either side. And both sides have the weather to contend with. For the civilian populations, life is also much the same, with the same shortages of good food and wine to contend with.

On other fronts, the war takes a different turn, when the mages experimenting with a counter to the blood magic being used suddenly find that they can hit back, and thus they have the breakthrough they have been looking for. In one of the occupied territories, the people due to be sacrificed to fuel the blood magic find a way to escape from the ghettos which have become their homes, and in their own way contribute to the outcome of the conflict. The young lovers who constitute two of the viewpoint characters find their lives changing once more when they discover they are to become parents, in a way which is integral to the final event in this novel. Further afield, countries which have previously remained neutral find that they are being attacked by one of the main protagonists.

As the fortunes change for the various protagonists, so also for the viewpoint characters we have met previously, in some cases drastically, and not always for the better. A prime example of this is when a group of irregulars, now led by the peasant who began composing protest songs, get commanded by a proper military man and realise that their aims and his are not the same: this results in a steady desertion by the irregulars, and leads to a whole new phase in our peasant's life, as well as providing a link into the next novel in the series.

Turtledove has maintained the same high standard he set with the previous three novels, which is no mean feat given the massive stage his work is played out on. He has managed to maintain an integrity and cohesion in his work which has my admiration, reminding us of the individuals and their problems, which have a much greater impact than the bigger events taking place world-wide. I await the next volume with great anticipation.

Jo Walton – *The King's Name* Reviewed by Vikki Lee

Tor, New York, 2001, 304pp, \$26.95 ISBN 0-312-87653-X

The King's Name is the second and final volume of Sulien ap Gwien's tale of her Lord and King, Urdo. It follows on from events in *The King's Peace* [reviewed in V214] where she told the tale of how the King's Peace was won; this book relates how it was kept.

Following the hard-won peace against the Jarnish invaders, Tir Tanagiri knows only a brief spell of calm. Civil war is now brewing as malcontents form alliances to challenge the right of King Urdo to rule all. Fleeing from an attempt on her life, Sulien slowly becomes aware of the forces building against Urdo. Being a soldier, and politically naive, she gradually comes to understand the implications of Civil War – fighting friends as well as enemies.

Sulien gathers her Pennons and advances to Magor where the renegades have taken control of the city. She lays siege to Magor knowing that her one-time friend Marchel, now exiled by the King following an unpardonable misuse of her authority, is a leading light in

the resistance. A long battle ensues and Sulien's army is finally victorious following the fortuitous arrival of her estranged son, Darien, leading the King's own Ala of soldiers. They are not wholly victorious however, as Marchel escapes and the real villain of the piece, Morthu, is still at large and is working against the peace from the city of Caer Tanaga. The scene is set for a confrontation at Caer Tanaga.

Walton has again produced a novel populated with real, thinking, feeling and caring people. If the plot is a little sparse, she more than makes up for it with character-driven action. For me, any book that starts with the line, "The first I knew about the civil war was when my sister Aurien poisoned me" compels the reader to continue. It is a pleasure to read a novel today where the author's attention to character, and what they do and say, is the lifeblood of the tale. I'd highly recommend this as an example of how to tell a simple tale engagingly.

Margaret Weis & Tracy Hickman − Guardians of the Lost ☐ Reviewed by Vikki Lee

Voyager, London, 2001, 578pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-00-224748-8

Guardians of the Lost is the second book in the Sovereign Stone Trilogy and continues the story some 200 years or so after events in the first book.

Dagnarus, Dominion Lord and Lord of the Void, has survived the cataclysmic downfall of Vinnengael. He is seeking the four parts of the Sovereign Stone, split apart by his father the old king, and given to the four races (Elves, Dwarves, Humans and Orken) in an attempt to unite the races and ensure everlasting peace. With his Vrykyl – dead people re-animated and kept 'alive' by the power of the Void – abroad and searching, drawing ever nearer to their goals, Dagnarus begins his conquest of the West with a huge army of Void-summoned Taan warriors. The alien, flesh-eating Taan strike terror into humans and elves alike as they overrun Dunkarga on their way to Dagnarus' ultimate target, New Vinnengael (built on the site of the original home of the Sovereign Stone).

Meanwhile the human Dominion Lord, Gustav, known as The Whoreson Knight, nears the end of his lifelong quest for the lost human part of the Stone. At the conclusion of his quest he is faced by a Vrykyl, and although he defeats it, he is mortally wounded. His battle is witnessed by a Trevenici warrior called Bashae, two young Pecwae and a dwarf, and on his deathbed the four are charged with delivering the Stone – without knowing what it is or its significance – to someone who can return it to New Vinnengael.

Dagnarus is also near to recovering the Elven portion of the Stone, and is using the enmity between the 'Divine' (the Elven King) and the 'Shield of the Divine' (the Elven Martial head and the Stone's protector) to his own ends. A pact with one of these ensures safe passage through Elven lands for his marauding army. All seems to be going well until the Elven Lord Damra's husband is taken hostage by

the 'Shield'.

After a slow start and a little confusion because of the 200-year gap in the story, this book really gathers pace. The Taan are a well-described and truly evil adversary with a fascinating culture, and although the battles and political manoeuvrings are inevitably tense, the authors inject a little levity by including an elderly grandmother on one of the

quests. Typically, every time Dagnarus grasps the tablecloth of victory, someone tugs harder from the other side of the table and snatches it away again.

This is an absolutely engrossing read and an excellent follow-up to a book I enjoyed and reviewed last year. It's dark, it's all action, and is highly recommended. Weis and Hickman are storytellers par excellence!

John Whitbourn − *Downs-Lord Doomsday* ☐ Reviewed by K.V. Bailey

Earthlight, London, 2002, 339pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-671-03302-6

The concept of Doomsday, the ending of all things, with potential for the dawn of new dispensations, has perennially provided for humankind an arena for the imagining of desired destructions and fulfilments. conceived with supportive fantasies, and occasionally acted out for real, as in the revolts of peasants, the excesses of millenarian sects, and the many partly-attained or unattained utopias of western history - and of science fiction. John Whitbourn's 'Downs-Lord' trilogy, in his portal-accessed alternate world focused on 'New Wessex', has from the outset created an exemplary stage for the combating of evil and the establishment of a new order the redeeming 'hero' being the priest Blades, portaltranslated from that historic England which is alternate to New Wessex. As with all attempted utopias, partial attainment is subject to relapse. In the trilogy's second volume, the ruling Bladesian dynasty have become corrupt and invasive evil is again rampant, and through that timeneutral portal the original Blades is brought back from

John Whitbourn has a predilection for, and the talent to, sustain such startling entities as the hideous and undilutedly evil Null and the beautiful, ambiguously intervening angels. Fantastic as these creations are, the

hermit-like retreat in seventeenth-century Capri by his own

descendant, Guy Ambassador, to fight and reign anew.

continuing portal-link between worlds has maintained some flavour of science fiction. This third volume, however, moves inexorably towards wilder shores of fantasy, until in a penultimate apocalypse we are left hesitant as to how far we are being asked to suspend disbelief. Blades has become semi-senile, a repressive godking presiding over a Byzantine-like court while his unifying rule crumbles. Such libertarian souls as the Levellers are rebellious, and Guy Ambassador has to deal with them. Conversion to their convictions leads to his exile, which takes the form of a campaign in New-Egypt, successful in its anti-Null objective, unsuccessful in its anti-Blades objective. Here the mode shifts from fantasy to enigmatic metaphysics, the crux of which, sited at a pyramid's pinnacle, is the magian revelation of an angelic evolution, and that in "A lattice of energy / In gorgeous dance / Matter is illusion / There is only aether /.... [and men are] mere sparks off the splendiferous blaze". The only axiom remaining after the final (here undisclosed) Blades/Guy confrontation and its aftermath is that, whatever the sub-evolutionary fluxions of history, the onus of the 'hero's' responsibility is inescapable.

Sarah Zettel – Sorcerer's Treason 🕮

Voyager, London 2002, 452pp, £17.99 hb ISBN 0-00-711399-4 (£9.99 tpb ISBN 0-00-711398-6); Tor, New York, 2002, 527pp, \$27.95 ISBN 0-312-87441-3

Reviewed by Carol Ann Kerry-Green

Bridget Lederle is the Lighthouse Keeper at Sand Point, Wisconsin, in 1899, as such is responsible for saving countless lives. Yet she is reviled by the people around her – for being the mother of a child born out of wedlock, and

for having been accused by some of murdering her bastard daughter. As winter approaches, Bridget's powerful vision alerts her to a boat in danger on Lake Superior. Determined not to lose a life, Bridget rescues a dark stranger dressed in outlandish clothes. The man, who calls himself Valin Kalami, claims to be a Lord Sorcerer from the land of Isavalta and advisor to the Dowager Empress Medeoan, and has come across the Land of Spirit and Death to find Bridget and take her back with him.

Kalami convinces Bridget to return with him to Isavalta, where she can help the Dowager Empress win her son Mikkel's

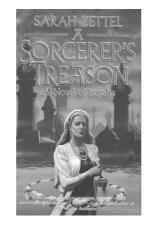
release from her stepdaughter Ananda. He promises that in Isavalta she will be welcomed as a powerful sorcerer in her own right and no longer have to put up with the ill-feeling of her fellow islanders. Saying goodbye to her loved ones in the graveyard Bayfield, Bridget is accosted by her Aunt Grace, her mother's sister who has shunned her over the years. A charlatan medium, Grace nonetheless warns

> Bridget that the man she is sheltering means her harm. Bridget however, is not willing to listen, and has made up her mind to go with Kalami.

> After crossing the Land of Spirit and Death, Bridget and Kalami are met by an escort and set off for the palace. Ambushed by crow-like creatures, Bridget finds herself the prisoner of Ananda's sorcerer Sakra. She has already begun to believe that not all Kalami tells her is true, but, unwilling to remain Sakra's prisoner for long, casts a spell that frees her, but deposits her in the forest, where she meets with the Vixen.

Sarah Zettel has woven a brilliant and intriguing fantasy using elements of both

Russian and Chinese folklore in the creation of Isavalta and its neighbors land of Hung Tse, Hastinapura and Kalami's homeland Tuukos. All exist in an uneasy truce, with



Hastinapura tied to Isavalta by Princess Ananda's marriage to Medeoan's son Mikkel, and Hung Tse held in abeyance by Medeoan's imprisonment of the Fire Bird.

It is rare for me to pick up a fantasy novel and become so embroiled in it that I am reluctant to put it down, but

Zettel's novel captured my interest from the beginning. With echoes of Guy Gavriel Kay and Robin Hobb in the writing, the novel makes very enjoyable reading. Highly recommended. I already await the second volume with anticipation.

David Zindell – Neverness

Voyager Classics, London, 2002, 685pp £7.99 ISBN 0-00-712437-6

Reviewed by Chris Hill

The ice-covered world of Icefall contains the magnificent city of Neverness, where members of the Order of Pilots. the only people capable of producing the mathematical mappings that allow space travel, are trained. Mallory Ringess, a newly-qualified Pilot, makes a foolish oath to penetrate the depths of the Solid State Entity, a giant brain constructed of moon-sized biocomputers. He hopes that this will help him find out the secrets of the leldra, the ancient race supposed to have seeded the galaxy with their DNA. But his discoveries send him back to Icefall to another quest amongst the Alaloi, a tribe of people who have had their DNA changed to resemble Neanderthals, and then finally to the discovery of traitor within the Order

Originally published in 1988, Neverness was Zindell's first novel and an incredibly confident debut. Although there are elements reminiscent of Gene Wolfe's The Book of the New Sun (the first person narration, a young and often unsympathetic protagonist being initiated into the secrets of their guild, a far future setting where the current day is almost forgotten), Zindell describes a world entirely his own. The city of Neverness itself feels very real, with its streets permanently covered with different-coloured ice, its various guilds of mechanics and seers and pilots and its complex social order.

There is also a real exhilaration in his description of the mechanics of space travel - the Pilots solving complex mathematical problems as they fall from one part of space to another. For someone like myself with a pure mathematics background, it is especially exciting to see the subject used as a genuine and important part of a major work of science fiction.

However, Neverness is not always an easy read. It is written in a self-consciously 'epic' tone, and is about largerthan-life characters and concerns. Inevitably this can sometimes be alienating - it can be difficult to see quite what it all has to do with us and to find characters that we can identify with. But once you adjust to the style it is quite compulsive.

It is good to see Voyager release this as part of their 'Classics' range (although I admit that not all readers will find it to their taste). It seems to me that sf writers tend to shy away from the epic, a style that is perhaps considered to be the property of modern fantasy. If this is so, then novels like Neverness are to be particularly welcomed for attempting to change this.



These are some of the other books we have seen recently. A mention here does not necessarily prelude a full review in later ISSUES OF VECTOR.

Neal Asher - Gridlinked

Pan, London, 2002, 522pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-330-48433-8 Neal Asher's first published novel, first reviewed by Scott Merrifield in V218 - "reads like a strange hybrid of Isaac Asimov, E.E. 'Doc' Smith and Philip K Dick" - now in mass market paperback to coincide with the publication of his new novel The Skinner by Pan Macmillan. Asher's collection The Engineer (Tanjen, 1998) was also reviewed by L.J. Hurst in V205.

Ionathan Carroll - Voice of Our Shadow

Gollancz, London, Fantasy Masterworks 25, 2002, 189pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-575-07367-5 This is the second of Carroll's titles to be selected for the Masterworks series (The Land of Laughs was reviewed by Iain Emsley in V216). One of Carroll's early novels (1983) set in Vienna (where he lives) among a series of variously rich, beautiful and talented people (Paul is a magician and India an artist) whose lives are overthrown by supernatural events.

(The print quality of the copy seen here is terrible, blurred and over-inked. Hopefully this is an isolated instance, but check first.)

Arthur C. Clarke - A Fall of Moondust

Gollancz, London, SF Masterworks 49, 2002 (1961, rev.1987), 224pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-575-07319-9 The tourist cruiser Selene is stranded in a sea of lunar dust, along with its passengers and crew. Time and air are running out while rescuers above have to contend with hostile and unpredictable conditions as they try and reach the stranded ship. A far-fetched scenario now but, as Clarke points out in his 1987 Preface, deep lunar seas of fine dust were a real fear in 1960 for potential Moon exporation, and not fully dispelled until the Apollo landings. Sir Arthur also notes that the Readers' Digest Condensed Books version of the novel (1961) may have been their first foray in sf.

David Gemmell - Ravenheart

Corgi, London, 2002, 507pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-552-14675-7

David Gemmell - Stormrider 🛄

Bantam, London, 2002, 446pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-593-04441-X Two further novels of the Rigante following Sword in the Storm, reviewed in V203 and Midnight Falcon, reviewed in V207. The Rigante are now a conquered people under the leash of the Varlish, their customs and culture all but destroyed. Now, after years of repression, two heroes are foretold by the woman known as the Wyrd of Wishing Tree Wood, who still holds to the old ways: one will become the outlaw champion Ravenheart, who will inspire the Rigante to rebellion. But against him, as the land is drenched in the blood of civil war, will come the brutal son of the Varlish king, Moidart – the Stormrider.

Jon Courtenay Grimwood - Pashazade: The First Arabesk

Earthlight, London, 2002, 327pp £6.99 ISBN 0-671-77368-2

Jon Courtenay Grimwood – Effendi: The Second Arabesk 🛄

Earthlight, London, 2002, 327pp £12.99 ISBN 0-7432-0285-6 The paperback edition of Grimwood's Clarke and BSFA Award shortlisted *Pashazade*, together with its just-published sequel *Effendi* (a teaser for which appears in the back of *Pashazade*). Grimwood's alternate history setting of the city of El Iskandria (reminiscent of the exotic location, politics and intrigues of Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria Quartet) is wonderfully realised, as are the characters and relationship between Asraf Bey ('Raf'), a fugitive (and escaped convict) from a US prison, and his nine year old niece Hani.

Tom Holt - The Second Tom Holt Omnibus

Orbit, London, 2002, 566pp, £7.99 ISBN 1-84149-133-0 Holt's second novel *Who's Afraid of Beowulf* (1988) and *My Hero* (1996) collected in one volume. In the first, archaeologist Hildy (whose name "means well" – a running joke through the novel) unwittingly wakes Hrolf Earthstar, last Norse king of Caithness, and his twelve companions, who decide to carry on their ages-old war with the forces of darkness. In *My Hero*, writer Jane finds her book and characters getting out of her control. Or is it, in fact, the other way round? Whatever, it's a very bad idea to go in there to try and sort it out...

Graham Joyce - The Tooth Fairy

Gollancz, London, 2002 (1996), 320pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-324-4 Graham Joyce is seemingly unable to write a bad, or even indifferent book. This is one of four Joyce novels (so far) to have won the British Fantasy Award, and establish him as one of the premier voices of Dark Fantasy, alongside Jonathan Carroll. Joyce's latest novel, *Smoking Poppy*, was reviewed by Andrew Seaman in V222.

Megan Lindholm - The Windsingers

Voyager, London, 2002 (1983), 392pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-00-711253-X This is the second volume in Lindholm's (who now also writes as Robin Hobb) Ki and Vandien Quartet, originally published in the early 1980s, and a direct sequel to *Harpy's Flight* which is reviewed elsewhere in this issue.

Ian MacDonald - Ares Express

Earthlight, London, 2002, 553pp, £7.99 ISBN 0-671-03754-4 MacDonald returns to the setting of his debut novel, *Desolation Road*, a picturesque Mars out of the pages of Edgar Rice Burroughs and Ray Bradbury (also 'borrowed' to equally splendid and exotic effect by Colin Greenland for *Harm's Way*). Feisty-But-Cute-With-It (as she tells us) heroine Sweetness Octave Glorious Honeybun Asiim Engineer 12th who wants more than anything to be an engine driver on the great fusion powered locomotives of the Bethlehem-Ares railroad, but (as a girl) is more likely to end married to a Ninth level steward on a backwater line, unless she Does Something About It. Which leads to a series of improbable adventures, escapes and encounters with the avatar of a less-than-saintly Saint, deranged Al 'angels', an anarchist circus troupe and a bicycle-powered floating apocalyptic church.

John Marco - The Saints of the Sword

Gollancz, London, 2002, 751pp, £7.99 ISBN 0-575-07290-3 Book Three and concluding volume of Marco's Tyrants and Kings, following *The Jackal of Nar* and *The Grand Design*. First reviewed in trade paperback by Alan Fraser in V219, this is the mass market paperback edition.

Marco's Eyes of God, just released as a Gollancz trade paperback original, starts a new Arthurian-flavoured series, and will be reviewed in a future issue.

Julian May - Sagittarius Whorl

Voyager, London, 2002, 373pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-00-648215-5 Third volume of The Rampart Worlds, following *Perseus Spur* and *Orion Arm* (the latter reviewed in V209), this concludes a fast-paced and somewhat gonzo-sounding sf adventure (the hero's house was eaten by a giant sea toad in the first book) of space opera skullduggery and shenanigans, described by Andrew Adams as a "rollicking good time".

Caiseal Mor – Carolan's Concerto 🛄

Earthlight, London, 2002, 491pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-734-2901-X A new stand-alone, novel from Mor, an Australian with family roots in Ireland (and a harpist himself). The title is also that of a tune by the brilliant Irish harper, Turlough O'Carolan (1670-1738) whose music was of such beauty that it was said to be a gift from the King and Queen of Fairies. The setting is 18th century Ireland, where rebel Edward Sutler is on the run. Hiding from the redcoats, he encounters distiller Hugh O'Connor and harper Denis Hempson, two old blind men who like a drink, a story and a spot of mischief, and finds himself drawn (in more ways than one) into Hugh's tale of the magical life of Turlough O'Carolan.

Robert Rankin - Fandom of the Operator 🛄

Corgi, London, 2002, 366pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-552-14897-0 Gary has all the normal hobbies for a young man, music, TV, girls and detective novels, except for one: reanimating the dead. So far without success, except for the rumour of a new telecomms service, Flatline. Like Chatline, but to those on the other side. An ideal opportunity, Gary thinks, to finally talk to his detective writer hero, the late P.P. Penrose

Sean Russell - The One Kingdom

Orbit, London, 2002, 714pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-84149-088-1 Book One of The Swan's War, now published in mass market paperback edition (this was originally issued as a £10 hardback promotion for this Canadian author.) Reviewing this in V216, Vikki Lee didn't think it broke any new ground in fantasy, although it was well-done, its characters engaging, and the story, set against a centuries-old family feud that threatens to erupt and shatter the peace of the One Kingdom, intriguing enough to look forward to the next volume.

Brian Stableford - Dark Ararat

Tor, New York, 2002, 352pp, \$25.95 ISBN 0-765-30168-7 The fifth (of six) books in Stableford's highly regarded 'Third Millennium/Emortality' series, which will be concluded by *The Omega Expedition* (based on the story 'And He Not Busy Being Born...'). The various books in Stableford's series vary between extravagant sf speculation (*The Fountains of Youth*) sfinal murder mysteries (*Architects of Emortality*) and conspiracy thrillers (*The Cassandra Complex*). *Dark Ararat*, set on a colony ship that is part of mankind's expansion out into the galaxy, is a mixture of both. Matthew Fleury is awakened from cryogenic sleep to replace a colleague who has been murdered just as the ship makes landfall on a promising world, but one with the abandoned remains of an alien civilisation. The murdered man is the scientist leading the investigation into the ruins, and if it proves that aliens still survive the colony must be abandoned and the planet declared off-limits.

Gene Wolfe - Return to the Whorl

Tor, New York, 2002, 412pp, \$15.95 ISBN 0-312-87364-6 Final volume in Wolfe's 'Short Sun' trilogy which began with *On Blue's Waters*, and previously reviewed in Tor hardback by Gary Wilkinson in V218, now in Tor trade paperback. The middle volume, *In Green's Jungles* was reviewed by Dave Langford in V212.

Clark Ashton Smith – The Emperor of Dreams

Gollancz, London, Fantasy Masterworks 26, 2002, 580pp, £7.99 ISBN 0-575-07373-X "In this phantom whirl of the infinite, among these veils of Maya that are sevenfold behind sevenfold, nothing is too absurd, too lovely, or dreadful to be impossible." The last sentence from Smith's short essay 'On Fantasy' excellently sums up both his approach to "weird fiction" and his style (grandiose, a little pretentious, but addictive when you get drawn in).

Subtitled 'The Lost Worlds of Clarke Ashton Smith', The Emperor

of Dreams – graced by probably the most gorgeous cover of the series, by J.K. Potter – contains, in addition to the opening essay, 45 stories and poems covering his whole career as a writer (he was also an illustrator and sculptor). Smith was one of the 'big three' authors in the pulp heyday of *Weird Tales*, along with Robert E. Howard and H.P. Lovecraft, and a master of the unsettling, uncanny and exotic.

Leon Stover - Science Fiction from Wells to Heinlein

McFarland, Jefferson N.C., 2002, 190pp, £42.75 ISBN 0-7864-1219-4 Large-format illustrated hardback, but whose academic price belies its 'St Michael' coffee table book appearance. According to the author credits inside, Stover is the compiler/editor of 8 volumes of The Annotated H.G. Wells for McFarland, as well as The Prophetic Soul: A Reading of H.G. Wells' 'Things To Come', critical volumes on Heinlein and Harry Harrison, as well as co-editor with Harrison of the anthology Apeman, Spaceman. The book is divided into Part 1: Science Fiction and Part 2: Themes. The first is divided into 'American Dominance', 'The British Tradition', 'Verne and Wells', 'John Campbell', 'Robert Heinlein' - an interesting approach to chronology, to say the least. 'The British Tradition' is almost wholly given over to a discussion of Wells - George Griffiths is mentioned almost in passing, but otherwise you'd be forgiven for thinking Scientific Romance began and ended with Wells until it crossed the Atlantic to reappear as scientifiction in the Gernsback pulps. Odd.

Jack Vance - Lyonesse: Suldrun's Garden

Gollancz, London, Fantasy Masterworks 27, 2002, 436pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-575-07374-8 The first book of Lyonesse (followed by *The Green Pearl* and *Madouc*), one of the ten kingdoms of the Elder Isles, the mythical, now-drowned land off the coast of Brittany from whence the ancestors of Arthur fled to Britain. Suldrun, King Casmir's fair but wilful and unworldly daughter is confined to her secluded garden after refusing the marriage arranged for her. But here she encounters Aillas, washed up on the shore of her garden from a Troicean ship, and her love and tragedy begin.

Peter F. Hamilton – Watching Trees Grow Ian McDonald – Tendeléo's Story

Gollancz, London, 2002, 110+103pp, £4.99 ISBN 0-575-07305-5 A back-to-back double of two novellas, first published along with Baxter's *Reality Dust* and McAuley's *Making History* separately in hardback by PS Publishing, and then all four collected in the hardback omnibus, *Futures* (Gollancz, 2001) reviewed by Gary Dalkin in V219. Presumably, the remaining two novellas are also to be published as a Gollancz paperback 'double' (not yet seen).

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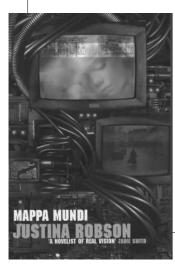


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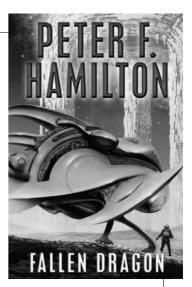
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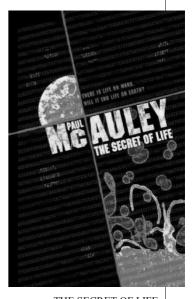
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