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# Vector

225

The Critical Journal of the BSFA

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THE CRITICAL JOURNAL OF THE BSFA


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## COVER

Pat Cadigan greets her worshippers at New Lanark Mills. Photo (and those on pages 5 and 7) by Edward James

## EDITORIAL TEAM


• **Production and General Editing: Tony Cullen** – 16 Weaver's Way, Camden, London NW1 0XE EMail: tcbsfa@gummitch.aviators.net]

• **Features, Editorial and Letters: Andrew M. Butler** – c/o Department of Arts and Media, D28 – ASSH Faculty, Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, High Wycombe HP11 2JZ. EMail: ambutler@enterprise.net

• **Book Reviews: Steve Jeffery** – 44 White Way, Kidlington, Oxon, OX5 2XA EMail: peverel@aol.com

• **Associate Editor: Tanya Brown** – Flat 8, Century House, Armoury Rd, London, SE8 4LH EMail: amaranth@avnet.co.uk


## VECTOR


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USA ENQUIRIES – **Cy Chauvin**, 14248 Wilfred Street, Detroit, MI 48213 USA

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## Other BSFA Publications

FOCUS – **Simon Morden**, 13 Egremont Drive, Sheriff Hill, Gateshead, NE9 5SE Email: focus.editor@cableinet.co.uk

MATRIX EDITORS –
**Gary Wilkinson (General and Film & Media),** Email: gary_wilkinson@yahoo.com
**Janet Barron (Books)**, 3 Ullswater Road, Barnes, London SW13 9PL Email: ullswater@compuserve.com
**Martin Sketchley (Internet):** Email: msketchley@blueyonder.co.uk
**Glenda Pringle (Magazines),** 22 Mead Way, Kidlington, Oxon, OX5 2BJ Email: chris@kidlington66.freeserve.co.uk

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Admittedly, only 32 pages, but over 38,000 words. Never mind the width, feel the quality! Off to France now for a well-deserved period of rest, reading and all the truffles I can snaffle.

# Editorial • The View From New Lanark

It's rare to have a conference or a convention in Utopia. Too often the campus-based convention is a 1960s or 1970s vision of utilitarianism, all glass and wood panels and draughts and swing doors. I'm a great fan of the Adelphi Hotel in Liverpool – although I've never actually stopped there – because of its layout with a central lounge. It's a firm favourite for Eastercons as far as I'm concerned, although I understand the security implications of an unlockable bookroom. I quite enjoyed the layered party atmosphere that was the Manchester Piccadilly Jarvis, with its series of landings and sofas, despite the constant refrain of 'it's in the other hotel!' which arose on each perusal of the programme book. My memories from 1995 of the SECCC (CCC...) – which I fear will be all too refreshed or confirmed by late 2005 – are much more of a dystopia, a characterless aircraft hanger; and Hinckley felt too much like a Sartrean hell, or a J. G. Ballard novel waiting to happen, *Red Brick Island* perhaps.

On the other hand, at the end of June I went to utopia. Or rather, as close as capitalism ever gets to utopia. Some time in the dim and distant past some bright spark had the idea that the Science Fiction Research Association, what with being an international organisation and all that, ought to have its annual conference somewhere that was not in North America. I'm not clear who approached whom, but New Lanark Mills World Heritage Site emerged as a perfect venue, Farah Mendlesohn emerged as the perfect organiser and (for some reason unfortunately lost to us right now or we could prevent it from happening again) I emerged as barely adequate programme scheduler.

I confess that if I were to organise a conference on my own, then I don't think I would have chosen this site – what with New Lanark being an hour by train and a similar distance by car from Glasgow and its various airports, and Glasgow being in a different country from either of the organisers. It's not as if we could pop along and check out the venue or have a quick word with the management. I also felt rather claustrophobic at Hinckley where, sprinting across the A5 to a fish restaurant aside, any other restaurant was a taxi ride away. In New Lanark I wasn't even sure there'd be taxis.

The events of 11/9/01 nearly rendered the whole conference impossible – we were quickly being told that these colours don't run as the stars and stripes wrapped the USA in understandable patriotism, but it also became rapidly apparent that these colours don't want to get on international flights. A conference in Greece lost all of its American Guests of Honour – although since our Guests of Honour were all either Edinburgh or London residents, this wasn't a problem we'd face. On the other hand it must have been sometime into 2002 before we were certain they'd have an audience. We did have a cap on numbers – New Lanark Mills had a limited number of rooms, there were limited hotel rooms nearby, and people would have to share – but it took us a while until we would have to worry about overflow.

Various crises of confidence weathered, I caught the train up to Glasgow the day before the conference and spent the night in my favourite Glaswegian Hotel (which *isn't* the Central), having taken time out to visit Borders, Waterstones and see *Spider-Man* at the new city centre multiplex. Whilst attempting to locate the hotel from where early arrivals would be catching taxis, I bumped into Joan Gordon, one of the editors of *Science Fiction Studies* who I'd first met at last year's SFRA conference in Schenectady, and arranged with her to take the train out to Lanark. Glasgow always reminds me of Melbourne (or vice versa) and the lower station at Glasgow Central reminds me of the grottiness of the underground rail stations on the city circle of Melbourne. At least Melbourne's station platforms had monitors to tell you about destinations; here you had to guess that you were getting on the correct train.

We rode out with more delegates, and eventually reached Lanark where we hunted for the bus stop (which is ungraced by any indication that it is a bus stop). When the bus arrived – a twenty-seater at most – rather too many people with rather too much luggage piled on, and hoped that New Lanark would be obvious once we got there. Removing rather too many of us with rather too much luggage was even more of a problem once we got there. But got there we did, and then we hit the next problem: where on site was the conference itself? I reached for my mobile phone to ring Farah, who I presumed was there already, only to discover that I couldn't get a signal. Plan B – hope the conference is at the hotel.

New Lanark World Heritage Site is a restored cotton mill, part of which is a museum of the cotton industry and various shops (including a rather incongruous Edinburgh Woollen Mill), and part of which is a hotel with conference space. This seems to be a new addition – to the extent that they were still hammering when I was given a quick guided tour. The rooms are remarkably green – some have automated lights, the toilets seemed to flush when they saw fit and it was all airy and light. The bedrooms only operated with your keycard – which was fine as long as you'd worked out that this was the case. In the early hours of one morning I found the corridors' automatic lights refused to acknowledge my existence and I had to first fumble around in the dark to find the slot in the door to open it and then the key dock to turn the bedroom lights on.

Cotton mills are surely ten a penny, but this one was run by one Robert Owen. Owen (1771-1858) was born and died in Newtown, Wales, but between those dates developed ideas about a more human face of capitalism. Very much a man of the Enlightenment, he felt that society could be arranged to be more just and egalitarian, where everyone could co-operate to their best advantage, and where everyone deserved some kind of educational opportunities. Educated workers could be happy workers. In 1813 he took over the mills at New Lanark and put his ideas into action, including a dedicated infants school for the children of his workers. One thing he banned was alcohol, feeling that it was detrimental to the health and the temperament of the people (this rather worried me – was the conference to be a dry one, I wondered?).

In his *A New View of Society* Robert Owen outlined his undertakings and argued that it should be expanded to the rest of the country:

> Their houses were rendered more comfortable, their streets were improved, the best provisions were purchased, and sold to them at low rates, yet covering the original expense, and under such regulations as taught them how to proportion their expenditure to their income. Fuel and clothes were obtained for them in the same manner; and no advantage was attempted to be taken of them, or means used to deceive them.
>
> In consequence, their animosity and opposition to the stranger subsided, their full confidence was obtained, and they became satisfied that no evil was intended them; they were convinced that a real desire existed to increase their happiness upon those grounds alone on which it could be permanently increased. All difficulties in the way of future improvement vanished. They were taught to be rational, and they acted rationally. Thus both parties experienced the incalculable advantages of the system which had been adopted. Those employed became industrious, temperate, healthy, faithful to their employers, and kind to each other. while the proprietors were deriving services from their attachment, almost without inspection, far beyond those which could be obtained by any other means than those of mutual confidence and kindness. Such was the effect of these principles on the adults; on those whose previous habits had been as ill-formed as habits could be; and certainly the application of the principles to practice was made under the most unfavourable circumstances. (It may be supposed that

> this community was separated from other society; but the supposition would be erroneous, for it had daily and hourly communication with a population exceeding its own number. The royal borough of Lanark is only one mile distant from the works; many individuals came daily from the former to be employed at the latter; and a general intercourse is constantly maintained between the old and new towns.)

After his reform of this factory, he moved on to try and set up a utopian community in America, buying the town of New Harmony, Indiana in 1825. This, alas, failed.

Marx and Engels mention Robert Owen as one of their predecessors in *The Communist Manifesto*, criticising him among others for his gradualist rather than revolutionary approach. But then you'd expect them to, since they were trying to mark out their own doctrine as the one to be followed. It's always a difficult equation to resolve: if people are being exploited should we hope that there will be a move to overthrow the entire system, or attempt to improve conditions, bit by bit, but in the process still exploit them.

On the other hand, some of the utopian socialists that Marx and Engels dismiss, are a whole lot more fun. Take Charles Fourier's vision of utopia: 'Men will live to the age of 144 [...] the sea will become lemonade; a new *aurora borealis* will heat the poles [...] Wars will be replaced by great cake-eating contests between gastronomic armies.' Maybe a sea of beer, or Laphraoig, and that would be my idea of utopia.

New Lanark Mills World Heritage Site is a brilliant use of an old industrial complex, and a wonderful space for a conference or a small convention. The staff couldn't be more helpful, and the food was tasty and imaginative. There were a dozen single malts to explore – and a range of intriguing bottled beer. And there's even a small but perfectly formed secondhand bookshop in the village. We might have been through purgatory to get there, but it seemed like heaven by the time we left. And some time soon, the masochistic brain cells says, we should do something else there...

**Andrew M. Butler, High Wycombe, Summer 2002**

## Are We What We read?

What are we if we are what we read and we read science fiction? It's a worrying thought.

To mark World Book Day on March 6 2003, the World Book Day people are holding a poll to see what book best describes life in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Unfortunately publishers are getting to submit the books which will then be whittled down to shortlists the public can vote on. (http://www.thebookseller.com/news/dnadisplay.cfm?id=2002_08_07_1.dat)

But in a spirit of creative theft – which sf or fantasy book or short story best describes our present? Not necessarily in some ploddingly literal 1936-story-from-*Astounding*-which-describes-something-like-the-internet way – although we'd be happy to see those too – but who's got it right in a more oblique way? Do the Sheep Look Up at cows, cows, burning bright? Do we really love Big Brother (or do we prefer *Survivor*?). Could we all stand on Zanzibar? Did anyone anticipate George Jr? Did anyone imagine an election where nobody came?

Send about five hundred words on the book or story of your choice to Andrew M Butler, D28, Dept of Arts and Media, Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, High Wycombe, HP11 2JZ or to ambutler@enterprise.net by 10 January 2003, and you may see your words appear in *Vector*. You might even win a prize...

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THE CURRENT EDITORSHIP OF *VECTOR* HAS LONG INTENDED TO INTERVIEW THE QUEEN OF CYBERPUNK, BUT FOR ONE REASON OR ANOTHER NEVER SEEMED TO QUITE FIND THE TIME. THE SCIENCE FICTION RESEARCH ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE AT NEW LANARK MILLS PROVIDED AN OPPORTUNITY AFTER THE FIRST EVENING'S MEAL FOR BUTLER TO BE FORCED TO ASK PAT CADIGAN A NUMBER OF QUESTIONS, IN FRONT OF AN AUDIENCE. THIS TIME, THERE WOULD BE NO ESCAPE. IMAGINE THE SCENE: THE *DIVA LOCA* DRAPED DECOROUSLY ACROSS A TABLE, A *VECTOR* EDITOR SITTING IN A CHAIR BEHIND THE TABLE, LOOKING FOR ALL THE WORLD LIKE A RABBIT CAUGHT IN THE HEADLIGHTS...

# Billable Time

### an interview with Pat Cadigan by Andrew M. Butler

**Andrew M Butler: Part way through your latest novel, *Dervish is Digital*, you describe someone as a 'slave-waged, tin-eared, moonlighting greeting-card copywriter'.**

**Pat Cadigan:** Yeah, I have no idea who I could have been referring to.

**AMB: Would you like to tell us about your not so secret career in writing greetings cards?**

**PC:** I was a slave-waged, tin-eared, moonlighting greeting-card copywriter, and it taught me everything I needed to know about being creative because every day was a creative challenge: what can I do today to make it so interesting that I don't keel over dead? I have to think of something interesting and really fascinating right now, or my mind is going to die.

We would occasionally get requests for interviews from TV magazine shows, like *PM Magazine* or *2020* who realise that there are companies that churn out greetings cards around the seasons. I did one of these and they asked me to write up a précis of what it is I do. I had to hand to it to my boss first and he handed it back to me saying, 'Could you please make this sound more creative?'

We would get an order blank and it would say, 'I need a six line verse, preferably female rhymes at the end to make it more interesting and friendly, I need it for Mother's Day, I need it with the main sentiment being how much you mean with a secondary wish for day, and I need it next Tuesday'. You'd do half a dozen of them because five would come back as already being in the files.

I swear this is what is called the 'social expression industry' and every time you buy a napkin, a key ring or one of those cute little posters from this company you are buying products from the social expression industry. The owner of the company would have started out of a YMCA, with a shoebox of postcards under his bed, and it was built into this incredible business. I started in the retail division, in this glorified shopping mall gourmet food store, and I was the assistant manager and buyer. One day he came to buy his favourite coffee beans. So I introduced myself to him – he would have been in his eighties – and we chatted and he asked me how I liked it. He came back, once every few months. About nine months after that I transferred to the editorial department. I was getting into the elevator one morning, and he got in with me and said, 'So, you're working over here now, Pat?' He could do that with hundred and hundreds of people. He did an awful lot to boost his creative people. They had a staff of hundreds of artists – some of whom are doing fine art now or fancy commercial art for big corporations who had done a year or two with him. They would put you through graduate school.

The last year I was there they started putting the verse on computers. So then we didn't just have six lines in iambic pentameter with female rhymes at the end, with the how much you mean with wish for day, we had #4902, six line verse, specifically from I or we and – well, sometimes I still wake up screaming. When it got really bad we did filthy rhymes and we'd listen at the committee door when they were going through them, listening for the silence, and then we'd know they'd got to the one about the candy corn. We had this standard rhyme we'd turn in every Halloween – candy corny / kinda horny. (It's funny if you've worked for a greetings card company.) I got to go to writers' conferences, and I also learned everything and more that I ever thought I needed to know about verse. I did ten years there and I decided I was only going to have happy memories. Every so often I dream that I'm back there.

What was the question again?

**AMB: I've forgotten now. Your first publication was for *Shayol*, a magazine you co-edited?**

**PC:** My first publication was before that, when *Shayol* was a magazine called *Chacal*, which was when my now ex-husband, Arnie Fenner was still trying to put the moves on me. He bought a story from me. I've stopped that now. I no longer marry everyone who buys a story from me. It was a weird little story that I'd written back at the University of Kansas, studying with James Gunn. They bought the story and then I started editing.

There were no such things as computers in those days. If you wanted to edit a magazine in those days you had to walk miles through the snow, uphill, both ways, and you had to typeset it yourself and you had to do it on special gloss paper with special ribbons, and these big old machines that look like the IBM Selectrics which had a wapping 5k computer memory in them. You could actually get five thousand words in them before you printed it out. If you had a justified column and you didn't like the spaces between the words, you had to move those letters yourself. There was no 'we'll fix the kerning there and the leading there...', you were on your own for that; it was *hell*. Then, after all that, you had to cut the columns out and paste them down, and you had to get really high on the glue. I hated it all. We were too soon for desktop publishing.

**AMB: Would you go back now there is DTP?**

**PC:** No. It's still too much work. I'm even more spoilt than I used to be. At the card company I had a typewriter with a wapping 10k memory, and one day I put all of the sentiments I had to write and printed them out on index cards. I said, 'That's it. I need a computer. I am not going to write another card until I get a computer.' That was how I put in my notice.

**AMB: Did you discover any writers whilst editing *Shayol*?**

**PC:** We discovered Marc Laidlaw. We may have discovered a few others but I've been travelling all day and I've been drinking this drink made specifically for me by the bar staff, so if at any time I get incoherent like now, you can blame this. It's got tequila in it and some other stuff that has chemically reacted with it – and me. While I am high maintenance and expensive, the truth is I am a cheap drunk. Which is what has really kept me going all these years; I like being a cheap drunk because no matter how bad things get you can still afford to get high.

**AMB: [Pause] Okay, next question then. *The Guardian* called you the 'Queen of Cyberpunk', you emerged as a short story writer at the time that cyberpunk was coming together, and you were in the *Mirrorshades* anthology, the sole woman. How would you define cyberpunk? Can you define cyberpunk? You may be the Queen of it, but do you write it? [long silence]. Are you now or have you ever been a cyberpunk?**

**PC:** This is very funny because in the Fall there's going to be this anthology from Byron Preiss called *The Ultimate Cyberpunk*, and it's going to have as editor on it, me. I'll make my excuses to you now, and if you can't accept them, tough, they asked me to edit it. I think they got all the way down the list of bigger names and finally I said 'Yeah, I'll do it'. It's a Marty Greenberg thing too. Over here in Britain, we writers really like Marty because his cheques are always good and they keep coming. You sign with Marty and you always hear from him once a year. He sent me a list of stories and I kinda fooled around with them, and I wrote an introduction called 'Not a Manifesto' which explains everything you *really* need to know about cyberpunk. It doesn't tell you the history or anything, but it explains, in the Gospel According to Me how cyberpunk happened.

Over the years people have taken issue with me over various things, and I've heard, 'Cyberpunk is just a boys' club, it must be a boys' club because there aren't any women in it.' And: 'Pat Cadigan just proves my point, there *aren't* any women in it'. Or, 'it's just a marketing thing, it's just a marketing ploy publishers made up so that they could sell more books and they could make the books look hip.' That wasn't it either, and people said, 'Bester, what about Alfred Bester? What about Samuel Delany? How come there wasn't this cyberpunk thing and now there is this cyberpunk thing, is it just because Bill Gibson said cyberwhatsits?'

Actually, what it is was the timing. We didn't have the word 'cyberspace' until we had cyberspace in the house. We had the desktop computer. Gibson has said that he was paying homage to Samuel Delany and Samuel Delany has said he was influenced by Alfred Bester, so the line is there. I've said this before: Bill Gibson did not walk out and say that there's this new thing called cyberpunk and I'm the bomb and nothing else matters. But a lot of people have jumped upon him as if he has. That has always bothered me, and if anyone wants to make anything about it you can see me outside.

If you say 'cyberpunk' then everyone knows what you mean. One of the other things that people say to me, is 'what about the women? Why are there no women in cyberpunk?' It's been almost twenty years now and things have changed, but not very much. The fact is in this case the whole question of gender is a red herring. There are some things that just cannot get a handle on by taking an inventory of the biology of the people involved in it. Cyberpunk was never about the sex of the writers, it was never specifically a guy thing among the guys.

I never ran into the 'you're a gurl' from any of the writers identified as the prime movers. I came in on it after they were all identified because I was busy having a baby and being a tin-eared, wage slave, moonlighting greeting card writer. I wasn't paying a whole lot of attention and then one day it became apparent to me, I started getting mail. I didn't have a computer – I didn't get my first one until after I sold my first novel, *Mindplayers*. It's a good job I got it then or I'd still be working on it; I still had the IBM Selectrics (uphill, in the snow, both ways). I've always managed to write exactly what I wanted to write and the only thing I managed to write well that I didn't like was greeting cards. I could only write what I wanted to write and I could only write what I was interested in.

Well, am I a cyberpunk writer? I think in this case perspective may be everything – if you don't like the idea that I'm a cyberpunk writer than god bless you, and if you do, god bless you too. It's not something that I necessarily worry about and I insist on the 'Queen of Cyberpunk' thing because publishing is a really tough business and everyone needs a gimmick. You say it and everyone knows who you're talking about.

What was the question again?

**AMB: 'What is cyberpunk?' – which you've successfully evaded so far.**

**PC:** Have I?

**AMB: We can play back the tape if you like...**

**PC:** You know, that happens a lot in my new book where everyone is under surveillance all of the time. So if they're having a conversation and they lose the thread – unlike now – they talk about calling the surveillance company and playing the tape back. I've spoilt that, but don't worry, there are plenty of other great moments in the book.

Everyone has their own idea of what cyberpunk is, and my idea is that it is produced by people with a bent in that direction. There were a few thing things written to be specifically like cyberpunk, and the authors aren't around any more. I don't know of anyone who decided to jump on it as a bandwagon and do a pastiche and make money so they could get famous, who managed to do it. I guess that if you write that kind of stuff then that's the kind of stuff you write. To me cyberpunk has always been concerned with the near or near-ish future, the impact of technology on human beings and vice versa. The best description came from Bill Gibson: the street finds its own uses for things.

**AMB: What struck me about your earlier novels is a sense of realism brought to cyberpunk, it feels like a lived in future with a technology that works, or in some cases doesn't work. There's the sense of Deadpan Allie in *Mindplayers* going on her assignments whilst still living her life.**

**PC:** The *Mindplayers* stories started out as satires on the card company. We had the four digit numbers: in the 4000s we had how much you mean, in the 5000s we had kind of person. I thought if you took that to its logical extreme you have *Mindplayers*. I really got interested in the technology I put in there. While I was researching the stories I was reading about brains and I came across the idea that the eye is a semi-exposed part of your brain. I thought, I probably ought to wear my glasses, goggles, protection. The more I thought about it the more I thought I'd mine that (or milk that, depending on your point of view) for material. Once I'd started doing that there seemed to be more things to explore in it. Whilst we aren't sticking things in our eyes yet, there are a number of riffs that I did on identity that seem pretty authentic to me but I'm biased.

**AMB: To leap ahead to the last two published novels, *Tea From an Empty Cup* and *Dervish is Digital*, both of which are set in the same world. A constant refrain through both of them is the idea of 'billable time'. I wonder if you'd care to say something about that.**

**PC:** Isn't everything costing you money? I'm not a scientist, I am a computer engineer. I took the course and I can fix your computer, up to a point. If I were unethical I would charge you £80 and take it in the next room, just to whisper to it. A lot of sf seems to involve the people who are developing technology – the mad scientist who develops the biotechnology – but I always end up with the badly documented device that doesn't quite work like it says it's going to and when I get the error message and I go and look it up in the trouble shooting section, it's always an error message that isn't there. That's my life and how most people are going to live with the technology. I've always written from the point of view of someone who's confronted with a real lemon of a car, lousy tv reception, clothes that don't quite fit, gadgets that don't quite work, things that never work quite the way they're supposed to. Outside of controlled conditions these things don't work.

I can remember when I was at school and they'd say, invent more machines, more labour-saving devices and we'll be able to save labour costs and have more leisure time. My thought was, living where I did, well under the poverty line, we'll have this leisure time but how are we going to make any money to eat during our leisure time? I was always seeing people put out of work or having to readjust their lives because part of it has become obsolete or it's not practical anymore. When I left America, I was seeing this weird contradictory thing in the area where I lived in Overland Park, Kansas. There were a lot of shops, but they were always going out of business, people could never keep them going because there was a Wal-Mart down the block and you were in five minutes' driving distance of three enormous shopping malls. You could either live economically and go to Wal-Mart or you could keep the centre of the town alive, but we weren't living in the kind of environment that would keep those shops alive, we were living in one designed to be a shopping mall culture. All of it was always costing us money.

When I first got AOL it was my idea of how to do an online service – it was for idiots. You did not have to get an education on how to be online, networks or computers, it was easy to use as a payphone. That's my idea of good mass media. When I got online I realised I could spend a hundred dollars without working up a sweat. We may have a flat rate for phone calls so we weren't charged by the minute, but AOL charged by the minute for connect-time. So it was still billable time.

If there's one thing that business is going to do in the future, it's going to do business. You aren't going to get online for nothing and they are going to make sure that they have something which plugs into your credit card before you plug into Artificial Reality. It's going to cost you time and money, probably mostly money. We're paying now in different ways for different things but people are still going to need to make a living and they're going to figure out new ways of putting their hand in your pocket. On the other hand, if you are in business then you have to figure out new ways of paying the bills. Sometimes it seems like the whole game is rigged so that I end up paying more and I'm entitled to get less and less. I'm wondering if I say that I will spend it all will they give me more? If I promise not to hang onto any of it, could I then have more?

**AMB: It comes back to this sense of reality about many of your novels. In Gibson's novels, for the sake of argument, no one has their modem hang up on them whilst they're halfway through downloading a file or hacking through cyberspace and rescuing the AI.**

**PC:** You see, that's 'Welcome to *my* world'.

**AMB: That's ironic, because I want to look at you playing with other people's worlds. You've written a one of the Web series, *Avatar* and a *Lost in Space* novel, *Promised Land*.**

**PC:** I tried to sell out but nobody was buying.

**AMB: Is this more greetings cards work, more formula?**

**PC:** William Goldman the screenwriter has this expression 'easy money at the brick factory' – any time you think you're gonna make easy money, it's going to be the hardest work you've ever done in your life. It's an example from his own life where he goes to work at the brick factory thinking it's really easy, and then at the end of the day his arm is so completely worn out that he can't move it, but he has to go in the next day and do even more. I was in the *Lost in Space* thing strictly for the money – I really needed the money. I'd fallen into the *Making of Lost in Space* book they did for the movie, and then I found that they were going to do franchise novels so I thought that I was in at the beginning of a franchise for once. I won't have to read all the stuff that everyone else has already done. I was steeped in the stuff because I'd been writing the book about the money. Then I found that when you sign for one of these novels, they think that you wrote it the night before, or they want it two weeks before they sent the contract back to you to sign. It was really fast and very unpleasant because I don't work that quickly.

**I tried to sell out but nobody was buying.**

**AMB: Was The Web experience more pleasant than that?**

**PC:** Oh yeah. But it was even harder than the *Lost in Space* Novel. My hat is off to people who write for children. This is not easy stuff. I like the book I wrote but I don't think it's something you should point to saying, 'Now there's a good example of a book for a young adult'. In the end I just had to write the story the best way I knew how. But the experience of sitting down with other writers – Ken MacLeod is one of the other writers in that six-pack of novels – we sat down and brainstormed the story-arc with the other writers and Simon Spanton the editor of the series, and that was really a lot of fun. If you are going to write like that, with an editor, get an editor who really knows how to pull ideas out – to accept every idea you get and not say anything critical about any of them. The idea is to get all the ideas out, and then the people that you're working with will bring their critical faculties to bear and eventually they'll come out with something good. One of the things that Simon seemed to do instinctively was not step on anyone's ideas.

**AMB: You've been resident in Britain now for about five, six years. Do you think that you've changed as a writer during that period, because you are living in Britain?**

**PC:** You probably change as a writer just in the course of your life. I grew up in New England which is exactly like England and we even know how to say things like 'Worcester' and 'Leicester'. So when I moved out to the Kansas City area, that was a bigger culture shock than moving from America to England. I think had more to do with the fact that it was 1973, and maybe my age, and the fact that I'd just married my first husbands.

I didn't leave the North American continent until I was thirty-six years old, and the first place I went was London. As I went into the city, I felt I was home. I had always wanted to travel outside my own culture because I was aware of the fact that I was very provincial. I didn't have a lot of experience that you get from meeting people who have grown up in completely different circumstances or other places on the planet. I was aware of it because a lot of them passed through Kansas of their way to somewhere else.

During the time I was fluent in Mandarin it was because I had this night job as a waitress at one of the local 24 hour places just off campus. I was studying Chinese – the cook was Chinese, there were a bunch of Chinese exchange students, I was taking the orders and giving them to the cook in Chinese. Then they all left and there was nobody to talk to so I lost all my Mandarin. But I was aware that I hadn't been anywhere and everyone else had. My first trip out of the country was eye-opening; I didn't talk much and I just listened to people. I decided that I want to do more of that.

So I went to The Hague, and that was the first time I'd been in a country where the language wasn't English. I decided that I either wanted to travel a lot or live somewhere else. I didn't know it was going to happen. I think that one of the reasons – and I'm always looking for reasons why I haven't turned something in yet – that my work has been going even more slowly than useful is the fact that I've gone back to the stuff that I had to progress when I moved over here and found that it really wasn't me anymore. It's not that I'm not American, because I think you always are where you grow up, and I haven't had any episodes of amnesia or brain washing, but I have acquired a much different viewpoint. I haven't necessarily become European; I'm still at the point when I'm neither one thing nor the other. Yeah, I'm still evolving. When I go back to America I find that I could not live there anymore. I could probably live in Manhattan, which is where I'd be living if I didn't know about London. There's something about living in London that's very satisfying, at least for me. I'm not saying it's perfect of course, it's not utopia.

**AMB: That brings me to my final question. We're talking a lot about the idea of utopia, dystopia, anti-utopia, heterotopia, homotopia, all the topias, this weekend, so what is your idea of the perfect place?**

**PC:** When I was invited to this and I was told the theme was going to be utopia, I was surprised they'd asked me because I really don't believe in utopia. My mother occasionally has utopia down in her flat but I can't stand it for more than about five minutes. She thinks it's heaven, I run from it screaming.

But I do believe in the utopian ideal. That corny thing about your reach exceeding your grasp. I think perhaps utopia is a state of mind; my idea of utopia is not necessarily where every *thing* is great, but where people rise to the occasion. Not people always getting along – 'oh, we all love each other, we never fight and there aren't conflicts'. The people that I conflict with and yet who are my friends, what we're conflicting over is methods. We all pretty much want the same thing but what we disagree on is methods. My ideal society is one where one where we can make a difference, and one where our being here makes a difference, our existence has caused a change. We want it to be a different world because we were in it. We want to matter. That's true of everyone, everyone want to have a chance to try to make as much difference as possible.

I could enumerate a whole bunch of ways which wouldn't be utopia. If it were against the law for someone like me to work. If it were against the law for two people who are very attached to each other to walk down the street holding hands. If it were against the law to have feelings that you feel ashamed about but didn't have to tell anyone about. This is all a long rambling way to get to freedom of thought.

This is perhaps the American part of me: the thing I really liked about America is the separation of Church and State, but there were times when I thought that there was such a fanaticism separating the two that we were really losing sight of the whole idea of separating them, which was to reign in fanaticism and not try to direct everyone's mind in the same way, whether it had to do with the worship of another deity, or a matter of dress, what kind of work you should do what your parents should be, what your skin colour should be.

**Audience: In the early days, did you have any contact with the Austin mafia, the cyberpunk guys, John Shirley, Bruce Sterling and Lewis Shiner? The early cyberpunks.**

**PC:** When we were still editing *Shayol*, we bought a couple of stories from Lew. I knew him better than to say hello to. I knew who Bruce Sterling was but I didn't take part in any of the workshops. I met him in passing at one convention, and John Shirley in passing at another one. But we weren't pal at that time.

Bruce sent me a whole bunch of this *Cheap Truth* stuff and gave me a phone number for a computer bulletin board that they were posting on. He said that if you're a cyberhead, feel free to call up and post. I didn't have a computer so I didn't even know what they were talking about when they said 'computer bulletin boards'. I thought, they've got a bulletin board down the supermarket and you have to have a computer if you want to post a notice? Is it selling computers? Buying computers? It's a meeting of the hobby club? So I wrote him back, by hand, using a stamp and an envelope, I said 'I'm not a cyberhead. I only have a vague idea of what that stuff is for.' Actually someone said it's Pat Cadigan disowning the whole cyberpunk thing. I didn't even know what I was talking about.

**Audience: It sounds as if you don't like your utopia too organised, and what you seem to prefer is a kind of gradual progress towards individual freedom. Did you get any of that from Jim Gunn? The wholesome 1940s gadgetry, just fix a few things here and a few things there.**

**PC:** That's not what it sounded like when I said it, it's not what it sounded like in my head. I suppose I *am* wholesome – don't let that leave this room, I have an image to keep up, I've got a living to make here.

**AMB: We have it on tape.**

**PC:** Life is tough. How can I be the 'Queen of Cyberpunk' if I'm wholesome?

**Audience: That was a stupid question. I have another question that might be...**

**AMB: Third time lucky?**

**Audience: I was wondering about the link between computers in cyberpunk and electronic popular music, the pop music culture. How does that link up in your mind? [Silence] Still a bad question?**

**PC:** Every so often I run into a new writer starting out whose published a couple of stories, and is working on a novel who says, 'I like to work to music, and I wonder if it would be OK to list the soundtrack at the end of the book?' I would say don't do that. If they find out that that was what you were listening to they might really laugh at you. You wouldn't want some of your musical tastes to get out.

The thing about the influence of music on cyberpunk was actually the generation that the writers belonged to. They were all born in

roughly the same era, the Beatles hit us all at the same impressionable age, we all watched the Vietnam War on TV at about the same point in our lives. We were hit with so many of the same cultural landmarks, high-water marks or low points. At least in American in the late 1960s the upheaval had a lot of connection to the rock music. This was nothing new; my mother's generation listened to that music made by *black people*, and you'd go wild listening to that music, you could get pregnant listening to that music.

**I suppose I *am* wholesome – don't let that leave this room, I have an image to keep up**

We had a more effective mass media and we were starting to get pictures around the world at the speed of light. We had the news on television so we were more aware of what was going on. You saw hippies freaking out to music. That'll carry through. Every generation will have some kind of cultural thing that everyone outside the generation is going to blame for making them crazy. I'm sure there's an awful lot of people my age who became parents, who have the complete works of Hendrix on vinyl and who cannot understand Marilyn Manson. 'Alice Cooper was one thing but Marilyn Manson is just too much.'

Our culture is within arm's reach all the time now. All the element are there whenever we want them. We carry music around with us, and it's not just the young people that do that. My mother's got a Walkman. Now have Internet Cafés, we can stop by, download something we feel we need or check our email, and now when people send you a message, it's got a piece of music embedded or a picture or a movie.

**AMB: And that's more billable time.**

**PC:** Exactly.

**Audience: You talked earlier about your mother. How big an influence was she?**

**PC:** Well, I've tried to push my mother out of the nest several times. When I moved over to England I brought my mother over as well. She lives in a flat on the ground floor, we live upstairs. My mother is 82. Everyone else in her family who reached her age was dead for about twenty years; some of them are dead longer than that and they haven't reached her age. No one was more surprise than her to have reached that age. I can't thank her enough, for living this long and having nothing wrong with her, except being stubborn as a mule.

My mother raised me as a single parent before it was fashionable. My father was a very abusive alcoholic, and when I was five we left. At that time, the late 1950s, you didn't leave your abusive husband, you stayed and you let him kill you. We moved to Massachusetts – I'm honest to god trailer trash, we moved from the trailer court to a tenement building. We moved in with her sister, my aunt Loretta, and her business partner Dolores, Dolly.

I didn't catch on until I was in college, and when I did, it was like, 'Oh... is that all?' I used to go fishing all the time with Dolly. I was raised by three women. It didn't seem strange to me. If you needed to go out on your own, you went out on your own. My aunt and Doll owned a tenement building, they worked full time at a steel factory and they ran a candy-making business in the basement of the house. Dolly's family, all her nieces and nephews were really ashamed and embarrassed by her, and didn't want to go fishing with her. She was fun; she didn't do any of that girl stuff.

I didn't get any of the usual conditioning women do, until I went to High School. I went to this all-girl's Elementary School, until eighth grade, Catholic school, we wore uniforms, and I really liked that because we were really poor and as long as your uniform is clean, nobody knew. I got into High School, which was co-ed, and I thought they were kidding me. That's when I ran into, 'Girls don't do that', 'You can't compete with boys'. I really thought I was being had for the first eighteen months.

My family pissed me off a lot, and they nagged me until I thought I'd go nuts, they criticised my music and made fun of my clothes. My mother used to say if I was going out on a date, 'You'd cry if I made you look like that.' But I never got beaten down, the way a lot of the better off kids were. I went to school with brilliant women, but they were so ground down. I never said an ethnic slur by accident in our house, but I was never told not to; it was sort of like nobody has to explain to you that you shouldn't kill and eat your friends. It was own world, but we were also realistic about things. When I told my mom I wanted to be a brain surgeon she told me I was going to have to be five times as smart as a man. And I said, well... I'm already three times. I never had to be told not to give up. I was the first girl from my school to go to university on a full scholarship, and I wasn't going to be playing football.

I'm going to have to look after my mom forever, but I owe her everything. Not only did she not crush me, but she was always there to encourage me. If you have kids, don't crush their dreams, encourage them, but also let them know you like who they happen to be.

Just one thing, if you have a mom, and she's still alive, call her and say sorry. Just sorry. When I had my son I was in hospital and she said, 'So, you had a baby?' and I said, 'Mom, I'm sorry, I am really sorry.' And she said, 'I forgive you.' Just call up your mom and say sorry; she'll know what you're talking about and she will forgive you.

The day after I had my son my then husband brought me a contract for *Asimovs*, it was 'Pretty Boy Crossover' and they wanted biographical material. I was still ecstatic about having had the baby, my stitches itched, but it was all I could not to put in a lock of hair and a picture of my fabulous offspring and so I dashed off a thing about how, having been identified with cyberpunk, I was pretty sure this made me the first cybermom. Until 'Queen of Cyberpunk' came along I thought I was going to have to labour under the title 'Cybermom'.

**AMB:** I think that's a good time to stop the unstoppable, wholesome, Pat Cadigan. Thank you, Pat.

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# Worlds Apart, Out of Mind: The Psi Fictions of Richard Cowper

**by Andrew M. Butler**

Richard Cowper (1926-2002) is perhaps best known for his White Bird of Kinship trilogy, consisting of *The Road to Corlay* (1978; with 'Piper at the Gates of Dawn' added 1979), *A Dream of Kinship* (1981) and *A Tapestry of Time* (1982). This is one of those peculiarly British – perhaps peculiarly English – creations that hover on the edge of fantasy but are clearly science fiction, a post-calamity account of a flooded Britain and the religious society which emerges. The trilogy stands in a line with Richard Jefferies' *After London, or Wild England* (1885), S. Fowler Wright's *Deluge* (1928), John Wyndham's *The Kraken Wakes* (1953), J. G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* (1962) and Christopher Priest's *A Dream of Wessex* (1977). Unfortunately this trilogy has yet to receive the kind of critical attention that it deserves (I am only aware of David Wingrove's 'The Rest is Dreams: The Work of Richard Cowper', *Vector* 92:9-15. March/April 1979 and Maureen Kincaid Speller's paper given at 2001: A Celebration of British Science Fiction), which is symptomatic of the wider neglect not only of Cowper, but of the 1970s in science fiction in general.

New Wave writings are still remembered and argued over – whether the British cluster around *New Worlds* of writers like Ballard, Aldiss, Moorcock, Brunner, Sladek, Zoline and Disch or American writers like Delany, Russ, Dick and Le Guin. These writers are usually recruited into being ancestors (with Bester and Burroughs) of the cyberpunk movement, with further influence being located in the feminist critical utopias published in the early 1970s by North American writers. The British writing of the early 1970s is either part of a long 1960s (Brunner's *The Sheep Look Up* (1972), *The Shockwave Rider* (1975), Ballard's *Crash* (1973) and so on) or entirely ignored. As Brian Stableford has argued in these pages: 'The seventies have, inevitably, suffered the sad fate of seeming very dull and flat by comparison, devoid of any such epoch-making turning-points.'[1] Begun in a period of optimism, the 1970s suffered a series of booms and busts, as fantasy emerged as a fully fledged marketing category and media sf in the form of *Star Wars* (1977), the films of *Star Trek* (1979-present) and their many imitators fixed the image of science fiction in the minds of the British public – whilst the genre in Britain was left without a magazine outlet. It is high time that the writers of the era receive due attention.

Just as much of the New Wave fiction was actually published in the 1970s, so Cowper began his sf publishing career in the 1960s. Cowper's real name was John Middleton Murry Jr, and the Murry family had once been part of the Bloomsbury circle. John Middleton Murry (1889-1957) had been a critic and editor, first of *Athenaeum* and then of *Adelphi*, which he founded, and in 1913 he had married Katherine Mansfield (1888-1928). The couple were friends of D.H. Lawrence and his wife, and can be traced in Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1921). Among other works, he wrote on Keats and Blake, poets who are an influence upon his son. Murry Jr tried to get published himself, either as Colin Murry or Colin Middleton Murry, but it was not until he adopted the pseudonym 'Richard Cowper' in his forties that he found success: in the distinctly un-Bloomsbury genre of sf.

*Breakthrough* (1967) is an apt title; and also set up a pattern he was to follow through the next decade of his career: two distinct societies which are linked by telepathic powers of one kind or another. At first sight it perhaps owes more to the American new wave than the British one, in that it is hardly revolutionising the form of the novel in the same way that Ballard and Aldiss had. Its attention to style and characterisation also echo the improvement in literary style or consciousness that is typical of 1960s writing. Even the use of psi as the central gimmick isn't particularly British New Wave, since even a solidly genre editor like John W. Campbell was fascinated by psi in the early 1950s. Perhaps the one concession to the period of modernism that sf was going through is the novel's sense of having a narrator telling a story: 'If this were a work of Science-Fiction I daresay events would at this point begin to move towards a rapid and theatrical climax [...]',[2] a move he repeats in later novels.

Jimmy Haverill, *Breakthrough*'s protagonist, is an English Literature lecturer – specialising in William Blake – who works at Hampton University in the mid-1960s. One day he meets an American lecturer in the Senior Common Room, Dr Dumpkenhoffer, who is part of 'the most "with it" university in the United Kingdom['s]' (7) Parapsychical Research Department, and who has found a promising subject in the form of a nineteen-year-old student, Rachel Bernstein. Rachel is able to gain a high score in predicting which symbol will show up on a card – albeit out of sequence in time: she can predict the order of cards in the next run through of the machine. It could be that Haverill is the telepathic one – and that Rachel is precognitive – or that the two of them form a psionic unit when close together.

Dumpkenhoffer continues his experimentation, occasionally with the rather reluctant Rachel, as Haverill and Rachel have an affair. More psychic oddities emerge – Rachel and Haverill share a dream of an Arcadian landscape: '"a sort of shallow valley [. . .] Halfway up the hills, on either side, there was a single line of enormous black pillars, so high that their tops were hidden in the swirl of the cloud [... Further along the path] I found myself gazing into a huge, terraced, amphitheatre"' (69). Haverill's dream from 1960, which led to his writing a book on Keats's *The Fall of Hyperion* and getting the job at the university, finds its counterparts in the imaginary reconstruction of an Asian Minor temple found in 1962, printed in *The Telegraph*, and in a nineteenth century painting reproduced in *Country Life*, by artist John Martin. Somehow they are tapping into a civilisation light years or centuries away – possibly deep in the past.

Dumpkenhoffer develops various technological devices to make brain activity visible, to share the visions, but it is clear that the experiences are a drain on all three's energies, and are a risk to their lives – at one point Rachel falls into a coma and is hours from death. Haverill has a vision: 'the palace of the Sky Children, the creation of ancient Kroton's prophetic dreams, something so far beyond the boundaries of material imagination that we three humans who gazed upon it were held in awestruck silence. What we were seeing manifest before us were the ultimate aspirations of mankind.' (191) The nature of this experience is ambiguous; it is perhaps Rachel's origin or the ultimate destination of humanity.

*Breakthrough* closes with the dream of one of Rachel and Jimmy's children, as Haverill remains uncertain as to what psychic powers they have passed on to their children. Dumpkenhoffer had vanished whilst wearing the apparatus, but now little Babbit has a dream of him as a white bird: an 'image of [...] the solitary white bird winging its lonely way on and on into the unknown darkness under a roof of millions and millions and millions of stars. True, it may not have been [him] exactly, but I can't help feeling he would have acknowledged at least a spiritual kinship' (214). Somehow this anticipates Cowper's White Bird of Kinship trilogy, ten years or more before its publication.

In *Phoenix* (1968) we again have two worlds: one is twenty-fourth century Earth, the other fifteen centuries later. Bard is heir to a fortune held in trust, and an embarrassment to his father. Rather than face humiliation, and reeling from a split with his girlfriend Andrena Klemp, he decides that his best solution is to go to the Caves of Sleep and get himself put into suspended animation for a few years. Unfortunately, whilst he is sleeping, there is some kind of disaster and he is unable to be awoken on schedule. When he is finally revived, he finds himself in a society dominated by a church-like power structure, with constant struggles for power and a paranoid fear of heresy.

Whilst Bard is accepted by those who have found his body, he is

in constant danger of discovery as an Old One. His limited knowledge of lost technology – even something as basic as the steam engines of the early Industrial Revolution – makes him both an asset to anyone who knows how to apply the horsepower to their own ends, and a danger that will bring charges of heresy upon them. Bard's memories of a school project on steam power is boosted by the ability of telepathic Mithrys to see into his mind. She is a double of the long-dead Andrena and perhaps part of a heretical religious movement known as the Dreamers. Mithrys has been given sanctuary by Pontius, the Tribune who has taken Bard in.

Naturally Bard falls in love with Mithrys, despite the risks he faces, and his secondment to a project to build a steam engine. For safety Bard must travel to Aetherios, the former island of Crete, where there lives a community of Watchers which has broken with the Brotherhood, and which embraces the knowledge of the Old Ones – Bard is not their first link with the past. Unfortunately he would have to travel without Mithrys, who is bound by her duties as a Priestess. There is a second alternative in the gift of the Watchers: '"it lies in our power to return you to your own age – to move you backwards in Time to the point at which you made your final conscious decision to undergo anabiosis"'[3]. Bard could then live his life out as he perhaps had been destined to – problems and all. In this parallel time there will be no Great Death to more than decimate humanity. To him the rest of reality will be a dream; to the Watchers the world will continue as before.

Communication across time is also at the heart of *Domino* (1971). We are once again in the contemporary period, with the young Christopher Blackburn reaching the age of eighteen and about to travel to Spain with his rock group. Before he can do this, he accompanies his Aunt Dorrie to a local meeting of clairvoyants, where he receives a message that 'Doctor Blackburn' is in danger. This he can treat with scepticism, since he hasn't yet gone to university, let alone gained his doctorate.

And yet he is in danger:

> The scaffolding was built out into a roof over the pavement and, as we approached, I saw that a concrete mixer was being edged out from inside the house. As I did so something grey flashed past my right shoulder and shattered on the road a couple of feet from where I was standing.[4]

Having survived this, he faces death in front of an underground train:

> My body gave a sort of wild galvanic twitch. I lurched, spun half sideways, caught a twirling upwards glimpse of two terrified white eyeballs in an ebony face, a yellow and black number plate and the edge of the platform tilted crazily above my head. I thrust out one arm absurdly to fend off the juggernaut, felt a shuddering blow on my shoulder, and then was subjected to a battering of sound as though all the old iron in the world had been emptied on top of me. (48)

Someone, or something, is trying to kill him. His inquiries at the various addresses he has for the people who have conducted the seances all come to nothing: either they have moved away or refuse to talk. One woman from the seance is declared dead – although when Christopher is called upon to identify her by the police, it is someone else's body.

Whilst investigating this conspiracy with the aid of his attractive cousin Valerie, he risks falling into another one. Valerie works for a company called Artefex, ostensibly in the import/export business, but also with a private research facility, Quaintways, somewhere near Folkestone. Its owner, Mr Topchik, is interested in Christopher's scientific prowess, in particular in his thoughts on a protein called 'histone':

> 'It's a DNA inhibitor,' I said. 'At least that's my guess. You see, when a gene's activated, the inhibitor – the histone – is itself restrained, probably by a hormone. It's a bit complicated, actually. But once we find out what's really going on, then organized genetic programming becomes a reality. Organized by us, that is.' (107)

It is clear that Topchik wants him to join Quaintways, but Christopher isn't so certain that this is a good idea.

Meanwhile he is contacted by those who were trying to kill him – people from the future. They are living in the society which has arisen from the use of such genetic programming:

> *'A society will arise in which all humans are programmed for specific tasks and ruled by a self-perpetuating tyranny. There will be the slavemaster and the slaves: the living and the dead. Humanity, as you understand it, will cease to exist. The depths of our degradation are beyond imagination. For us the concentration camps of the twentieth century would be a paradise. We are the damned.'* (160)

Whereas in *Phoenix* the past may be changed so that an individual might continue living his life – although Bard in fact rejects this option – here an individual risks being assassinated in order to prevent the future coming about. The damned will not come into existence, so his death will not cause their deaths. It is not so much that time is being changed, but that another possible world will come into existence. Fortunately, for Christopher, he is amenable to being persuaded to avoid joining the institute which would have funded his research into genetic engineering.

The novel ends on an ambiguous note, with Christopher certain that the future has changed, and the damned have not come into being. He has got his A Levels and attended a redbrick university, gaining both a degree and a doctorate, and then a job in the Kutzman Institute. Further:

> [A]t the weekends recently I've been engaged on a little private research project of my own into the histone reaction. Nothing much has come out of it as yet and certainly – to be *absolutely* safe – I wouldn't dream of publishing anything for at least another five years if at all, but – well, let's just say that so far it looks promising: quite promising.... (175)

Whilst his life decisions has averted one lousy version of the future, the novel can offer no guarantee that another, as bad or worse, will not come into existence, one without those able to communicate though time.

After another Earth-based post-disaster novel, *Kuldesak* (1972), which involves some telepathic communication with highly evolved rabbits as well as an alien, and the satirical *Clone* (1972) Cowper returned to precisely the same theme as *Domino* in *Time out of Mind* (1973). This time Laurie Linton is given the task of trying to save Europe from Piers Magobion:

> he attempted to visualize some sort of sinister scenario in which Magobion set out to prove his dominion over the world. What he lacked in skill he made up for in desperation, and as one crudely outlined episode succeeded another he found himself enmeshed in the web of his own fantasy. Watching the imaginary missiles lancing down like shooting stars from the twinkling space-stations, he was overwhelmed by the conviction that he was doing more than simply projecting a vision of some future Armageddon– that he was, himself, inextricably involved in preventing it![5]

This picks up on a vision of some kind of ghost that he had as a child in July 1987 whilst out fishing. Later he discovers this was people from the future telling him what to do – if anything to program him: *'Kill Piers Magobion'* (16). These people had travelled by means of a drug which later turns out not to have been developed after all – its researcher having changed course in July 1987.

Laurie grows up and trains to join NARCOS, an anti-drugs organisation which is nominally part of the UN. Here he is introduced to Catherine, an almost comatose addict who has psychokinetic powers. After she is removed from NARCOS's ward by the Ministry of Internal Security (MIS), Laurie is delegated into investigating her mysterious background – being found in a Gravesend tenement building, and before that being fished out of the Thames estuary. The addict is clearly on some kind of new experimental drug that changes the entire person, and makes them think that they are in paradise; the drug is manufactured by a Dutch company named Köbler & Stassen for a sub-department of MIS – in other words it appears to have official sanction from an organisation which is ostensibly part of the war on drugs, and in particular is being controlled by Colonel

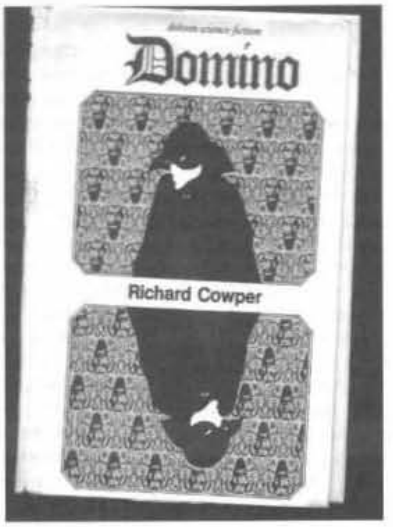
Magobion.

Laurie later assassinates Magobion, and miraculously survives being shot and killed himself – having been told by Catherine (on behalf of the comatose addicts) that he is protected. Curiously Laurie had tried to avoid killing Magobion:

> 'After they'd shot that gas up at me and I saw Magobion starting to walk towards me I stuck my gun through the crack *but I didn't point it at him!* I aimed at a place ten feet in front of him *and four yards to the left!* I simply held it there and waited. And instead of coming straight on as he should have done, *he moved across to his right!* When I pulled that trigger I *knew* he was already dead. And when I fell it was as though I was falling out of a dream already dreamt. It was what I'd seen over my own shoulder all those years ago – the one thing I couldn't remember. *It was what I had to do!*' (158)

The characters are left wondering whether they have been manipulated into doing something, indeed whether Magobion was going to be a tyrant, or whether in a different time stream he was a problem so that someone had to set up contact with Laurie in this timestream. Laurie has succeeded in preventing Magobion from becoming a tyrant in this timestream, but presumably not in any number of others.

1974 saw the publication of two novels by Richard Cowper: *Worlds Apart* and *The Twilight of Briareus*, the latter 'is generally considered his best singleton'.[4] However, Tom Shippey, in *Foundation*, was rather more ambivalent: '[I]f Richard Cowper were Geoffrey Chaucer, one would say that this was his *Merchant's Tale* – a story with many good points, not very like any of his others, ending (very nearly) in a sexual climax, but leaving finally an impression of experiment and uncertainty'.[5] Saying that this novel is not like any of his others is perhaps generous. Like *Breakthrough* – and indeed like *Worlds Apart* – this is a narrative of psychic contact with aliens, with Earth being the contactee. There is a scientist figure (as in *Breakthrough*) who befriends the couple, who explains what is going on (*Breakthrough* and *Domino*) and dies (ditto). The protagonist, Calvin Johnson, is an English teacher who embarks upon an affair, and who acts as a saviour to the world.




His first name, 'Calvin', suggests John Calvin, the founder of Calvinism, a branch of Protestantism which believes in the predetermination of salvation or damnation. Reverse the order of his names and you get JC – the initials of Jesus Christ, the ultimate in saviours. When Calvin finally dies, it is from a wound to his right side,[6] at a place that he has alluded to as Calvary (219), and it is perhaps not too much to suggest that the star Briareus Delta – featured in the novel's title – is meant to hint at a crown of thorns. Even the date of his death – the year 2000 – suggests a messianic cycle fulfilled.

In 1983 the star Briareus Delta explodes. Calvin observes the supernova with his sixth form pupils, and offers one of them, Margaret Hardy, a lift home. Just as he is about to help her out the car, they have a vision: 'The Downs were deep in snow; the sky was a frosty glitter of stars; *Briareus delta* and the aurora had vanished as though they had never been. And, as if that wasn't enough, I realized I was seeing this *through the bodywork of the car!*' (42). This precognition of a wintery future continues over the next few nights in dreams, until Margaret and Calvin arrange an assignation in a beachside milkbar. A tornado strikes and in the wreckage, they 'perpetuated an act of rape on each other [...] an act of brutal fertilization' (61). The tornado is the first extreme weather event in what develops into a new ice age, covering most of Britain above London in snow. Margaret and Calvin have acquired precognitive powers – which we have first encountered at the start of the novel in the sense of *déjà vu* Calvin experiences in 1999 as he arrives at Moyne, the place where he is to die. The couple are not the only ones to acquire such powers; what become known as 'Zeta mutants' are predominately female, aged 16-17, with the male mutants being aged 25-30. The female mutants can possibly get pregnant, when the rest of the population has been rendered infertile.

To make what would otherwise be a cosy catastrophe more complex, Britain thus totters on the edge of the totalitarian society glimpsed in *Domino* and *Time out of Mind*. The Zetas are to be rounded up and experimented on: '"[They] aren't going to quibble over sacrificing a few million odd Zetas to the noble cause. We are simply expendable. [...] Remember what was allowed to happen to the Jews?"' (131). As a possible Zeta himself, Calvin fears for his life. More than that, he is a Diplodeviant – his brainwaves show both the standard human pattern and the Zetan pattern exhibited by those conceived at the time of the supernova, who grow up to demonstrate a belief in predestination and fate. Somehow the Diplodeviants hold the balance to the coexistence of humans, Zetas and the last generation of children, and perhaps hold the key to future fertility. It seems likely that the explosion precipitated an alien invasion from *Briareus Delta*; to be precise, a telepathic invasion. The world can be saved, but only by the necessary sacrifice of Calvin.

*Worlds Apart*, which features endless strikes and power cuts, marks a return to the satire of *Clone* and anticipates the satire of *Profundis* (1979). By then the White Bird of Kinship trilogy was underway. *World Apart* at times seems to be biting the hand that feeds it, featuring as it does the intertwined narratives of George Herbert Cringe, middle-aged teacher and father about to embark on an affair with a younger colleague who scribbles an sf saga about Zil Bryn and Orgypp on the planet Agenor, and the experiences of Zil Bryn and his wife Orgypp on the planet Chnas, where Zil has started scribbling a satire called *Shorge Cringe's Pilgrimage*. The planet Chnas, one sf cliché after another, is full of objects, fauna and rituals with names that fall off the Scrabble board, curiously lacking in vowels. Cowper even mocks his own interest in Keats: 'Beauty is worshipped on Chnas as passionately as money is worshipped on Earth. It is the fountainhead of *hwyllth*. Indeed, according to a revered Chnassian sage: *"'Beauty is Hwyllth: Hwyllth Beauty', That is all ye know on Chnas and all ye need to know."*'[7]

George, we learn, discovered sf when he was thirteen, the mythical perfect age, in a magazine called *Asto* (the cover being ripped, and presumably all other mentions of the title obliterated). He went on to read such people as Heinlein, Van Vogt, Aldiss and Wyndham, before abandoning sf in favour of making model aircraft. When cornered in the act of reading *Amazing Stories* by an English teacher we are told 'Although he could not have known it, his sullen retort: "Well, what's *wrong* with escapism, sir?" had called into question all the dubious values upon which the English secondary education system is based' (13). Later, one of Cringe's sf-writing friends declares, '"The point is [...] that in science fiction it's the science that's the fiction and the fiction that's the truth."' (44).

The truths of Cowper's works lie not in the pseudo-sciences of psi, which seem to be devices enabling him to connect different societies and generate a plot (George's possible mid-life crisis or nervous breakdown as he imagines and then visits an alien planet; Zil's exploration of the nature of reality and non-reality as he posits and then visits Urth). The truth is in the behaviour of his characters and the possibilites of redemption – possibilities that include possible failures.

## Notes

1. Brian Stableford, 'Science Fiction in the Seventies.' *Vector* 200 (July/August 1998), p.21.
2. Richard Cowper, *Breakthrough* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1967), p.84.
3. Richard Cowper, *Phoenix* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1968), p.176.
4. Richard Cowper, *Domino: A science fiction novel* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1971), p.29.
5. Richard Cowper, *Time out of Mind* (London: Gollancz, 1973), p.140.

6. PN/JC [Nicholls, Peter, and John Clute]. 'Richard Cowper.' *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. Ed. Peter Nicholls and John Clute. (London: Orbit, 1993), p.270.
7. Shippey, Tom, 'Narrative Interruptus [*The Twilight of Briareus* by Richard Cowper]', *Foundation*, 7/8 (1975), p.200.
8. Richard Cowper, *The Twilight of Briareus* (London: Gollancz, 1974), edn cited (London: Pan, 1980), p.232.
9. Richard Cowper, *Worlds Apart: a science-fiction novel* (London: Gollancz, 1974), p. 15.

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*Breakthrough* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1967).
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*Domino: A science fiction novel* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1971).
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*Kuldesak* (London: Gollancz, 1972).
*Time out of Mind* (London: Gollancz, 1973).
*The Twilight of Briareus* (London: Gollancz, 1974).
*Worlds Apart - A Science Fiction Novel* (London: Gollancz, 1974).
'The Profession of Science Fiction: 10: Backwards Across the Frontier', *Foundation*, 9 (1975), 4-21.
*The Custodians and other Stories* (London: Gollancz, 1976).
*The Road to Corlay* (London: Gollancz, 1978).
*Profundis* (London: Gollancz, 1979).
*A Dream of Kinship* (London: Gollancz, 1981).
*A Tapestry of Time* (London: Gollancz, 1982).



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IT SEEMED AS IF GWYNETH JONES WAS GOING TO BE THE ETERNAL BRIDESMAID WHEN IT CAM TO THE ARTHUR C. CLARKE AWARD, BUT FINALLY SHE WON IT FOR *BOLD AS LOVE*. NOW MARK BOULD EXAMINES THREE OF HER EARLIER WORKS

# Not Writing Cyberpunk: Three Science Fiction Novels by Gwyneth Jones

## by Mark Bould

In the future, if science fiction histories recall 1984 it might no longer be as the ostensible setting of George Orwell's dystopia but as the year in which William Gibson's *Neuromancer* was published. The distorting effect of that event might be so great as to loosen Orwell's grasp on the date; after all, it has already obscured 1984's other significant debut novels of genre interest – James Patrick Kelly's *Planet of Whispers*, Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Wild Shore*, Lucius Shepard's *Green Eyes*, Lewis Shiner's *Frontera* and Walter Jon Williams's *Ambassador of Progress* in the USA, and Iain Banks's *The Wasp Factory* and Colin Greenland's *Daybreak on a Different Mountain* in the UK. It was also the year of Gwyneth Jones's *Divine Endurance*, her seventh novel, but the first of her eight adult sf novels to date.

Since 1977, she has published over thirty titles, including one collection each of short stories, fairy tales, and criticism. However, the majority of her work has been in the field of young adult fiction (usually under the pseudonym 'Ann Halam'), to which she has contributed an impressive body of horror and fantasy novels distinguished by their sense of foreboding, quietly gripping narratives, credible and ethnically diverse characters, and the author's intelligent and humane socialist-feminist commitment to exploring and exposing structures of domestic and social power. Whatever other horrors and ordeals the characters in her young adult fiction face, they always have to find ways to deal with the complexities of living in families and communities. Although this article restricts itself to the three adult sf novels Jones wrote in the 1980s, it is important to note that the exclusion of her young adult fiction is as arbitrary as that of her adult sf from the 1990s (*Flowerdust* [1993], the belated sequel to *Divine Endurance*, and the *Aleutian* trilogy: *White Queen* [1991], *North Wind* [1994], *Phoenix Café* [1997]). All are complexly interrelated, reflecting upon and developing concerns beyond the boundaries of individual texts and regardless of their intended audience.

*Divine Endurance*, which Jones had described as 'a science fantasy of the old kind, silently dedicated to [Roger] Zelazny's *Lord of Light* and many others',[1] opens in an isolated garden/palace setting reminiscent of J.G. Ballard's 'The Garden of Time' (1962). The Emperor and Empress ask the machine which orders and preserves their existence to give them children. Although the Controller only has the capacity to produce one child, the Empress somehow subverts it. Twins are generated, and the Emperor hatches the male child, Worthy to be Loved or Wo, and gives him away to passing gypsies. After murdering the Emperor, the Empress's health declines. Just before she dies she hatches the female child, Chosen Among the Beautiful or Cho, who is raised by the Controller and the eponymous cat. A century passes and the Controller finally breaks down. Divine Endurance and Cho flee the cataclysm that befalls their home, and set out in search of Wo. After many diversions, their quest, in which Cho has never been terribly interested, is successful. Divine Endurance's motives and expectations have never been clear, but the reunion of Cho and Wo does not appear to have the consequences for which she seems to have hoped.

During their journey from inland China to the tip of the Malaysian Peninsula, Cho discovers a complex society divided and in part created by successive waves of invasion. As the revolution she helps set in motion spirals out of control, exacerbating the chaos and corruption of this colonial legacy, so Jones offers a rebuke to the orderly and comprehensible wars, revolutions and imperialisms of most sf, defying the genre's typical fantasies of knowledge and control. For characters and readers alike, it is never very clear what is going on in *Divine Endurance*, and this vagueness is deliberate. One never doubts that Jones's world is worked out in rigorous detail, but the omniscience one associates with, for example, the narrator who introduces M. John Harrison's *The Pastel City* (1971) is denied any voice. This oblique approach to narrative invites comparison with Gibson, whose frequent use of seemingly unexplained neologisms, tradenames-as-nouns, and untranslated foreign languages and subcultural vocabularies rendered *Neuromancer* so difficult for many early readers to understand. For example, John Huntington argued that the language of *Neuromancer* is 'always just a bit beyond comprehension, though never incomprehensible':

> In Van Vogt [...] we usually know when we do not know what is being talked about. Gibson puts us in a much more nervous position: we usually have the anxiety that we have missed an explanation somewhere earlier. One thematic effect of the device is to imply that the reader has never grasped more than an edge of the whole reality. Such an anxiety is different from that which the characters themselves feel: they do not know some plots, but they are completely at home in the technology.[2]

However, although one might have to struggle on occasion to work out Gibson's precise meaning, he remains interpretable. His commitment to narrative narrows down the range of possible interpretations, recuperating his invention. In contrast, Jones's epistemological[3] uncertainties deny the reader such easy rewards. To recount the plots of her novels, especially of *Divine Endurance*, is to abuse her project by attempting to fix the meaning of her messy, elusive worlds and reinterpretable events suggested by the words on the page. Jones disturbs the emphatic nature typical of most sf, including, ultimately, Gibson. The ambiguities, uncertainties, and contingent and erroneous constructions upon which *Divine Endurance* is built are also the very matter of its tale. It exists in the space between possible interpretations.

In *Divine Endurance*'s dedication, Jones recalls how an 'ignorant passion for mountains' would often see her and her husband attempt, during their time in South-East Asia, to strike their own path to a summit, only to fail, defeated by the convolutions of landscape and thus convinced of the impossibility of an ascent. However:

> that night in the village someone would tell us about the summit trip – starting from somewhere unexpected, miles away from our vision. So we would go there, very dubiously, and then everything fell into place...

Jones compares this experience to that of writing *Divine Endurance*, noting that the completion of both brought the same mixture of 'astonishment' and 'definite resentment at having to give up my glorious defeat'. This also provides a useful metaphor for the experience of reading *Divine Endurance*. The inhabitants of Jones's world do not have perfect knowledge of their world. The infrequent exposition is unreliable, not only because characters are ignorant or obscurely motivated but also because the fairy tales, legends and various allegories recounted within the novel indicate the complex relationship of words to meanings, of signifier to signified. The reader thus becomes like the author trying to find her mountain, or like the modernist reader who must 'sift through the evidence of witnesses of different degrees of reliability in order to reconstruct' the events of the narrative even as the text 'transfers the epistemological difficulties of its characters to its readers'.[4]

There is a variety of planetary romance, exemplified by Brian Stableford, in which the world is constructed as a mystery which must be solved, in which the characters and reader might become turned around and lost in the convolutions before being led to the mountain-top from whose vantage point everything becomes clear. *Divine Endurance* does its reader no such favours, pursuing its radical modernist strategies with a maturity and conviction that eluded so many New Wave/*New Worlds* writers, thus obviating their grandstanding displays. There is nothing self-consciously spectacular about Jones's technique: this is merely how novels are written in the late twentieth century. And if this sounds like a recipe for difficult and exacting fiction, it is worth recalling that 'to astonish' means not only means to bewilder but also to give a shock of wonder.

If *Divine Endurance*, with its genre-blending depiction of the posthuman and those marginalised by late-capitalism, and with its epistemological – ultimately ontological – concerns, offered a far-future science fantasy alternative to cyberpunk, *Escape Plans* (1986) tackled it head-on. Cyberpunk's imagery cannot be easily separated from its political naïveté, but in depicting an analogous posthuman information society Jones is careful to delineate the operations of power within it.[5] Consequently, the novel is structured around the contrary impulses of explicating her created world while perpetuating *Divine Endurance*'s commitment to the unknowability of the world. This results in a text littered with acronyms and abbreviations, many of which are explained in a glossary whose definitions are often far from straightforward. Occasionally, unfamiliar terms are followed by parenthetical clarifications, betraying an (editor's?) anxiety about technique and the demands it might make on the reader. Regardless of such moments, and despite the greater clarity of both narrative and milieu, *Escape Plans* continues to pursue an aesthetic in which, as McHale suggests of the quintessentially modernist text, 'strategies of "impeded form" [...] *simulate* for the reader the very same problems of accessibility, reliability, and limitation of knowledge' (9-10) suffered by the characters.

The novel is set in a far-future India. After a period of expansion across and out of the solar system, it is discovered that Earth exists within a bubble-universe devoid of other lifeforms and cut off from the rest of the cosmos. The posthuman VENTURans return to Earth. Finding it in the final stages of ecological crisis, they set about terrareforming it without consulting the inhabitants. This involves rounding up all the humans, sometimes known as ex-humans, and consigning them to a subterranean existence incorporated into various cybernetic life-support, service, surveillance and control systems. Many of them are integrated even further when they are literally used as components in data-processing machines:

> They were plugged in, unconscious, and the information they processed vanished from their biological circuitry as soon as the shift was done. No conscious human mind could match the speed of the machine. Only the brain was necessary – on its own an excellent piece of firmware. At home we used SYNCOR: synthetic cortex. We could not improve on the design.[5]

*Escape Plans* recapitulates the spatialisation of social class established in such sf texts as H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine: An Invention* (1895) and *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang; Germany, 1926), as well as following their pattern of descent into a working-class underworld. It also follows the trajectory of an escape into nature typical of much dystopian sf, from E.M. Forster's 'The Machine Stops' (1909) to *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott; USA, 1982). Jones's VENTURan PIONERs live in a cluster of linked orbital environments; some of them, known as Rangers, live in high-altitude surface habitats from which they manage the planet. The humans, variously known as subs, numbers or serials, live beneath the ground; some of them have slightly greater freedom of movement if they are prepared to work as biels (bonded labourers). In addition to this vertical hierarchy, managed by a variety of exclusionary methods ranging from physical barriers, restricted access to information, and electronic tagging to matters of etiquette, there are also horizontal restrictions which keep the numbers securely in their place. ALIC, a VENTURan PIONER tourist, becomes intrigued by the number jockey Millie Mohun.[7] In an attempt to save her from danger, ALIC enters the world of the subs and becomes trapped there. Even as her experiences begin to educate her in the politics and realities of colonial oppression, she is caught up on the periphery of a nationalist revolution which resolves nothing. The VENTURan systems achieve a new homeostatic balance, fulfilling the novel's recurring pun on liberation and libration.

Traditionally, the dystopian underworld is a place of bestial terror (*The Time Machine*) or grinding misery (*Metropolis*) or narcotised disconnection ('The Machine Stops'), and although *Escape Plans* toys with these possibilities it is more concerned to depict its oppressed people as people, as in the scene in which ALIC attempts to resuscitate a ulaux soldier who has died because of his unsuitable equipment. Previously depicted as anonymous instruments of violence used to terrorise the numbers, the ulaux are revealed in this moment as just another ill-used segment of the working-class. However, the strength of Jones's rearticulation of the dystopian novel lies in its recognition of class, race and gender as deeply interrelated systems of oppression. Whereas Gibson imported a half-hearted critique of capitalist corruption when he retrofitted the hard-boiled imagery and voices of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, Jones carefully reiterates that impoverishment and disempowerment are not just set-dressing. And whereas cyberpunk wished for a magical technological salvation, either in data-immersion or physical transformation, *Escape Plans* emphasises the existence of structures of power which cannot be overcome by fantasies of deliverance.

The oddly-prescient *Kairos* (1988) it is set in a near-future Britain in which an ineffectual Labour government has had one term in office after nearly two decades of Conservative misrule. Impoverishment and pollution have increased, and many hard-won freedoms have been abolished, although it could be argued that Jones is actually offering a view of contemporary Britain with little, if any, extrapolation; for example, the legal restrictions imposed on travel can be seen as a mere formalisation of those implicit in poverty and in the fears of crime and violence promulgated by politicians and the media. The narrative follows the left-wing lesbian couple Otter and Sandy, Otter's son Candide, and various friends from their University days, as they become tangled up in a conspiracy by BREAKTHRU, a neo-fascist political organisation posing as a millenarian cult (or vice versa), to seize power courtesy of the eponymous reality-distorting drug. Relationships and the world crumble – the nature and status of events become increasingly uncertain – and reconstitute.

*Kairos* shares many characteristics with Jones's previous sf novels. Heterosexuality is not presented as a norm, and women occupy centre stage, although men have not been 'dropped by the current of history'[8] as in *Escape Plans* or become as marginalised and ineffectual as in *Divine Endurance*. A female saviour appears onto whom others project their desires, although not as categorically as Cho or Millie Mohun. Evil is not permitted a metaphysical form but is shown to be the material and ideological processes through which power is maintained.

Where *Kairos* differs most strongly from its predecessors is in its resolute turning away from the overt fantasy of *Divine Endurance* and the abstraction of *Escape Plans* in favour of the mundane and grinding horror of the world of the bourgeois realist novel. John Clute, in an otherwise laudatory review, criticised *Kairos* for the 'enervating dither' of its first hundred pages, complaining that 'by replicating all too perfectly the unconscious snobberies of [Otter's] private world, [it]

tends to disdain any normal courtesies of narration'. He goes on to say that '[r]eading these careless, nickname-infested pages is like eavesdropping on a large extended family one could never hope to join'.[9] But that is precisely the point. It is no great revelation that the contemporary novel of bourgeois realism (in which an allegedly external reality rudely matches the inner world of a protagonist) and the standard sf novel (in which novelty is elaborated and constrained by an unthinking mimesis) both embody a reactionary political project.

Much feminist sf, including a significant proportion of the fiction published by The Women's Press sf list in the second half of the 1980s, exhibits a tendency towards comic fabulation which draw on elements of folklore, fairy tales and gothic fiction as well as sf to derange the orderliness and solidity of the worlds of dominant realist and sf norms.[10] In *Kairos* Jones simulates, and in the final analysis parodies, both contemporary bourgeois realism and near-future mimetic sf only to undo them by establishing the dominance of ideological and linguistic constructions over any underlying 'reality', just as the eponymous drug shatters and transforms the world within the novel.

Like all of Jones's fiction, *Kairos* is committed to socialist-feminist politics and, as always, there is much to learn. Rarely didactic, she rejects the schematic and dogmatic forms which are said to cripple a lot of political sf and fantasy. Her insistence on the complexity of characters and events sees her spurn the notion that the representation of strong female characters is sufficient to make sf feminist. And if her fiction lacks the exuberance found in more recent socialist sf and fantasy, such as China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* (2000), nearly every page offers rewards in the exhilaration of possibilities and the joy of small ironies.

There are other, bigger ironies, too, although they can give only cold comfort to Jones and her readers. Champions of cyberpunk have argued that during the 1980s and 1990s sf was primarily concerned with the human and social impact of the globalisation of capitalism, with the consequences of the introduction of new information technologies, with gender and sexual identities, with old and new ethnicities, with genre-blending and a maturation of technique. If this were really the case, these would not have been the decades of William Gibson and Bruce Sterling but of Gwyneth Jones. Furthermore, if sf was a literature of ideas, as its defenders have so often claimed, then Jones would be one of the genre's most popular authors rather than merely one of its best.

**Notes**

1. Jay P. Pederson, ed., *St. James Guide to Science Fiction Writers*, 4th edn. (New York: St. James Press, 1996), p.489.
2. John Huntington, 'Newness, *Neuromancer*, and the End of Narrative', in Tom Shippey, ed., *Fictional Space: Essays on Contemporary Science Fiction (Essays and Studies*, 43) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp.59-75, p.70.
3. According to McHale, modernist fiction and detective fiction are dominated by epistemological questions such as 'How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it? [...] What is there to be known?; Who knows it?; How do they know it, and with what degree of certainty?; How is knowledge transmitted from one knower to another, and with what degree of reliability?; How does the object of knowledge change as it passes from knower to knower?; What are the limits of the knowable?' McHale goes on to argue that postmodernist fiction and sf are mainly concerned with ontological questions: 'Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it? [...] What is a world?; What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?; What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects?; How is a projected world structured?' (Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* [London: Routledge, 1994], pp.9 & 10). Although not uncontroversial, this somewhat schematic distinction is useful in situating Jones's fiction within a twentieth-century literary context.
4. McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, p.9.
5. In personal correspondence, Jones has indicated that the dates of publication are potentially misleading and that she had completed her novel before reading *Neuromancer*. Therefore, although it is tempting it is also untenable to read *Escape Plans* as a response to Gibson.
6. Gwyneth Jones, *Escape Plans* (London: Unwin, 1986), p.42.
7. As indicated in note 5, matters of chronology prevent this being a play on Gibson's console cowboys and Molly Millions.
8. Gwyneth Jones, *Escape Plans*, p.176.
9. John Clute, *Look at the Evidence: Essays and Reviews* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), p.134. The review originally appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 6th January 1989.
10. In addition to such examples as Jody Scott's *I, Vampire* (1984), Jane Palmer's *The Planet Dweller* (1985), Josephine Saxton's *Queen of the States* (1986) and Carol Emshwiller's *Carmen Dog* (1988), this important list did publish sf which was not overtly feminist, comical or fabulist. The Women's Press also published Jones's young adult novel *The Hidden Ones* (1988), and she contributed a story to their anthology *Despatches from the Frontiers of the Female Mind* (1985), edited by Jen Green and Sarah Lefanu.



*Mark Bould lectures in film and media at Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College — Eds.*

# Snuff Video

## Gary Wilkinson encounters Japanese heart-stopping terror with the *Ring* series

Two teenage girls are taking a break from their homework to talk about boys, but soon the conversation takes a darker turn. There's this videotape, see, and it's cursed. It was recorded off a dead channel (some kid on holiday wanted to watch the baseball but the channel did not transmit that far). You watch and then the phone rings – one week later the phone rings again and you're dead. One of the girls admits to seeing it... but she's just teasing her friend. Or is she? Then the phone rings. Then the television turns on on its own...

Sounds dreadful doesn't it? Some straight-to-video American slasher movie, or a post-*Scream* ironic comedy.

Actually no. This is *Ringu* (*Ring*, 1998). It's Japanese and an unbelievably good, straight horror film. There's no gore – it's only a '15' certificate – but it's just about the scariest thing I've ever seen. Although recently suffering from a series of profound economic depressions, Japanese culture has been going through a renaissance – not least in the horror gene and *Ring* is just one of a number of effective films that have come to the West such as *Battle Royale* (2000) and *Uzumaki* (2000).

*Ring* was based on a trilogy of best-selling Japanese novels by Suzuki Koti. The film, costing only just over a million dollars to produce, was released in 1998 and went on to become the number one film in Japan and several neighbouring countries. It gained critical acclaim at many international film festivals, and spawned film sequels and a prequel. The story also inspired versions in many media including a radio drama, two television series and a mini-series, a number of *manga* (Japanese comic books) and a video game.

*

In the original film, reporter Asakawa Reiko is investigating the latest urban myth that is spreading among local teenagers – a video that kills anyone who watches it. She learns her niece was

apparently a victim, dying suddenly from a heart attack, her face twisted into an unnatural rictus of pure terror. Asakawa discovers that three of her niece's friends all died the same way at the exactly the same time. Further investigations lead her to the holiday cabin in Izu where her niece and friends stayed and the finding of the actual tape. Curiosity gets the better of her and she watches it. Now Asakawa's only got a week to discover the origin of the video and try to break the curse. More urgency is added to her quest when, as she sleeps, her young son watches the video.

The video that she/we see is incredibly disturbing, a mini-masterpiece on its own and it is worth taking a bit of time to examine it. For a start the footage is blurred and grainy, interrupted by flashes of static like a multigenerational copy. The soundtrack is largely white noise but out of that rise a number of metallic screeches – the screenplay describes them as 'metallic insect noises' – that cut right through you. We are presented with a number of disjointed images, visual *non sequiturs*. First static. Then a pale disk on a dark background – the moon? No, streaks of cloud scud across the disk and we see perhaps a face? Then we see an oval mirror where a woman is brushing her hair. Suddenly the mirror flicks to the other side of the screen. Almost instantly the mirror flicks back to its original position, but in that one moment we see reflected a small figure in a white gown, their face obscured by long dark hair. This is replaced by a swarming mass of *kanji* (characters used in the Japanese language) – only 'eruption' is translated on the subtitles. This is followed by a view of a confusing group of crawling, stumbling, people, some moving in reverse. Then we see a figure standing motionless by a shore, head shrouded with a white cloth, pointing off to one side at something we cannot see. Then a close-up of an alien-looking eye. There is single, small, white *kanji* reflected in the large black pupil – *sada* (chastity). The screeching gets louder and finally we see a small stone structure against a background of trees, a well. Repeated viewing throughout the film dulls the impact somewhat, as some of the images are explained, but the first time is mind-blowing.

Asakawa enlists the help of her ex-husband Takayama Ryuji to search out the truth behind the video. They slowly discover the meaning of some of the images on the tape. Hidden in the background static during the 'eye' scene is a phrase that uses words of a certain Japanese dialect: 'If you keep playing in the water, the monster will come for you.' (That's according to the screenplay – the English subtitles have it rather more poetically as: 'Frolic in brine, goblins be thine.') The woman brushing her hair is identified as Yamamura Shizuko, a notorious psychic who, in the 1960s, predicted a volcanic eruption in the region the dialect comes from but was then accused of being a fraud by the news media. Already an unstable personality, she was so traumatised by this that she committed suicide by throwing herself into the volcano.

Asakawa and Ryuji travel to Oshima island, the birthplace of Yamamura Shizuko, in search of clues. They find out Shizuko had a daughter, who mysteriously disappeared thirty years ago, named Sadako. Most Japanese girl's names end in either –mi ('beauty') or –ko ('child') – Sadako thus means 'chaste child'. Sadako was a tremendously powerful psychic, able to kill at will – in fact killing a reporter who pilloried her mother at a public demonstration of her talents. Although the film ostensibly indicates that Sadako's father was Ikuma Heihachiro, a psychiatrist who treated Shizuko and investigated her abilities, we also learn that Shizuko spent much of her time alone sitting on a local beach staring into the sea and the film strongly hints that her daughter was perhaps sired by some non-human sea-dwelling entity to produce some kind of Lovecraftian half-human half-sea-demon.

Asakawa and Ryuji learn that Ikuma tried to murder Sadako by throwing her down a well, sealing it, and leaving her for dead. The cursed video was in fact created by Sadako in vengeance for her imprisonment using her psychic powers to 'burn' onto the tape her thoughts and memories. With nothing left to try Asakawa and Ryuji resolve to find the well and recover Sadako's body in the hope of appeasing her spirit. They realise that the well must be located at the cottage on Izu, where Asakawa's niece first watched the video with her friends. With only a few minutes to spare they frantically try to drain the well. They find Sadako's skull and then are overjoyed, suddenly realising that the deadline has passed, and they are still alive.

However, there is one final devastating twist that pushes *Ring* into a new direction in its coda...

Watching *Ring* is genuinely unsettling experience and has none of the catharsis of a 'normal' horror film experience – it defies closure. A successful blend of horror tropes, in *Ring* we have the 'urban legend' coming true, the Asian ghost story, even a touch of *Videodrome* (1982) and *Poltergeist* (1982) in its twisting of the passive comforts of television viewing. Like Japan itself it is a blend of old and new, the traditional and the innovative.

Throughout there is a stark, bare, visual style. The mostly naturalistic acting very quickly creates a strong bond with the characters and we are drawn into their plight. As a lead we have a well-rounded young woman who has been dragged into something beyond her control – one of the reasons the film was so popular with Japanese female teenagers, a much greater audience for horror than in the West. Instead of 'what's that noise – I must go and look' stupidity, she behaves, worryingly, like you think you would do yourself in the same situation. Also, her relationship with her ex-husband is treated realistically – just because they are working together they don't automatically fall into each other's arms as you would expect in a Hollywood movie.

There are no scenes of 'stalk and slash'. Instead, avoiding cheap shock tactics and with great restraint, the film instead uses suggestion, situation and atmosphere, even the weather or simple things like blurred photographs, to slowly build up a cloying, claustrophobic feeling of complete dread that builds to a climax that had me worrying I was going to expire from a heart attack myself.

There is some very subtle special effect work and exactly right use of a spare score (by Kenji Kawai who is most well known for his excellent work on *Ghost In The Shell* (1995)) to emphasise the terror. Also, while the film uses naturalism for most of its running time, at key moments it swaps to a dramatic style that seem more reminiscent of *Noh*, the traditional form of Japanese theatre – where the actors wear masks and use exaggerated body language to convey emotion – to heighten the effect as we step from the normal to the unnatural, from the rational to pure inexplicable horror, from life to death.

As an aside there is some factual basis for the story. There was an alleged psychic, a Japanese woman named Mifune Chizuko, who was investigated by a psychology professor in the early years of the twentieth century. There was also an infamous public demonstration where, as in *Ring*, the psychic was accused of being a charlatan. Mifune was so traumatised by this she later committed suicide (by poison) at the age of 25.

A year before Mifune's death another psychic was born who would later rise to prominence because of her gift of *nensha* (the focusing of will to produce an image on photographic film or other medium). Her was name Takahashi Sadako.

In an unusual move, the production company Asmik Ace Entertainment hired two separate crews to produce *Ring* and its sequel *Rasen* (*Spiral*, 1998), and then released both films simultaneously. However, whereas *Ring* was a huge hit, *Spiral* was slaughtered by the critics and did poorly at the box office. It was never released in the West and is now not seen as a 'proper' *Ring* sequel. The director of the first film, Nakata Hideo, chose to ignore it completely when he came to make *Ring 2* (1999).

The main character in *Ring 2* is no longer Asakawa Reiko, who's disappeared, but Takano Mai, Takayama Ryuji's assistant who appeared briefly in the first movie. She teams up with another

reporter to carry on Asakawa's investigation. Unfortunately *Ring 2* is a bit of a mess itself. The film screws around with what made the original so successful by adding a large dose of pseudo-scientific rationale to the supernatural events and ends up dissolving into incoherence.

However, there are several strong individual scenes. For instance, the police are trying to reconstruct Sadako's face from her skull but flashes of 'something' on the model keep interrupting their work. A famous Japanese actress, Fukada Kyoko, has a cameo – she 'mutates' into Sadako as a reporter repeatedly fast-forwards and rewinds video footage of her from an interview. There is a survivor of a 'Sadako attack' from the first film living in an asylum and there is fine scene when she passes a television and the screen is distorted and begins to show a picture of a well, the well. Perhaps the most chilling scene is one of the simplest. Takano goes to Asakawa's empty apartment which is completely normal, except that the screen of the television has been smashed in. And why is that mass of black melted plastic in the bath?

As the plot progresses it seems that Asakawa's son has gained Sadako's powers. These powers, and the effect of the video, are also being investigated by a team of doctors – all mad-science with some sort of babbling about 'energies' given as an explanation. Eventually several characters end up at the inn where Sadako grew up. One of the doctors performs an experiment to try and raise the curse. Several die but there is a kind of a happy ending, though it does not make a great deal of sense.

There were reports of a 'haunting' on the set of *Ring 2* during filming, the story being featured in a segment of the popular Japanese television show *Unbelievable* (the title of which is a apt summary for the film).

*Ring 0* (2000), the next film in the series, a prequel to the original, is much better. Director Norio Tsuruta takes up the reins, lending an appropriately different feel to the other two, a long way from the dark unsettling atmosphere of its forebears, but not the worse for it. *Ring 0* is subtitled *Baasudei* (*Birthday*) though that should perhaps be *Birth Day* as this looks at the origins of Sadako.

We start with a close-up of Sadako's eye, but instead of 'in-human' this time it's all too human belonging to a rather attractive, if frail, young woman. We soon discover that she was an outcast during her childhood and is considered strange, suffering from the same psychological problems as her mother. She joins a drama troupe, and falls in love with one of the workers there. One of the most terrifying 'monsters' of cinema suddenly has all our sympathy.

There is plenty of horror, but not the choking dread of the first film – this is more of a tragic love story combined with a mystery. The 'curse' is here but this time it infects the reel-to-reel tape recorders used to provide the sound effects for the drama troupe's stage productions – then on into the very 'medium' of theatre itself.

The ending is horrifying, for Sadako herself as she, and we, experience the full terror of her imprisonment. And before then we have had a series of blinding plot twists and the switch from natural to even more unnatural 'drama' to even greater effect.

As stated earlier, the original inspiration for the films were a series of best-selling books: the trilogy of *Ring*, *Spiral*, and *Loop* by author Suzuki Koji. A fourth book, *Birthday*, is a series of short stories that includes 'Lemonheart' the basis for the movie *Ring 0*. The exception to this, *Ring 2*, used an original story by director Nakata Hideo and screenwriter Takahashi Hiroshi.

Although there are rumours of a translation of at least *Ring* in the works, none of the books have yet appeared in English, so for the following I'm relying on secondary sources. Although much of the following does sound pure pulp, remember that the series was hugely successfully – the first book sold three million copies.

There were a number of changes made between the books and the films, not least the fact that the main protagonist of *Ring* the book is male though still named Asakawa. Also the books, with the possible exception of *Ring 2*, are actually much more science-fictional than the films.

The main change is with regard to the character of Sadako and the cursed videotape. In the books Sadako is not a girl at all, but actually a hermaphrodite, although still appearing to be a beautiful young women. Unlike in the film Sadako doesn't turn up to induce a heart attack in her victims, they instead die from some kind of virus, spread by watching the videotape

In the book, Sadako was not thrown into the well by her 'father' Ikuma Heihachiro, but by a young doctor named Nagao Joutarou. Nagao was also the last-known patient in Japan to be treated for smallpox. Out alone with her one day, Nagao rapes Sadako. Afterwards, noticing her vestigial male genitalia, he is overcome with revulsion. Suddenly ashamed at having been discovered, Sadako launches a telepathic attack. Nagao retaliates by strangling her and throwing her into the well. As in the film her malign influence extends beyond her death and is eventuality recorded onto a video tape in one of the rental cabins built over the well after her death.

However, in the book Sadako not only wants revenge, she wants life as well. She uses her power, that can operate on a cellular level, to create a unique virus. With the smallpox virus, passed on to her from Nagao, and the female and male genetic material she has due to being a hermaphrodite Sadako creates a carrier that allows her to transmit her DNA to a host victim. This either kills through the creation of a lethal tumour or in one case allows the rebirth of Sadako...

The second novel, *Spiral*, goes into self-referential overdrive. The reborn Sadako ensures that a report written by Asakawa is published as the book *Ring*. This is the new carrier of the curse. The book becomes a best-seller. A film adaptation is in the works staring Sadako herself. The human race is doomed...

Things get really loopy in the third book, *Loop*. Unfortunately I can only find only a few details on this part of the series, but what there is sounds intriguing. The world has fallen victim to the 'Human Cancer Virus.' Futami Kaoru, who has lost both his father and girlfriend to the virus, travels to America in search of a cure. In the deserts of New Mexico he uncovers a top-secret project called Loop. Ostensibly a study into the lengthening of the human life span, it is in fact an entire artificial reality, existing solely within a massive computer system. The events of both *Ring* and *Spiral* both occurred in this new reality...

The U.S. rights to *Ring* were eventually acquired by DreamWorks and their version is due to be released later this year (January 2003 in the UK) as *The Ring* with a screenplay written by Ehren Kruger (*Arlington Road*(1998)) and Scott Frank (*Minority Report* (2002)) and directed by Gore Verbinski (*The Mexican* (2001)). Naomi Watts, recently in *Mulholland Dr.* (2001), was eventually found for the lead after the role was turned down by Jennifer Connelly, Gwyneth Paltrow and Kate Beckinsale. Veteran make-up and special effects artist Rick Baker is also on board. The action has been transferred to the coast of north-east America and is set in and around a farm that breeds horses that have suddenly started dying under mysterious circumstances.

Advanced reports indicate that the adaptation is going to be pretty faithful to the Japanese version and reports from previews have been very favourable. I obviously hope that this latest incarnation of *Ring* will be as good as the original film but somehow I don't think anything can ever match it. Once seen you'll never look at a television the same way again.



Note that, as is usual practice, Japanese names have the family name first and the given name last. For more details on *Ring* in all media see the excellent web site *Ringworld* at: http://www.somrux.com/ringworld/. *Ring*, *Ring 2*, and *Ring 0* are available on video and DVD from Tartan Video (UK).


# 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.**

### Brian Aldiss – *Super-state* 🕮

Orbit, London, 2002, 230pp, £16.99 ISBN 1-84149-144-6

**Reviewed by Jon Wallace**

This is a strange and very English book. It's the sort of quintessentially English book where the characters wander around saying profound (or not) things to each other and where nothing really happens. But it's Brian Aldiss, so it must be good. Mustn't it?

Aldiss has always been one of those authors who could never be mistaken for anything other than English, like LeCarre or John Fowles. The problem with that is that it is difficult to pick up an Aldiss book to relax or just for a good laugh. His writing has that edgy quality that the English books often have.

I must point out here that I'm using 'English' like a genre description. I mean, Pratchett doesn't fit squarely into the category (although sometimes you see that side of him lurking in the background), but Iain Banks (I know he's Scottish) does when he's in non-sf mode.

The result is that this "...darkest and funniest novel to date..." is peopled with those sort of characters who are not-quite-real and not-quite-caricature but that hold up a candle and illuminate the darker bits of the human condition. In Aldiss's case, these weird and (not so) wonderful people live in the Super-state of Europe, forty years from now. A state looking for excuses for war which has funded a strangely uninteresting mission to Jupiter aboard the spaceship *Roddenberry*.

So much for plot, what about the experience? Did I enjoy this book? Really, 'English' books are not for enjoying. They are thought-provoking, unsettling. Here, though, the unsettling thought was provoked that this was a book that didn't really need writing. The problem is, stylistically, that this book really should have been written in the mid-sixties. Books like this had influence then. We could have then re-published it in 2001 as a Gollancz Masterwork and everybody would be happy. As it is, I was left with the thought that perhaps Aldiss needs to get out more. Sorry.

### Tom Arden – *Nightdreamers* 🕮

Telos, Tamworth, 2002, 112pp, standard hb edition £10.00 ISBN 1-903889-06-5; deluxe hb edition £25.00 ISBN 1-903889-07-3

**Reviewed by Ben Jeapes**

Deep in a forest, a group of mismatched lower class artisans rehearse a play in which one of them must take the part of a wall. Elsewhere, we find a young woman forcibly betrothed to one man though she loves another and her beloved hexed by an impish little fellow into falling in love with someone else. One of the actors has a head like a monster. And it's Perihelion Night.

Tom Arden takes on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and wins. Rather than slavishly follow the Bard's plot he mixes and matches, reworking it into an early 1970s Third Doctor/Jo Grant era *Doctor Who* adventure. We start with only three cross-matched lovers; Jo herself rounds up the quartet, still pining after Latep, the Thal with bad 1970s hair that she didn't follow back to Skaro. The lovers are all given far more character than Shakespeare ever managed; you can actually tell them apart. We recognise some of the roles –

Puck, the Rude Mechanicals – and some of the scenes, but there is no sinking feeling of "there's the guy with the funny head, now it must be time for the wrong man to get the love drug." Instead the streamlined version of the play is mixed in with other Shakespearean elements (the Duke owes more to Prospero than Theseus) and an enjoyably Whoish plot of rival planets and politics, a castle that's really a spaceship, black-leather-clad bad guys, and a closing scene straight out of the hardest sf you're likely to find.

It's not just a fun story but it's told with obvious love and affection for the *Doctor Who* era in which it's set. The story takes place on Verd, a small, forested moon. The setting is small even by the story's own frame of reference and Arden uses only a few scenes, so it's no difficulty at all for your mind's eye to set the whole thing within your old black and white TV that took 30 seconds to warm up, on a dark Saturday evening back in 1973. You can even picture the BBC sets.

The gravity on Verd is highly variable, meaning that characters are likely to find themselves bouncing or even flying at any moment. The short novella length of the story means that the plot rattles along, barely giving the reader or the characters time for breath; there is an over-arching logic to the whole thing but you never notice. It just makes sense at the time. Puck's valedictory "If we shadows have offended ..." rhyme has never been more appropriate: it really is like a dream.

£25 is steep for a novella hardback, but a "standard" version is also available at £10.

## Anselm Audley – *Inquisition* 🕮

Earthlight, London, 2002, 400pp, £10.00 ISBN 0-7432-0965-6

**Reviewed by Vikki Lee**

*Inquisition* is the second book in The Aquasilva Trilogy and follows on directly after events in *Heresy*.

Having survived the attentions of the Domain Sacri, destroying half of Lepidor in the process, Cathan, Palatine and Ravenna are trying to figure out what to do next. Deciding to head for the Archipelago in order to make contacts for an arms deal, they are secretly searching for the lost, fabled Manta, *Aeon*, which is purported to have equipment on board that would enable Cathan and Ravenna to predict the storms that wrack the archipelago. It could also be quite a useful weapon in itself.

On arrival in Ral Tumar, the Domain also make port and decree an Inquisition. Having already had their run-in and been named Heretics, things suddenly get decidedly hairy for our heroes. As is often the case, however, they are their own worst enemies as inexperience and mistrust lead the party to get separated. Ravenna, who is known only to a very few select people as the Pharaoh of Qalathar, flees into hiding.

Cathan, the twin brother of the despotic Emperor Orosius, has a magical visitation from said brother which leaves him weak and in fear of his life from yet another quarter. Taken in by a bunch of Thetian rebels, Cathan's indecisiveness threatens everything as he is torn between causes. Dodging the Sacri, the Emperor and even those supposed to be helping them, Cathan and Palatine start to search for Ravenna who may prove to be the key to many things. But cleverer people are not far behind, and things are destined to continue to go wrong as Sarhaddon arrives and tries to convince Cathan that the Domain would like to try a different way of leading their flock to the one God – promising the end of the Inquisition, the burnings and slaughter. But can he, like anyone else, be trusted?

This is a very slow and plodding story typical of today's 'second book in a trilogy' syndrome. An awful lot of running around with little progression to the story at all. Things do eventually begin to come together, but not until the last 30 pages or so from the end, and this sets the third volume up nicely. However, saying that, the last book set this one up nicely and very little appears to have come of that. I remember complaining about the atrocious proof-reading in the first book of this series – this one has corrected that fault and is at least readable. Bit of a yawn this one, can't really recommend it.

## John Barnes – *The Merchants of Souls*

Tor, New York, 2001, 398pp, $25.95 isbn 0-312-89076-1

**Reviewed by Claire Brialey**

Most readers of *A Million Open Doors* (1995) will recall the moment when the protagonist, Giraut Leones, discovers clear proof of the existence of an ancient alien civilisation in the galaxy, and will probably have concluded that there would be a sequel. Since then both *Earth Made of Glass* (1998) and *The Merchants of Souls* have developed the political intrigues of the Office of Special Projects and the personal lives of the characters against a background of conflict between societies, while making little enough progress on revelations about the aliens to make it clear that this is a long-term series.

Both the previous novels have – with varying degrees of subtlety – explored how to maintain a functioning multi-world human civilisation: the impacts on cultural diversity, the opportunities for minority views to find an effective voice within the system, the benefits of choice compared to conformity, and whether either the centre or the market can – or should – provide solutions at any stage. In doing so they examine human behaviour at both the general and the personal level.

Giraut's view of the world and of other people, and his approach to relationships with them, is somewhat alien, derived partly from his upbringing in a stylised chivalric society. He is an unreliable narrator, and deceptively admits it. Sometimes you have to wonder whether Barnes is (disingenuously?) demonstrating that Giraut is just a bloke who doesn't understand that intuitive feminine stuff – almost a Nick Hornby for science fiction, which goes a bit further than we need.

The conclusion of the previous novel set up the disastrous state of Giraut's marriage and the impact on his working life. Here Giraut's personal relationships would take centre stage were it not for his need to come to terms with the inner life of someone even closer to him than his wife had been. This novel focuses on the big issues by looking at the small ones: what it means to be a person (personality stands here for the 'soul' of the title). The challenge for the reader is to come to terms with a culture in which managed reincarnation is the norm, and the challenge for the characters is to prevent their local equivalent of globalised corporations from using the legal system to warp this tradition and abuse those members of society who are most vulnerable and disenfranchised.

It's sometimes hard to tell whether these novels are a blunt instrument or a subtle knife and can only conclude, to mix metaphors, that this is a mixed bag. A well-paced plot with some disorienting twists makes some powerful points about human relationships, but does so through some characters who are often not sufficiently developed to tell whether they are plausible, and eventually ducks some of its own big questions by placing the blame squarely on a non-human bogeyman.

## Lois McMaster Bujold – *The Curse of Chalion* 🕮

Voyager, London, 2002, 442pp, £11.00 ISBN 0-00-713360-X

**Reviewed by Carol Ann Kerry-Green**

Returning to Valenda, home of the Dowager Provincara, Lord Cazaril is hoping to gain a place in her kitchens as a servant. His life has been an eventful one, a lord, captain, courtier, courier, and now he returns after a stint as a galley slave on a Roknari ship to seek peace and quiet in the service of the Dowager.

Fortune smiles on Cazaril as the Dowager remembers his previous service to her family and takes him in hand. Assigned as secretary/tutor to the Dowager's granddaughter Royesse Iselle, Cazaril finds himself once more becoming embroiled in the lives and fortunes of the Provincara's family.

When Iselle and her younger brother Teidez are recalled to the court of Chalion at Cardegoss by their elder half-brother, the Roya Orico, Cazaril goes with them. This brings him once more into direct contact and conflict with the Jironal brothers, whom Cazaril is convinced were responsible for him being sold to the slave galleys. The elder of the two brothers is now Chancellor of Chalion, a position that gives him immense power. As Cazaril learns more about the state of play in Cardegoss, he fears for the lives of his charge and her young brother. Orico himself is slowly dying, part of a curse laid on his father, Fonsa, by the Golden General. With no heir of his own, he places his hopes on young Teidez to succeed him, but Teidez is being seduced by the younger Jironal brother into the more debauched side of court life.

The curse throws a pallid shadow over Fonsa's children and grandchildren. Only those touched by a god, like Cazaril and the Roknari saint, Umgeat, can see the dark aura around the royal family. Cazaril is fighting a desperate battle to save the life of his Royesse and win her free from the curse. When Orico gives Iselle in marriage to Dondo dy Jironal, Cazaril tries one night in desperation to kill dy Jironal using death magic. Believing he has failed, Cazaril returns to his bed, only to be rudely awakened by the Chancellor looking for the perpetrator of the death magic that has killed his brother. As the truth slowly dawns on Cazaril that he has been chosen by the Daughter to help counter the curse, he finds himself in a desperate fight against time to persuade the young Royse Bergon of neighbouring Ibron to marry Iselle to help break the curse.

Fast paced and well-written, Bujold has produced a marvellous fantasy that takes the reader on a journey through the history, culture and landscape of Chalion and her neighbours. As the action gathers pace it is hard to put down the book. *The Curse of Chalion* is an excellent fantasy novel from an author perhaps better known for her science fiction Vorkosigan series.

## Richard Calder – *Lord Soho* 🕮

Earthlight, London, 2002, 378pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-7434-0896-9

**Reviewed by Stuart Carter**

No doubt about it, Richard Calder is ploughing his own lonely furrow in the sf world. All his works use the same ornate and occasionally impenetrable language to evoke a world that is as skewed and perverse as his characters are decadent and untrustworthy. I personally like it, for the most part, but could fully understand if others did not – not meaning to brag, but I managed to wade through some of William Hope Hodgson's extraordinary prose without expiring, and Calder's style is dissimilar mainly in its utter lack of soppy romance.

Calder's *novum* in this series is that, in the late 21st century, "fallout" from the catastrophic demise of a neighbouring parallel universe has leaked between the dimensions to wreak havoc upon our own, creating all manner of weird, incredible and unpleasant mutations, and almost entirely destroying civilisation. *Lord Soho* is called "A Time Opera" presumably because it traces the fortunes of the Pike family across the generations – specifically its first-born sons, all named after Richard Pike, the first Lord of Soho who appeared in Calder's excellent earlier novel *Malignos* – and also since the Grand Guignol elements and mannered language evoke the spectacle and finery of the opera.

This "Time Opera" is a linear series of short stories about the procession of the Pikes, beginning with the third of this unpleasant and disagreeable line, one who promptly loses his title and is cast into the badlands outside a millennia-distant London. The Pikes are then somehow always at the centre of the revolutions, renaissances, crusades, etc., that continue to convulse this strange world.

However, a morbid sense of repetition surrounds all of these, emanating not least from those who oppose the archaeology of the past (or, roughly, our own time) in favour of embracing the "perverse" – those changes wrought by the fallout from the dead universe. The Pikes, whose bloodline was "contaminated" when the first Richard Pike married a "perverse" girl, have a unique but always shifting connection to it, alternately cursing and revelling in it, but never quite comprehending its meaning.

If you didn't like *Malignos* you won't like *Lord Soho* either. To fully enjoy *Lord Soho* you need to be in quite an alert frame of mind, since both the language and story don't lend themselves to lazy reading. Fortunately Calder avoids the meandering excesses of *Impakto*, his previous novel, and gives just enough pale and decadent excess to please.

## Ramsey Campbell – *Pact of the Fathers*

Tor Forge, New York, 2001, 414pp, $26.95 ISBN 0-312-87869-9

## Ramsey Campbell – *Ghosts and Grisly Things*

Tor, New York, 2001, 300pp, $14.95 ISBN 0-312-86757-3

## S.T. Joshi – *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*

Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2001, 180pp, £14.95 ISBN 0-853-23775-1

**Reviewed by Iain Emsley**

Ramsey Campbell has firmly established himself as the master of British horror writing, and, thirty years after his first publication, shows no sign of losing his touch for the horrific. Over his career he has bridged the gap between the pulp writers, such as H.P. Lovecraft, and more modern modes of horror. However, he has largely been overshadowed by the success of King and Barker and perhaps now the time is ripe for a re-appraisal of his stalwart contribution to a field which has undergone both boom and bust in recent decades.

S.T. Joshi's study explores Campbell's career through thematic chapters, placing his work within a larger framework of horror writing. Campbell himself provides a useful opening chapter, exploring his own roots and constant search of terror or the 'peculiar unquiet' which may be found in fiction other than horror. Joshi shows us how Campbell's style has moved from Lovecraftian imitations, which provided the bulk of his first collections, to the intimate terror found in everyday life examined through a purple lens. Joshi weaves relevant biographical information as well as dense textual examination to show how early concerns with showing the terror which lies without is still present in the later, more surface, horror writing of the 1980s. The other gem of this study is that Joshi also writes– albeit very briefly – about the film novelisations and the sword and sorcery writings, as well as providing a detailed bibliography.

In the collection *Ghosts and Grisly Things*, Campbell has pulled together a range of short stories which demonstrate his various styles. We are treated to the more traditional horror of 'The Same in Any Language', a zombie story which builds its tension but does not release the reader with a soft dénouement, or 'Out of the Woods', a pulpish tale of supernatural horror in the modern world. In 'Where They Lived', Campbell explores our holiday nightmares through the Lunts who stalk the Hatchards but hints that the cycle will carry on after the episode ends. In each story, he explores various tropes, expanding them from their common forms and re-writing them for an audience already knowledgeable about the genre.

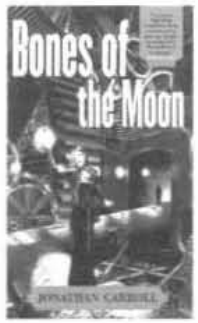
In *Pact of the Fathers*, a secret fraternity collects their due after one of their own has attempted to cheat them. Daniella Logan begins to question the circumstances of her father's death; she uncovers his pact and fears for her own and her friend's safety. Where most horror writers would focus upon the actual pact and the secret history that necessarily underlies it, Campbell chooses to focus upon the flight and the discovery, slowly building the tensions, temporarily releasing them and then changing the tempo, upping it to a horrific conclusion before releasing the reader. The horror really rests upon the damaged relationships rather the actions, the betrayals therein, but he also balances his older style of supernatural horror with the modern terror to achieve its effects.

Whilst horror as a genre may currently rest in the doldrums, confined to the edges of genre writing, authors such as Campbell show how powerful it can still be, utilising a variety of modes and atmospheres. Joshi's study, whilst necessarily slight for the newer reader, provides a thought-provoking examination of a modern master, glossing over extreme detail but still engaging and thorough. *Ghosts and Grisly Things* shows Campbell at his best in the short story form, whilst *Pact of the Fathers* shows his remaining vibrancy in long form. In a field that has, perhaps, lost its way in recent years, Campbell still strides across the landscape.

## Jonathan Carroll – *Bones of the Moon*

Orb, New York, 2002, 222pp, $13.95 ISBN 0-312-87312-3

**Review by Chris Hill**




Cullen James is a happily married woman, although her memories are clouded with guilt over an abortion she had some time earlier. Now, though, she has started to dream of an imaginary land called Rondua in which she, together with the son she does not have, are on a quest to find the five Bones of the Moon – a quest she has apparently been on before but failed. Then she starts to exhibit special powers in the real world and other people start dreaming of her fantasy world. In the end the final battle with the villain in Rondua becomes linked to a killer in the real world.

Reading *Bones of the Moon* (first published in 1987) I found myself becoming aware of how in some ways Carroll is a formulaic writer – though the formula is all his own. The first part of the novel relates a mundane life, although this time the main character is not an artist (except potentially), where some event in the history of the character has an importance to the resolution. Cullen is not always easy to sympathise with, but as usual Carroll surrounds her with more likeable secondary characters (her husband Danny and their gay best friend Eliot).

*Bones of the Moon* is perhaps the closest he has written to a true fantasy; the quest in Rondua has a feel somewhere between Lewis Carroll and C. S. Lewis. It also has something more closely resembling a happy ending than most of Carroll's books, though not without a price.

But somehow I ended up feeling a little disappointed in the novel, for reasons that I cannot quite pin down. It certainly did not give me the shiver of fear that *Voice of Our Shadow* or *Land of Laughs* did. Somehow it became a bit 'so far, so Jonathan Carroll' – nothing actually *wrong* with it, but just not as good as I know Carroll can write.

## B. A. Chepaitis – *The Fear Principle*

Ace Books, 1998, 243pp, $5.99 ISBN 0-441-00497-0

## B. A. Chepaitis – *The Fear of God*

Ace Books, 1999, 274pp, $5.99 ISBN 0-441-00622-1

## B. A. Chepaitis – *Learning Fear*

Ace Books, 2000, 287pp, $6.50 ISBN 0-441-00696-5

**Reviewed by Elizabeth A. Billinger**

So, what's your greatest fear? What drives you? Is it fear of poverty, of impotence, of death, or maybe you're afraid of being just plain ordinary?

It's Jaguar Addams's job to learn a prisoner's deepest fear, then teach him to face it, because crime grows out of fear and overcoming that fear is the only cure. Jaguar Addams is a Teacher, the most accomplished Teacher on the most advanced prison world, Planetoid Three. She is a survivor of the Killing Times, a witness to the murder of her family and a powerful empath in a world that is afraid of anyone practising the empathic arts. Jaguar is a complex and difficult character for both the reader and her colleagues.

This is a world where both the heroes and the villains are flawed and believable: Chepaitis skilfully offers us three-dimensional characters, people who do bad things because they believe they are doing good, and a heroine who is prepared to break every rule in the book, and then some, justifying the means by her conviction that she is pursuing the right ends.

In the first novel, *The Fear Principle*, Jaguar's task is to take on Clare Rilasco, a successful socialite and assassin. Very obvious clues at the murder scene indicate that the assassin either chose to be caught or she has been set up by the people she's working for. Jaguar's mission is not only to rehabilitate Rilasco but to find out who hired her to take out the Governor of Colorado. Rilasco is a cool and dangerous character – not so different from Jaguar herself – and the tangled plot in which she is involved threatens not only the lives of Jaguar and those close to her, but promises to unleash on the world some very disturbing technological advances.

*Fear of God* brings Jaguar another challenging case – the fanatical leader of a religious sect whose followers have been programmed to start their own apocalypse on Earth. Her faith leaves her with nothing to fear, so how will Jaguar unpick this woman and find a way to stop the carnage before it's too late? And of course, the more Jaguar works on the case, the more complicated things become.

*Learning Fear* takes Jaguar back to Earth to lecture on a University course on the History of the Empathic Arts. The people on Planetoid Three are wary of empaths in general and Jaguar in particular, but on Earth the fear and prejudice is much greater. Jaguar, never a practitioner of the diplomatic arts, must try to educate her students even as she becomes entangled in the machinations of an extremist anti-empathic movement and suffers telepathic invasions of her mind.

Were Jaguar not so stubborn and single-minded she would

never be able to see these things through; on the other hand, were she not so stubborn and reluctant to trust people, some of the most difficult and dangerous situations could be avoided.

These books bring a forward-looking, sf sensibility to the good old-fashioned thriller. Chepaitis is a great storyteller with interesting and challenging ideas that blur the boundaries between virtual reality and telepathy and posit a new solution to the rehabilitation of the criminal. It's a shame that these books have not yet been published in the UK, but I recommend pouncing on any copy you come across.

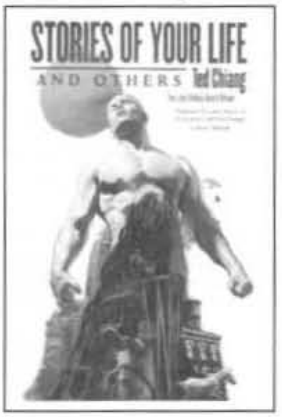
## Ted Chiang – *Stories of Your Life and Others*

Tor, New York, 2002, 333pp, $24.95 ISBN 0-765-30418-X

**Reviewed by Steve Jeffery**

It has often been said that the short story is the heart of sf. On the evidence of Chiang's first collection, the genre heart is beating strongly and in a very healthy state indeed.

This is that *rara avis*, a first collection and first book by a new writer. It has equally been said that these days collections don't sell anywhere near as well as novels, and that even established writers have to fight hard to get publishers to take them on. All credit then to Tor for putting their faith behind Chiang and bringing him to a wider audience than those who are already aware of this remarkable talent from magazines and a number of key anthologies.




Chiang describes himself as a slow and occasional writer. Perhaps it's that slowness and attention to detail (the eight stories here span 11 years, from 1990 to 2001) that has resulted in an impressive slew of awards for any new writer – two Nebula Awards, The John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer, the Theodore Sturgeon Memorial Award, a Sidewise Award for alternate history and the number one slot in the *Asimov's* readers poll. *Stories Of Your Life and Others* is almost certainly destined to become one of those landmark collections in the history of sf, like those of Sturgeon, Gene Wolfe, Michael Blumlein's *The Brains of Rats* or Greg Egan's *Axiomatic*.

In the same interview in a recent *Locus*, Chiang mentions both John Crowley and Greg Egan, and it's not hard to see the influence of both those writers in stories such as 'Hell is the Absence of God', a bleak and affecting updating of the story of Job, or the brilliant collision of a cabalistic science and industrial revolution in 'Seventy-Two Letters', which draws equally on the legend of the golem and Karel Capek's *RUR*, and then uses this to springboard into a wider story of an 'Invisible College' of scientists desperately trying to avert the almost certain extinction of the human race within a few short generations. It's this ability to illuminate connections between seemingly disparate systems, from language and mathematics, to genetics, alchemy and cosmology, drawn equally from science fiction and fantasy, that give Chiang's stories such effective and affective power, and so often, a true 'sense of wonder'. A superb example of the latter is 'Tower of Babylon', a description of the ingenious engineering solutions of an immense tower that reaches to the very vault of Heaven, and which a group of miners are about to break though to find what lies on the other side. Language and perception are key elements of many of Chiang's stories, from the award-winning title story (which combines the humanity of Bob Shaw's Slow Glass tales with the intellectual fireworks of Ian Watson's *The Embedding*) to the super-genius duel of 'Understand' and the short and sharp 'The Evolution of Human Science'.

An exceptional, and essential, collection.

## James Clemens – *Wit'ch Fire* 🕮

Orbit, London, 2002, 491pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-84149-150-0

**Reviewed by Andrew A. Adams**

This is a late UK publication of the first in a five-book fantasy sequence. The US publications are under way, so expect four more (with a two-word title of 'Wit'ch Something').

The first thing that struck me about this book, and which will probably strike readers of this review as well, is the spurious punctuation in the title. I had a sinking feeling when I saw this, and it was unfortunately borne out. At no point in the near-500 pages of this first book is this idiocy explained. As well as the witch (sorry, 'wit'ch') of the title we have elv'in, og're, d'warf, people (Er'ril, Tol'Chuk), places (Aloa'glen). Well, you get the picture.

Now, I've never been fond of the habit of putting unusual words constantly in italics, as though to stress to the reader that this is a made-up word, not just something unfamiliar. This is worse, however. It constantly jars the reader: familiar words such as witch, ogre and dwarf are no longer so familiar. One is left with a frustrating lack of internal 'sounding' for character names such as 'Er'ril'.

The book starts with an over-complex introduction layering the story beneath history, translation and myth. All unnecessary, though short-lived and not as annoying as the spurious punctuation.

This is all rather a shame because it's not a bad fantasy. Nothing spectacular, but a dark-edged story, with an interesting mix of archetype and 'ordinary' characters. Some twists and mystery running through the plot are well paid off towards the end and the story hangs together well enough for book one of five (and a first novel to boot). The only serious problem with the writing is that the "voice" of various characters sometimes blends into the third person narrator, but it *is* a first novel and experience will probably solve that.

On balance, the lure of where the story will go isn't enough to get me over the irritations in the abuse of language. Casual readers may well be put off by the initial layout: in-character introduction; preamble; prologue; yet another pre-amble. Glancing at the first few pages in a bookshop won't grab you, and the writing isn't sufficient to become a 'must buy'.

## Philip K. Dick – *Minority Report*

Gollancz, London, 2002, 290pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-86798-738-1

**Reviewed by L.J. Hurst**

*Minority Report* is a collection of Philip K. Dick's short stories bringing together the title story (originally prefixed with 'The'), now a hit film, along with three others also filmed, and another five chosen to introduce new readers to the strange Dickian universe. Apart from the title story, the filmed stories are 'We Can Remember It For You Wholesale' (the basis of *Total Recall*), 'Imposter', and 'Second Variety' (filmed as *Screamers* in 1995). There is a short introduction by Malcolm Edwards giving these detail. And finally, there is a long quotation from Dick (taken from the biography *Only Apparently Real*) about the nature of his place

in the universe.

Readers might find a strange discrepancy between Malcolm Edwards' Introduction and that quotation from Dick, because Edwards fails to mention that even when you are reading a blood and guts story about psychopathic robots, such as 'Second Variety', you are also learning something about the definition of humanity, and the role of perception in that definition. Dick, who read widely, probably could have expressed this in the terms of obscure academic philosophy, but he never did; not for the ordinary reader anyway. (This has obviously found its way into Spielberg's film – a BBC reviewer described *Minority Report* as being "saturated with religion").

Oddly, this volume has managed to include a typographic error that exacerbates this confusion. In 'The Electric Ant' a computer is giving an analysis of the contents of a man's chest: "The punched tape roll above your heart mechanism is not a programming turret but is in fact a realty-supply construct". 'Realty-supply' (checking the *Collected Stories* Volume 5) should be 'reality-supply'. However, it is not an impossible reading, because in Dick's work thought can create worlds. Poole, the character, realises that if he cuts the tape "Reality will continue for others, but not for me. Because my reality, my universe, is coming to me from this minuscule unit". Then Dick goes on with his story, describing Poole's struggles, before the eventual reversal – no matter what humans tell him about liking him, when Poole finally expires irrecoverably, it becomes clear that all that amity was another illusion: Poole, the electric ant (android), was hated.

Both *Screamers* and *Total Recall* had scripts by Dan O'Bannon, though with different degrees of success with audiences. The two stories which have become hit films are perhaps the weakest in this volume – certainly the film makers had to add the most – 'We Can Remember It' does not contain false heads and 'Minority Report' does not include eye transplants, for instance... Dick's short stories were collected in five volumes – this collection selects from only three of them (missing the first and third). I had forgotten how good was 'Faith Of Our Fathers' – in effect, it is a retelling of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, answering something that Orwell elided over – how could Big Brother appear a big brother to all of the ethnic groups in Oceania? Again, Dick's answer is that it lies in the manipulation of perception, but he manages to get a lot more in there as well (including what could now be understood to be plagiarism checks in our universities). It is also a very visual story – should David Cronenberg ever film one of Dick's works, perhaps it would be 'Faith Of Our Fathers'. As Malcolm Edwards writes, Dick has now spawned three hit films; he has equalled Asimov, Heinlein and Herbert together, who were only responsible for one each. There will be more.

## Raymond E. Feist & Joel Rosenberg – *Murder In LaMut*

Voyager, London, 2002, 324pp, £17.99 ISBN 0-00-224720-8

**Reviewed by Vikki Lee**

Feist's latest novel, set in the series entitled *Legends of the Riftwar*, is another collaboration, this time with Joel Rosenberg.

Set entirely in the western city of LaMut, this is the tale of three mercenary soldiers, Durine, Kethol and Pirojil, who are just earning a few coppers whilst waiting out the bitter winter months. Veterans of many battles against the invading Tsurani (this is set around seven years after the portal bringing the first Tsurani, so is effectively slap in the middle of the Riftwar) the three spend their time doing guard duties and patrols – the Tsurani not choosing to fight during the winter months.

The Swordmaster, Steven Argent, is in charge of LaMut whilst the Earl is away at a war council planning the Spring assaults on the Tsurani. Without any direct threat to LaMut, it should be quite an easy task to 'hold the fort' until the Earl returns. But LaMut is a city full of troops, and what's more, lots of petty, power-grabbing Barons of differing allegiance. Steven is worried about the safety of one of these, Baron Morray, and so he assigns our erstwhile mercenaries to protect him. Whilst on escort duty to the family home of Baron Mondegreen, the party are set upon by a small band of Minwanabi (Tsurani) warriors, which they successfully repel – delivering their charges safely. Having escorted the Lady Mondegreen as well, they learn that her husband is dying and that the Lady is to return to LaMut to represent his interests there. It is when they return safely to LaMut that things start to take a turn for the worse. Not the brightest three in a box full of buttons, our heroes get more and more entwined in the politics and machinations of the petty Barons, and no matter how hard they plan to extricate themselves, ill luck and circumstance, not to mention the weather, prevent them from leaving.

This is an utterly engrossing tale. The three mercenaries are at once likeable and believable, and one empathises deeply with their plight as one unforeseen circumstance leads inexorably to another, and their ability to control or even affect their own destiny dwindles away to nothing as surely as the sand runs out of an hourglass. It's a stand-alone novel, a straightforward story with a beginning, a middle and an end – with the customary twist of course. If you've not read Feist before then this is surely a good place to start. Highly entertaining and recommended.

## Phyllis Gotlieb – *Mindworlds*

Tor, New York, 2002, 253pp, £24.95 ISBN 0-312-87876-1

**Reviewed by Penny Hill**

*Mindworlds* is the third volume in a trilogy and I made some allowances accordingly. However, enough of the back story was detailed on the cover that ostensibly there was no need to catch up on the plot.

As I continued reading, I felt strongly that the different plot strands were disjointed and uninvolving. There was a lack of tension between the elements rather than a drive to see how they connected. Later in the narrative, the separate plot threads came together and an overall pattern emerged but it was too late for any payoff. A summary of the plot sounds great – it should have been a tense and exciting thriller.

Perhaps one reason why this failed was because I had trouble telling the main male characters apart, even when they were of different species. They all thought, talked and acted in similar ways. Hasso the Khagodi (an alien giant lizard ) who falls hopelessly in love at first sight, reads exactly the same as Ned, the human mercenary whose only motive is to provide for his family. Tyloe and Lorrice, purely because of their names, reminded me of a trailer trash couple. They were dragged along for the ride and had far more narrative attention paid to them than their contribution to the plot would justify. Because of the lack of differentiation between the characters, I found I kept losing track of them – especially Ned.

This similarity between characters also applied to the evil characters – Andres Brezant the arms dealer and Gorodek the Khagodi Governer both fell into the stereotype of rich and powerful men plotting conspiracies and buying sex on the side.

The different plot strands are set on a variety of worlds. In the depictions of the alien inhabitants, Gotlieb fell into two errors. The Lyhhrt were too alien. Their lack of individual names and identity was profoundly irritating – especially as they were given de facto names based on their appearance – and their telepathic powers made them too powerful, making their defeat unconvincing.

On the other hand the Khagodi were described using terms too close to human concepts. I failed to suspend my disbelief and

see that sticking out your tongue was a mark of respect, and not a childish gesture. I pictured their sleeping basins as small hand basins and found this unintentionally and distractingly funny.

The cover blurb describes this novel as "offering a resounding climax" to the story and maybe if read in context it does; however, read alone it was unsatisfying. I will not be seeking out any more works by this author.

## Peter F. Hamilton – *Fallen Dragon*

Macmillan, London, 2001, 634pp, £17.99 ISBN 0-333-90065-0

**Reviewed by Iain Emsley**

Peter Hamilton has cut his cloth with his own brand of wide-screen sf and *Fallen Dragon* certainly carries on this tradition. Lawrence Newton spent his childhood dreaming of space travel, fuelled by watching old sf re-runs on television. However, he discovers the future already mapped out for him is with a position in his father's company, so he rebels and escapes from the colony world of Amethi to pursue his dream on Earth. Whilst undergoing selection, he becomes involved with an anti-corporate protester but finds that he cannot operate outside the company framework and leaves Earth on a mission. Several years later, Newton is leading a team on another company operation that begins to show disturbing similarities to a previous disastrous mission. He hears rumours of a Temple of the Fallen Dragon with a vast treasure and sets off into the interior to discover its secrets.

Whereas the Nights Dawn trilogy was populated with a thriving commercial civilisation, albeit under attack, the universe of *Fallen Dragon* is one where space travel is phenomenally expensive, funded only by company piracy, and thus limited to essential operations. The companies themselves are collapsing and their employees begin to question the economic wisdom that is peddled. Newton comes across two societies that thrive without the company technology, harnessing biology to their own ecological survival and thus stand in opposition to the expansionist corporations. The uplift found by Newton potentially offers a Zen moment but is also reminiscent of Clarke, linked to the stars as well as the within. There is a sense that Hamilton agrees with the latter non-corporate path and spends more time interspersing the main plot line with a back story of the rebels and their long history. Again this is tempered in a fashion – Newton returns home to find his own happiness where he started.

Previously Hamilton has been largely conservative in his writing but *Fallen Dragon* demonstrates a growing tendency towards anti-corporate politics in space and in many ways this frees him. This is certainly not as wide as his previous writing but it has a strong focus to the plot line and comfortably plays with both space opera and military sf.

## Robert Holdstock – *The Iron Grail*

Earthlight, London, 2002, 299pp, £17.99 ISBN 0-7432-2077-3

**Reviewed by Steve Jeffery**

*The Iron Grail*, Book Two of The Merlin Codex, is a sequel to *Celtika* (reviewed here in V215), in which Merlin, once called Antiokus in a long-gone age, and a former companion of Jason on the *Argo*, raised the sunken *Argo* and its undead captain from a lake in the frozen Land of the North and, with a new crew including the exiled Celtic chieftain Urtha and the impetuous young sorceress Niiv, set out on a new voyage. At the end of *Celtika*, Jason, half mad from his seven-century imprisonment at the bottom of the frozen lake, and the discovery that his two sons are not dead, as he believed, but abducted and hidden by his wife Medea, has found the elder of his sons, Thesokorus, who has taken upon himself the name Killer of Kings, but been severely wounded by him. Urtha has also suffered a severe wound in an epic combat in which he slew his traitorous foster-brother Cunomaglos, who allowed Urtha's fortress home of Taurovinda to be overrun and Urtha's children to be abducted and hidden in the Land of Ghosts. Thus starts *The Iron Grail*, in which Merlin travels to Urtha's homeland of Alba, The Isle of Ghosts, to discover the hiding place of Urtha's son and daughter, Kymon and Munda.

Taurovinda has been occupied by warriors from Ghostland, both of the dead and those yet to be born, and Urtha's son, Kymon, is determined to take it back to prove his worth as a warrior before his father returns. Meanwhile Jason is also making his way to Alba, where he believes his youngest son, Kinos, "Little Dreamer", has been hidden by Medea.

The various stories woven through the Merlin Codex are a complex and mythic interplay of quest, revenge, misunderstanding and tragedy – not least that between the cautious Merlin and the headstrong Niiv, who frightens Merlin as much as she loves him. It all adds up to an epic tale, in the full meaning of that too-often overused word. The world of The Merlin Codex is as brilliantly imagined and awe-inspiring as that of Holdstock's previous 'Mythago' books (which already stand as one of the high points of contemporary fantasy) and the Arthurian legends, the Irish epic of 'The Cattle Raid of Cuilnge' and the Greek myths of the Argonauts, the Odyssey and the Trojan Wars. A spectacular triumph of storytelling. New readers should really start with *Celtika* (now out in mass market paperback, see V222), but they will find themselves rapidly caught up in The Merlin Codex and as eager as this reviewer to see where future books will lead.

## James Lovegrove – *The Hope*

Gollancz, London, 2002 (© 1990), 229pp, £6. 99 ISBN 1-85798-802-7

## James Lovegrove – *Imagined Slights*

Gollancz, London, 2002, 276pp, £6. 99 ISBN 1-85798-801-9

**Reviewed by Chris Amies**

*The Hope* was first published in 1990 and became a *succes d'estime*, meaning something that got very good reviews but which some years later nobody seemed very much to have read. Which is a shame, because –beyond the bloodiness and over-the-top nature of Lovegrove's creation which originally caught those reviewers' attention – this is a very accomplished work.

The *Hope* of the title is a huge ship, apparently afloat on the seas of Earth though it, still unable to find land, could easier be a generation starship; this ship of fools echoes the society that built it – the rich up top in the daylight and the poor below decks. Creatures that eat rats breed in the spaces between the walls. Dr Macaulay is sole doctor for one million patients; strange fish are fished from the sea and unnaturally though not unexpectedly cause poisoning he can't cure (dubious food occurs in several stories in the volume); the swimming pool is empty, a Ballardesque sign of a civilisation that has abandoned its posts, and invented its own superstitions like the Rain Man, and Lonely the Rat, who may have found the explanation for the *Hope*'s inability to find the farther shore. Written halfway through the Thatcher era, *The Hope* comments on the soulless and divisive belief system of those years.

*Imagined Slights* contains a baker's dozen of stories dating

from 1992 onwards. Whether it's more optimistic because times have changed or because the author is now a decade older is a moot point; the author's sense of grand guignol and taste for bloody scenes is undiminished, but the tone of this collection varies far more than it does in the linked stories of the earlier novel. An alternative and ideal London, "a second London ... made up of all our hopes and dreams and longings of what this city should be like", is glimpsed in 'A Taste of Heaven'; 'Nana', the old lady down the street who somehow remains the same even when the children who knew her have grown up, may represent the braking effect of the individual's past, or the undefeatable nature of the common people, or both. 'Britworld™', which appeared in *Interzone* and set off a spat between British and American readers, now reads less as an attack on Britain as one on American cultural imperialism. 'The Unmentionable' suggests overtly what the reader may already have suspected, that Lovegrove has more of a sense of humour than at first seems the case; it's Lovegrove doing Lovecraft, as it were. 'The Gift' is an accomplished sf story; 'The Driftling' too: in this case, one that lays cheerfully but accurately into the feminist-sf conceit of all-female societies. Lovegrove, here and elsewhere, is disturbed by the tendency in some quarters to see men as expendable. In many of the stories, ordinary miracles happen, and love really does triumph, though in some of the stories the borderline between love and obsession is hard to define, and in some cases the beloved doesn't have to be present or even alive. The sense of optimism for the reader comes from a feeling that Lovegrove believes that the ideal, whether it's the remade slow city, or true love, is attainable. These are subtle, politically- and morally-charged stories, magical realism if anything is, and we can hope for more.

## John Marco – *The Eyes Of God* 🕮

Gollancz, London, 2002, 794pp, £12.99 ISBN 0-575-07364-0

**Reviewed by Alan Fraser**

This self-contained new "classic fantasy" novel from John Marco is set in a different world from that of his Tyrants And Kings series. Young Akeela, newly-crowned King of Liiria, comes to make peace with his country's lifetime adversary, King Karis of Reec, along with his champion, Lukien, called the Bronze Knight. To seal their pact, Karis bestows upon Akeela the hand of his beautiful daughter, Cassandra. Unfortunately Cassandra soon complicates matters by falling in love with Lukien, so we get the classic Arthur-Guinevere-Lancelot triangle. As if that's not bad enough, Cassandra is eventually forced to reveal the dark secret she has hidden from her father, her husband and her lover – she is terminally ill with cancer. Akeela's librarian finds a legend in his oldest scrolls of something that may save Cassandra's life – in a far-off kingdom called Jador, there are said to be two amulets that protect their wearers from all disease and natural aging. These amulets are called the Eyes of God, and Akeela sends his champion Lukien off on a quest to find the amulets and bring them back by any means. We know early on that this tale will not end well for all the parties, and the tale soon darkens, with both Akeela and Lukien committing murder to further their objectives.

This book has an engrossing plot that goes off in unexpected directions, flawed heroes, sympathetic villains, sticky ends not all deserved, and a muscular page-turning writing style. However, I was bugged throughout by apparently irreconcilable difficulties with these amulets and a curse that is supposed to be on them. After re-reading several seemingly inconsistent passages and still being confused, I decided just to read to the end and see how Marco resolves them. In the end, he does (although not till almost the last page), but I wasn't entirely satisfied.

Do you remember the *Macbeth* cheat perpetrated by Shakespeare? The witches told Macbeth he couldn't be harmed by a man "of woman born", but he's finally killed by MacDuff, who was "from his mother's womb untimely ripped". Even our English teacher acknowledged that this wasn't fair play, and Marco resolves one plot paradox with just such a sly solution.

All in all a great read, as long as you don't let the amulet paradox bug you as much as it did me!

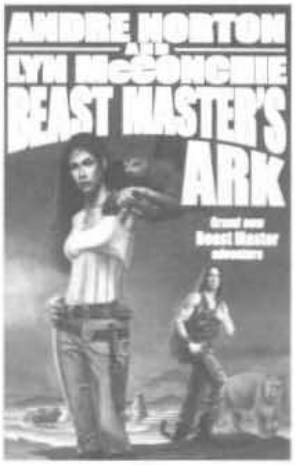
## Andre Norton and Lyn McConchie – *Beast Master's Ark*

Tor, New York, 2002, 318pp, $23.95 ISBN 0-765-30041-9

**Reviewed by Lesley Hatch**

This novel, a return to Andre Norton's Beast Master sequence, does not depend on previous novels in the series, and so those new to this particular storyline (like myself) are not at a disadvantage.

From a personal point of view, I had always thought that there was only one example of empathic/telepathic relationships between animals and humans in science fiction or fantasy, in the form of the Dragonriders of Pern. However, I was delighted to discover that Andre Norton has created a brilliant alternative example of this particular concept.




On the surface, the storyline is simple; it takes place on Arzor, a planet inhabited by two indigenous tribes, each with their own traditions, and a colony of humans who are employed in various ways. All three groups have a common enemy – a virulent life form that attacks and kills its prey in a matter of minutes, leaving only bones and artificial items behind. The life form is encroaching on the lands belonging to one tribe, forcing them to advance into the other tribe's lands, creating a potential war situation. In turn, this has an effect on the human colonists who have set up ranches, as the natives who trade with them and work for them find their lands being overrun.

Into this uncertain situation comes the Ark, a spaceship occupied by an extended family of geneticists who are collecting gene samples of species decimated in a recent inter-stellar conflict, the idea being to perpetuate the various species by cloning, and thus widen the gene pools. The youngest of the group, Tani, is an orphan, the child of an Irish medical expert and a Cheyenne Beast Master, both of whom lost their lives following the invasion by an alien race bent on domination and annihilation. Beast Masters, including Tani's father, fought in the war, and Tani has been indoctrinated by her mother to believe that using your team in a war situation is wrong – her father and his team died in the conflict, and the fact that one of the reasons for their visit to Arzor is to replace a late team member for the resident Beast Master has prejudiced Tani against him. As a consequence, their first meeting does not go well.

It is against this backdrop of conflict – between ranchers and tribes, between the two tribes, and between Tani and Storm, the resident Beast Master – that the battle to combat the latest threat takes place, a battle in which the various factions have to unite or be exterminated.

This is a compelling novel, rich in description and characterisation and high adventure, and I cannot recommend it highly enough. Read and enjoy.

## Ricardo Pinto – *The Standing Dead* 🕮

Bantam Press, London, 2002, 525pp, £17.99 ISBN 0-593-04558-0

**Reviewed by Vikki Lee**

*The Standing Dead* is the long-awaited second book in The Stone Dance of the Chameleon series and picks up where the first book left off.

Our two kidnapped heroes, Carnelian and Osidian (the God Emperor elect), smuggled out of Osrakum after the plotting and scheming of the Empress Ykoriana, are near to death before finally being rescued by a tribe of plainsmen. Carnelian recovers and begins to fit into the daily routines, slowly winning the Ochre tribe's trust and respect. Osidian, however, has lost much more, and is a 'Master' through and through. Slower to recover than Carnelian, he begins to plot his return to Osrakum to remove his brother Molochite from the throne of God Emperor and to take his revenge on his mother Ykoriana. Using the plainsmen tribes to build an army, Osidian has opposition not only from the elders of the tribes, but also from Carnelian who is trying desperately to preserve the plainsmen's way of life, and the loving relationship that originally bought the two together slowly turns to loathing and hatred.

For those of us who wanted to explore the society of Osrakum and the 'Masters' more, this book is something of a big let-down. Set entirely out on the plains, we see the other side of the coin – 'how the other half live'. The plainsmen's lives are ruled by the Masters, whom they believe to be Angels, and they suffer irregular tithes of their young where the best of their offspring are selected for service in the city. It's an engrossing read and gives a lot of background on how the Masters maintain their own society through domination and fear. It reads well enough as a standalone or companion novel to *The Chosen*, and of course sets up a return to Osrakum for the next.

Apart from the disappointment of this novel not being what I wanted it to be, it's still a damn good read and continues the promise shown in *The Chosen*. I look forward to the next book and hope it pulls it all together satisfactorily.

## Frederick Pohl (editor) – *The SFWA Grand Masters Volume 3*

Tor, New York, 2002, 477pp, $16.95 ISBN 0-312-86876-6

**Reviewed by L.J. Hurst**

Lester Del Rey, Frederick Pohl, Damon Knight, A.E. van Vogt and Jack Vance, each of them awarded the title "Grand Master" by the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, are the third and final set of authors from whose work the contents of this anthology has been selected. Editor Pohl has chosen about four stories from each of them, which means there are no longer novellas or novel extracts.

In his short introduction, Pohl describes the background in the new sf magazines of the 1930s, and especially the role played by two successive editors of *Astounding* – F. Orley Tremaine and then John W Campbell Jr. According to Pohl, Campbell wanted "the kind of stories that could appear as contemporary literature – in a magazine published in the Twenty-fifth Century". It was a good definition, though these five authors are not particularly identified with Campbell (Robert Heinlein, who appeared in Volume 1 of this series, and Isaac Asimov in Volume 2 are stronger Campbell "creations"). However, Lester del Rey appeared in *Astounding* in 1938, and then making an *Astounding* debut together in July 1939 were A.E. van Vogt and Asimov. Three of van Vogt's contributions here are *Astounding* stories – including "Black Destroyer" (1939: now admitted to be the basis of the *Alien* films) and "Vault of the Beast" (1940: which seems to have a similar relationship to the *Terminator* series).

Mike Ashley's *The Time Machines: The History Of The Science Fiction Magazine Volume 1* (Liverpool University Press: 2000) covers this period in detail. He makes it clear, though, that synchronicity played a major part in the Golden Age of SF – just when Campbell took over, Ray Palmer was taking over at *Amazing*. In March 1939 Palmer published Asimov's first story. The SF magazines were revivified, and the young Turks found new markets and discussion places.

Only the Lester del Rey and van Vogt stories come from this golden period – there is a ten-year hiatus and then the other three sets are taken from the fifties and sixties. (The authors, though, had all been active on the sf scene much earlier). Only Frederick Pohl's "The Tunnel Under the World" (1954) is well-known, while I am surprised that I've never come across Damon Knight's "The Handler" (1960) before – it is a classic piece of paranoia and a bizarre case of the elephant in the living room forty years before that idea came into being. "The Tunnel" appeared in *Galaxy*, and the role of the big three post-war sf magazines I guess will appear in Mike Ashley's second volume. Certainly, magazine themes changed, and *Astounding*'s metamorphosis *Analog* could never be confused with Herbert Gold's *Galaxy*.

Ezra Pound once said that literature is news that stays news. In 2001 BBC Radio 4 broadcast a full length dramatisation of "The Tunnel" – they did not have to set it in the past. With a third Terminator film said to be in production, and "Handlers" still of concern, these Grand Masters deserve their titles; their work remains contemporary. Read it.

## Adam Roberts – *Stone* 🕮

Gollancz, 2002, 261pp, £9.99 ISBN 1-0-575-07064-1

**Reviewed by Stuart Carter**

Tell me that this isn't a glorious old-style sf back-cover tagline:

> "Sprung from a prison in the center of a star, the universe's last criminal is employed to kill the entire population of a planet. And leave the planet itself intact."

Put Adam Roberts' name on the front cover and you must, *surely*, be onto a winner?

Well, yes, actually, you are.

Ae, the aforementioned 'last criminal' in *Stone*, recounts her time spent running amok in the t'T, a utopian society reminiscent of Banks' Culture (but then aren't most utopias influenced by the Culture these days?) The t'T is a distant descendant of humanity and one in which the nanotechnology – or dotTech – inside everyone has lifted the burden of poverty, toil, ill-health and even itching. FTL travel is possible, within limits; helpful AIs abound, again within limits, and most styles of living can be accommodated. Now everyone in the t'T is free to pursue their lives, hobbies, partners and interests to their hearts' content. From the outside it can be seen that the t'T isn't perfect (it is rather static

and unadventurous), but it's pretty damn close.

*Stone* begins (and ends) with Ae stripped of her dotTech and incarcerated in a jailstar, a hollowed out asteroid prison balanced among the outer layers of a small, nondescript star. Between her first and last imprisonment she escapes to travel the worlds of the t'T looking not only to do the murderous bidding of the mysterious benefactors who have sprung her from the jailstar but also to discover their identity and need for her unique services. In a perfect world where even a single homicide is rare, why should anyone need to commit genocide?

Ae is not a sympathetic figure: her self-pity, self-justification and often overt psychopathy preclude that; but it's these very qualities and her unreliable narration that render the story as engaging as it is. We can feel superior to Ae in that we better understand some parts of the story , although we come no closer than her to unraveling the mystery of the plot. Add to this the physical (and other) wonders of the t'T, and Roberts's examination of some unexamined consequences of quantum theory alongside it, and *Stone* becomes a thrilling tour de force of scientific and social exploration.

I really, really enjoyed *Stone*; it's absorbing, intelligent and, importantly for a relatively hard sf book, lucid. Despite containing any number of familiar elements this seems a very fresh cocktail, mixing some Vinge, some Banks (the perspective rather than the spaceships) and even some Le Guin.

If anything *Stone* would probably benefit from being another 100 pages longer since there's a lot more I'd be interested to learn about the t'T, but even that's praise rather than criticism.

## Rudy Rucker – *Spaceland*

Tor, New York, 2002, 301pp, $24.95 ISBN 0-765-30366-3

**Reviewed by Andrew Seaman**

Rudy Rucker can lay fair claim to having one of the wildest and most surreal imaginations in sf. However, his latest novel, a 21st century update of Edwin Abbott's classic of Victorian mathematical fiction, *Flatland*, suffers from the same problem that's dogged his previous work: neat (or, as one of Rucker's characters might say, gnarly) ideas, but somewhat wonky execution.


Abbott's tale, of the adventures of A. Square, a two-dimensional being, and his encounter with a sphere from Spaceland (i.e. our third dimension) is both a handy mathematical primer on higher dimensionality and a mild critique of the Victorian class system and its attitudes towards women. The somewhat safer targets in this novel are the manners and mores of the slacker generation and the dot.com business boom.

Rucker's modern equivalent of Abbott's hero is Joe Cube, a slacker computer programmer in a dead-end job and relationship. On the eve of the new Millennium, Cube is approached by Momo, a four-dimensional woman, with a business offer he can't refuse – marketing a new mobile phone incorporating a 4-D antennae offering interference-free communication without the need for a phone company. Sensing an opportunity to get very rich, very quickly, Joe and his partner Jena, plus Joe's colleague Spazz and his girlfriend Tulip (this *is* California after all!) decide to set up their own company, funded by an initial influx of cash from an extra-dimensional bank raid by Momo.

The plot broadly follows that of *Flatland* with our hero being introduced to the wonders of life beyond Spaceland, but being forced to confront problems of his own, both personal and more universal, when he realises that Momo's motives may not be as pure as they first appeared. Along the way we're offered some undeniably vivid scenes, including a little extra-dimensional cheating at a casino to increase the company's stake money and various encounters during Joe's subsequent odyssey through the fourth dimension with Momo, where Rucker's gonzo imagination is given the chance to really shine.

Rather like *Flatland*, *Spaceland* is less a novel than a series of incidents strung together and Rucker does this well enough, although some readers may become slightly irritated by the relentlessly joky tone of the writing and the juvenile humour that the author insists on indulging in. Ultimately it's competent entertainment, with the bonus of some higher mathematical education thrown in for good measure, but whether it adds anything to Abbott's original vision for a 21st-century audience (other than another dimension!) is open to debate.

## Robert J. Sawyer – *Hominids*

Tor, New York, 2002, 444pp, $25.95 ISBN 0-312-87692-0

**Reviewed by Chris Amies**

Robert J. Sawyer is claimed to be the most successful Canadian author, with a string of award-winning novels behind him. *Hominids* is the first in a new trilogy which investigates alternative possibilities in human evolution; that instead of *Homo Sapiens* becoming the dominant humanoid form, we died out and the Neanderthal form dominated. It is a pleasant conceit, as the author accepts that *H. Neanderthalensis* might have been an alternative human optimised for colder climates, and not the grunting savage of earlier fiction and Stephen Baxter's otherwise-admirable *Space*.

*Hominids* gets much of its sfnal impetus from quantum computing, the idea that complex problems requiring large amounts of computer time could be solved by routing the problem through computers in parallel universes. Ponter Boddit, a Neanderthal physicist, finds himself catapulted through the gate between worlds in a lab accident, and deposited into a heavy-water sphere beneath the Canadian soil. Fortunately he is rescued by sympathetic *H. sapiens* who try to keep the world's inquisitive press from him, but back in the homeworld his co-worker and closest friend is on trial for Boddit's apparent murder. The Neanderthal world depicted is one where a small prosperous population has been preferred over a large ever-hungry one. It is also charming and full of warmth, a society that seems to have arrived at its own version of the *Slow Cities* movement without ever being addicted to speed and growth in the first place.

However, I am not really sure what this novel is about; anthropology, violence and surveillance all contend. Firstly, it's an anthropological story about the possibility of Neanderthal societies, and what the differing physiology might imply: a far greater reliance on scent because of the larger nose, and thus no use of fossil fuel burning, for example. Sawyer postulates a very much smaller world population, which subsists by hunting/gathering. I'm not sure about this. Every human society that has got beyond basic subsistence nomadism has had agriculture. Even if the population remained minuscule they would still want the convenience of having their food supply in a fixed place and delegating certain members of society to produce it.

He also suggests that Neanderthal females were not permanently fertile, and from this postulates males and females

living apart except when they come into rut. This may be an attempt to heal a male/female rift in our society, especially as one of the key events of the novel is that, just prior to the discovery of the Neanderthal in the heavy-water sphere, geneticist Mary Vaughan is raped by an assailant in the University grounds; Sawyer's list of further reading for this book includes a title called *The Beast Within: why men are violent*, and at one point he says, "Everything is down to male violence." It's fairly desperate though, to suggest all that men and women can do is live apart, though many people of both sexes have been tempted by the idea. Equally he bashes *Homo Sapiens* by suggesting that in our world we wiped out the Neanderthals, with very little counter-suggestion that in the Neanderthal world they wiped out *H. Sapiens*.

Another key feature of the Neanderthal world is its surveillance. When one of the humans hears about this, that everything people do is filmed, her immediate reaction is: 'you mean it's a totalitarian society?'. No, it isn't, because of who owns the information. Everyone is being recorded at all times, but the person recorded owns that recording. Its release can be required by a court of law but that is a long way from permanent CCTV being watched by the police. The Neanderthal world is not entirely paradise, with this kind of surveillance and also the legal sanction of sterilising not only wrongdoers but also close members of their family.

In *Factoring Humanity* Sawyer came up with a situation where everyone is party to everyone else's thoughts, and he seemed to find this rather creepy situation desirable. Robert Anton Wilson has suggested that – faced with increasing surveillance via CCTV and the Internet – *You have no privacy. Get used to it.* We should proceed as though *all* information is public. The subjects of surveillance and violence do seem to bulk so largely in this novel that the reader cannot avoid hearing a very large tub being thumped.

## Jan Siegel – Witch's Honour 🕮

Voyager, London, 2002, 312pp, £17.99 ISBN 0-00-225839-0

**Reviewed by Penny Hill**

This is the third novel in the series that started with *Prospero's Children* and continued in *The Dragon-Charmer*, and set a few years on from the events in the latter book. Gaynor and Will, having been central to the action of the previous volume while Fern lay in a coma, are now relegated to bit parts, and Fern again takes centre stage. Gaynor gets her own bit of mythic importance as she discovers her name is a corruption of Guinevere, but it doesn't really resonate with her own character and is just useful for confusing the enemy at a vital point.

These familiar characters are lightly handled but new depths are reached. Through Gaynor we see the themes of the importance of friendship and little kindnesses to one another. We also see the awkwardness and self-consciousness between her and Will as they try to come to terms with the relationship with one another that they shied away from when they last met.

Fern herself is still cold and detached, but we understand her better and her developing relationship with Luc, a successful man whose sister has been captured by the witch Morgus, makes sense in this context.

The story-telling is as fascinating as we have come to expect from Siegel. We are never given an easy definition of what *Witch's Honour* itself might be but instead have to deduce what it isn't. The narrative switches between Morgus' megalomanic plotting, which is naturally in the first person, and the efforts of Fern, Gaynor and Will to overcome her, which are in a calmer third person narrative. The final sentence of the book is deliberately ambiguous so that you question the meaning of what has just been described, without doubting that the series has definitely been concluded.

Where Jan Siegel's relative inexperience as an author became clear was in the overall flow of the book. *Prospero's Children* itself was crippled by being broken-backed and in *Witch's Honour* the shape of the book is somewhat unplanned, with the main plot ending two-thirds of the way through the book. The story then switches to the subsidiary plots without the readers having enough information about these new developments to be prepared for them. Given that these subsidiary plots were supposed to convey the overwhelming sense of Fern's destiny, they should have been hinted at more strongly in the main body of the text, so that we could invest emotionally in their outcome.

This proviso aside, Jan Siegel is already a fascinating and enjoyable author, whose next work I await eagerly. I look forward to her development into a truly great writer.

## Robert Silverberg – *The Longest Way Home* 🕮

Gollancz, London, 2002, 213pp, £10.99 ISBN 0-575-07352-7

**Reviewed by Graham Andrews**

Robert Silverberg's almost legendary first book, *Revolt on Alpha C* (1955), was a juvenile (or Young Adult, in today's parlance) sf novel. He has taken several more flyers at the form, most notably with *The Gate of Worlds* (1967) and *Project Pendulum* (1987).

Now Silverberg has given us *The Longest Way Home*, which might or might not be a titular tribute to Poul Anderson's *The Long Way Home* (1955: aka *No world of Their Own*). The novel is set on the Old Earth colony planet of Homeworld, where society has stayed rigidly stratified for over a thousand years. Great Houses interlinked by feudal kinship, the Folk (those more *hoi polloi* colonists), and the laid-back Indigenes ('Natives' having long since been placed on the Index of Forbidden Words).

Fifteen-year-old Joseph, the eldest son of Martin Master Keilloran of House Keilloran, is visiting his relative, Grylilin Master Getfen of High Manza, when the Folk finally Rise Up in Their Wrath. "This is a prosperous estate," he tells himself, with commendable sang-froid. "What grievances could exist here? In any case the relationship of Folk to Masters everywhere was a settled thing; it benefited both groups; why would anyone want to destabilize a system that worked so well for everyone?" (p.4).

Cue the Power of Positive Slinking. Joseph must haul his sorry ass back home, across ten thousand miles of a world that has suddenly turned mad, bad and dangerous to know. But people and the occasional *thing* keep helping him out, for no good reason apart from AWITH (Author Wants It To Happen). He is the archetypal Boy Who Learns Better; but not a lot, and not quite the hard way.

The peasants revolt at High Manza is mostly told about rather than shown, which sets the action-free tone for much that follows. It's not unlike the 'Spartacus' episode of *Up Pompeii*. Spartacus himself, fending off an unseen army, describes the pitched battle taking place outside this minimalist Roman villa. Frankie Howerd, as Lurkio the slave, turns to camera and says: "Well, surely you didn't expect to see anything?". Brilliance and/or cheek on a BBC-TV budget (probably about 10/6 ,in old money).

*The Longest Way Home* isn't an actively bad novel. It's just a wee bit... flat. Moreover, everything is over-explained in far too much finicky detail. Read *The Gate of Worlds* instead, or seek out *Revolt on Alpha C* – if only for the superior action scenes.

## Norman Spinrad – *Child of Fortune*

Tor Orb, New York, 2002, 467pp, $17.95 ISBN 0-765-30155-5

**Reviewed by John Newsinger**

The belief that Norman Spinrad is one of the giants of American science fiction has been with me for as long as I can remember. I seem to have always known it. When *Child of Fortune* arrived for review, I was actually forced to examine this belief in the man's eminence and found that it was based on the reading of only one of his novels, *The Iron Dream*, and an acceptance of what seemed to be his critical reputation. How would this reputation fare in a confrontation with his actual work? I need not have worried: *Child of Fortune*, first published in 1985, in a marvellous novel, not just a pleasure to read, but essential reading for anyone interested in science fiction, in what it does and how it does it.

The novel is a celebration of the *Wanderjahr*, of the rite of passage adventures of the itinerant hippies of the Second Starfaring Age, of the exploits of the Gypsy Jokers who, in the book's mythology, embody all that is best in the human spirit. The tale is told by Wendi Shasta Leonardo, a citizen of Nouvelle Orlean on the planet Glade, looking back on the youthful naïveté with which she launched her own wanderjahr. In this distant future age of plenty it is the custom for the young to go walkabout in order to discover who they really are, and our protagonist sets about the task with a vengeance.

On the planet Edoku she falls in with the Gypsy Jokers and becomes the lover of their 'leader', Pater Pan. Then she discovers her vocation: storytelling, but not her story. For that she travels to the planet Belshazzar, the source of much of her civilisation's recreational pharmaceuticals. She ventures into the Bloomenwald, the great forest that covers a whole continent, searching for 'the perfumed garden, a Xanadu deep in the interior where Enlightened Ones dwell in nirvanic perfection with the flowers'. Her encounter with Belshazzar's ' floral fascism' provides her with her story, a story that brings with it celebrity and wealth.

What is in many ways a simplistic, indeed simple-minded story, is turned into something quite marvellous by Spinrad's prose, by the erotic charge of his writing, by his sustained and uplifting rhetoric. The passage where Pater Pan tells Shasta his name story is worth quoting:

> "Vraiment, I chose not the freenom Pater Pan in homage to the name of the spirit, rather did the spirit of the name choose me to carry its task forward into our age, for Pater Pan was born before the first ape climbed down from the ancestral tree to wander the plains of Earth. I was the very song that drew that dim creature out of the forest of ignorance to take his first halting steps on the Yellow Brick road... Yes before the singer was the song, to which we wandered from apes into men, and I was the horny-billy goat music leading us onward by the compass of our desires, and the Pied Piper urging the Children onward from the dusty street of Hamelin town into the Magic Mountain of eternal Oz, and so too was I the Minstrel of Aquarius who slew the timebound rule of chairmen of the board and kings."

Amen to that.

Of course, what is missing from his celebration is the inevitable sell-out, the transformation of the child of fortune into the celebrity of immense wealth, whereby the youthful rebel becomes the very thing he/she most despised. We are perhaps entitled to be sceptical of Pater Pan and the Gypsy Jokers. After all, we do live in a time when ageing Mick Jagger, the gypsy joker of my generation, can receive a knighthood for services to selfishness and greed, bestowed on him by the British Royal Frump, acting on the advice of our wonderful christian-conservative prime minister who chose to become a lawyer (!) instead of a rockstar. It would indeed be easy to mock the naïveté of *Child of Fortune*. Far better to enjoy it. And there is a sister volume, *The Void Captain's Tale*, which is supposed to be even better.

[ed.'s note. *The Void Captain's Tale* was reviewed in V221 by K.V. Bailey.]

## Peter Straub – *Magic Terror* 🕮

Harper Collins, London, 2002, 401pp, £6.99, ISBN 0-00-710991-1

**Reviewed by Iain Emsley**

The dominant modes of horror, but not the only modes, are the tale of terror and the tale of horror. The tale of terror tends to be a more psychological, resting upon the unsettling of the individual(s) at the centre, whilst the tale of horror tends to be more visceral, relying upon the physical to create its reactions. In *Magic Terror*, Peter Straub collects seven tales that explore these modes, playing with forms and tropes with an originality that marks him out from the rest of the horror field.

In 'Ashputtle', he treats us to a disturbingly re-written fairy tale, first collected by Datlow and Windling. Ashputtle is a disturbing voice, taunting the reader, yet casually inviting them into her nursery world as she escapes from her two step-sisters and cruel mother, to the terrors inflicted in the nursery class. The dawning of the truth horrifies yet compels the reader to the end. 'Porkpie Hat' is, one suspects, a slightly autobiographical tale. Straub weaves a tale within a tale, warily trapping the unsuspecting reader in a series of unreliable narrators and narratives, like a Henry James novel. The narrator recounts how he watched a jazz player, whom he gives the identity of Porkpie Hat due to his head-gear, play his horn at various jazz nights, ultimately screwing up his courage to talk to him and interview him for a magazine. In this interview, Porkpie Hat tells a story of increasing horror. On further investigation, doubt is set upon many of the events but they cannot be verified by any party; the truth only known by Porkpie Hat.

To my mind the best tale is 'Mr Clubb and Mr Cuff', a previous Bram Stoker award winner. A financier, brought up in a closed religious community, finds that his wife has been having an affair and hires two private investigators to put an end to it. However, in typical horror fashion, the ends exceed the means and the financier is returned to his station. The pace and delivery are measured, delivering a tight story which pays attention to its own detail, using its own pace to head towards the inevitable. Straub shows that he is in complete control of his material, delivering a densely detailed story that surprises as it delivers.

This collection mixes so many styles and forms, from tales based on classic American literature (such as *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*) and nightmares (Vietnam) to stories which explore horror tropes and deliver their own takes whilst aware of the necessities therein. This is a fabulous collection with which to experience Straub's writing and is firmly recommended.

## Sheri S. Tepper – *The Visitor* 🕮

Gollancz, London, 2002, 407pp, £10.99 ISBN 0-575-07416-7

**Reviewed by Vikki Lee**

Tepper's latest offering is a post-apocalyptic world where the earth as we know it has been drastically altered by earthquakes, fire and

floods following an asteroid hit. This apparently happened in the 21st century and destroyed most of life on earth. Naturally, some small pockets of life survive, and civilisation begins again – albeit a very different civilisation to that before the cataclysm.

In the walled city of Bastion, Dismé Latimer, following the demise of all her close loved ones, finds herself under the guardianship of her cruel and abusive stepsister, Rashel. She has long ago learned to keep her head down where Rashel is concerned and simply blends in with her surroundings. It's hard for Dismé to even make lasting friends because every time she does, Rashel conspires to remove them permanently from her life. Her one secret from Rashel is her book – an ancient diary written by her forebear Nell Latimer in the time before the cataclysm, and given to her by her mother.

Despite the cruel regime which now rules, there are dissidents who believe other than dictated doctrine, and Dismé finally escapes the clutches of Rashel by accepting a post with Dr Jens Ladislav at Hold. The doctor knows the truth about the 'outside world' and other forbidden topics, and Dismé soon learns that she has a huge part to play, even a destiny.

Far away in a hidden cavern fortress, a group of scientists from the time before the cataclysm survive with the aid of cryogenics. They are monitoring the new world's development, using religion and myth to enable their occasional interference in worldly matters. They become aware that a malevolent evil from the time of the asteroid is stirring again. Their number, however, is slowly dwindling, and the time must come when they either go out into the world or disappear altogether, no longer able to study and shape the new world. Nell Latimer is one of those scientists, and she is unaware that her many-times-great granddaughter has her diary, and how important the knowledge therein will prove to Dismé and the new order.

As always, Tepper has woven a marvellous tale that sucks you in and keeps you turning the pages. Her characters, the hub of all good storytelling, are at once believable and likeable, yet quirky enough to continually surprise. This tale gives you everything you expect of a Tepper novel, and yes, as I've mentioned before in many reviews of her books, the usual lecture on the error of humanity's ways and the repercussions of our current existence. To be honest, all Tepper's books nowadays are simply vehicles for her to get her personal ideals across, and whether you agree with them or not, wrapped in such wonderful prose and sheer scope of imagination, they produce novels which are a joy to read. A rare standalone novel nowadays, *The Visitor* is highly recommended.

## Ian Watson – *The Great Escape* 🕮

Golden Gryphon, Urbana IL (www.goldengryphon.com), 2002, 283pp, $23.95 ISBN 1-930846-09-6

**Reviewed by Paul Kincaid**

Back in the early 1970s, when Ian Watson first burst upon the sf scene with a series of breathtakingly imaginative novels, it seemed that he was destined to be in the first rank of science fiction authors. Well, Watson has continued to produce books and short stories at an astonishing pace since then, and they flare and flash with the same pyrotechnic wonder, but he has never quite fulfilled that early promise. With this new collection of stories (coming from an American small press that has littered the work with so many proofreading errors you wonder whether someone could have been out to sabotage the work) one begins to understand why that might be.

Watson has never been short of ideas, and there are enough vivid and startling notions crammed into this one book to keep any other writer in plots for an entire career. There are moments of awesome wonder – a group of ineffectual angels watching while demons stage a very, very slow escape from Hell; aliens announcing their presence by sending dead bodies plunging across space towards our sun – and there are moments when one can only scratch one's head and puzzle how anyone could come up with this stuff – the twin brother of Jesus Christ being the first human to set foot on another planet! The trouble is, there are too many ideas.

In places where they are controlled, the ideas make for wonderful stories: 'The Great Escape' about the escape from Hell; 'Caucus Winter' about what happens when a quantum computer falls into the hands of American white supremacists; 'Early, in the Evening' about a small group of people having to relive a thousand years of history in one day, over and over again. All these, and a handful of others work superbly well, but they have one common characteristic: the central idea can be summed up very quickly but exploring it in depth opens up a host of unexpected ramifications. In contrast, there are too many other stories where the ideas are simply jammed together so that you don't get a coherent whole but rather a disconnected sequence of images and fancies without a plot. The worst example is perhaps 'Three-Legged Dog' which leads off this collection. It begins as a sort of ghost story, transforms itself into a story about a personality recreated within a computer program, transforms itself yet again into someone exploring beyond the limits of a computer scenario, and finally transforms itself into a poet accessing the moment of inspiration of her poems. None of these sections quite belongs to any other, the resolution that (unsatisfactorily) ties off the final section fails to resolve any of the issues raised in the earlier sections, the rationale and motivation explored in one part of the story are simply forgotten when we move into the next. There are other stories with the same broken-backed structure. 'The Amber Room' is part thriller and part supernatural horror; both parts are excellent in themselves, but neither belongs with the other. Other stories start well but run out of steam, because while the idea may be spectacular and original (most of Watson's ideas are), it lacks a strong enough plot to drive the whole thing. 'When Thought-Mail Failed' is a fascinating idea about people who have always known instant communication with everyone else, when suddenly the system goes down; 'The Descent' is equally interesting in presenting a world in which people find themselves instantly and curiously transformed. Unfortunately, neither ends up going anywhere because Watson finds himself more interested in presenting the idea than in telling a story which explores that idea.

As a writer Ian Watson's strengths are that he is reliable, fertile, intelligent, surprising and original; but his tragedy is that he is not always very good as a simple storyteller.

## Peter Watts – *Maelstrom*

Tor, New York, 2001, 378pp, $25.95 ISBN 0-312-87806-0

**Reviewed by Claire Brialey**

We are in the Last Days. What's more startling is that we're still here at all. A giant tidal wave has struck the west coast of North America, killing millions of people, and that was the solution rather than the problem.

The problem is that there's a new killer on the loose. It devours life. Any life. Animals, people, anything that moves, are not merely its sustenance but its transport. Left to itself, it can rely on the weather to get about. The authorities resolve on a killing cure: better to sacrifice thousands, or even millions, more through an unhesitating scorched earth policy than to lose everything – and they have a lot to lose. If their gamble doesn't pay off, the world is lost to them. And if it does, they have a second front on which to fight: they need to make sure no one finds out where this plague came from and how it got loose.

Fortunately, all the witnesses closest to home were the first to get taken care of in the explosion that caused the tidal wave. Apart

from one. Or two. Out of the ocean come Lenie Clarke and Ken Lubin, the most disturbed and thus potentially the strongest of the team adapted for deep-sea work in Watts's first novel *Starfish*. When your mum and dad have finished screwing you up, in step the multinationals. Sometimes this makes you stronger. Sometimes this makes you want revenge. *Starfish* showed a world in which big business would exploit people who were already vulnerable. *Maelstrom* shows quite how far that exploitation might go. But this is a world in which few people were at ease even before its end began; it's no coincidence that any reader sympathy allowed by the bleak tone of the narrative goes against the attempts by the rulers of the world to save it.

The first novel presented a new alien landscape: the deepest reaches of the ocean, with its bizarre lifeforms and different ways of living. The second has a physical landscape which is more familiar, alien only in its extremity. But it includes a new world for which 'cyberspace' seems an increasingly inadequate name. The Maelstrom is what the Internet has evolved to become, and within it data can behave like life-forms in the physical world. It's a conceit, certainly, and the changes of pace and tone between the nature-programme style of data watching and the apocalyptic reportage of the world outside aren't always effective; but it's quite engaging in itself and it is a clever device by which to help transform a woman with multiple personal problems of her own into an unlikely messiah of the End Times.

# Particles

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*.

**Stephen Baxter – *Origin***

Voyager, 2002, 445pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-00-651184-8

The conclusion of Baxter's Manifold trilogy (*Space*, *Time* and *Origin*) which examine possible answers to the Fermi Paradox ("if there are aliens out there, why aren't they already here?"), here reissued in mass market edition, and previously reviewed by Chris Hill in V221. When a vast blue light appears over Africa, the Moon is replaced by a larger and redder one, to which a number of people are transported. Among them is astronaut Reid Malefant's wife Emma. In the violent aftermath of the appearance of the Red Moon, Malefant lobbies strenuously for a rescue mission.

**Ben Bova – *The Rock Rats***

New English Library, 2002, 440pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-340-76959-9

Part 2 of The Asteroid Wars, previously reviewed in the Hodder and Stoughton hardback edition by Mark Greener in V223 (also available as Tor hardback, $24.95 ISBN 0-765 30227-6).

This is a sequel to *The Precipice* (also reviewed by Mark in V217), a corporate conspiracy space opera that reads almost like a throwback to the pulp days of the '40s and '50s. "*The 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."

**Ray Bradbury – *The Illustrated Man***

Voyager, 2002, 240pp, £8.99 ISBN 0-00-712774-X

**Doris Lessing – *Shikasta***

Voyager, 2002, 448pp, £8.99 ISBN 0-00-712776-6

Two further volumes in Voyager's Classics series. Bradbury's second collection of stories (1951, rev 1952) is linked by the framework of the titular figure, a man whose tattoos come to life each sunset to tell a story, from the virtual reality of 'The Veldt' to the fate of the stranded astronauts in 'Kaleidoscope'.

*Shikasta* is the first volume of Lessing's complex, metaphysical Canopus in Argus: Archives series, in which the fate of Earth (or Shikasta, "the stricken") hangs between the rival galactic empires of Canopus, Sirius and Puttiora. The Canopean emissary Johor is sent to Earth, a former Canopean colony, in its last days, in a mission to try and save humanity from its almost wilful urge to self-destruction.

**Arthur C. Clarke & Stephen Baxter – *The Light of Other Days***

Voyager, 2002, 472pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-00-648374-7

Clarke and Baxter's collaboration takes its title from the celebrated 'Slow Glass' story by Bob Shaw (to whom it is dedicated), although wisely does not attempt to borrow further Shaw's invention, instead proposing a distant viewing technology based on small wormholes ("wormcams"). The effect of such a ubiquitous and invisible technology for eavesdropping anywhere in the world (and later at any point in time) is devastating to both personal and corporate privacy, as if everyone were suddenly conducting their business or pleasure (innocent or otherwise) in glass houses.

First reviewed in hardback by Paul Kincaid in V211 – " a bravura performance, the best thing to come from Clarke in many years and a clear demonstration of Baxter's continuing improvement as a writer ... packed with enough ideas to fill the entire output of many another sf writer, and with moments of sheer unadorned wonder."

**Michael Cobley – *Shadowkings***

Earthlight, 2002, 436pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-7434-1599-X

A debut, and first of a new trilogy for Scottish writer Cobley, first reviewed here in trade paperback edition by Vikki Lee in V220. Sixteen years ago the Khatrimantine Empire fell to the Mogaun, who themselves are beginning to be split by internal rivalries. In an effort to re-knit the Mogoun under one rule, one of the warlords, Brynak, finds himself increasingly compelled to become a Shadowking, a host to the five souls of the Lords of Twilight, a destiny not unanimously approved by the whole of the Mogaun. A fairly traditional fantasy setup (a young heir, a mage, a knight, on the Khatrimantine side, struggling to overthrows their oppressors) is given a complex and intriguing twist by an even-handed treatment of both sides, depicting the Mogaun themselves as pawns of greater powers.

Vikki Lee was intrigued enough to recommend this first volume and look forward to others in the series.

**Storm Constantine – *The Way of Light***

Gollancz, 2002, 408pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-575-07293

The conclusion of Constantine's Chronicles of Magravandias, begun with *Sea Dragon Heir*, "compelling and climactic" in the words of K.V. Bailey, who first reviewed this in Gollancz hardback edition in V219. The dynastic fantasy concerning the entwined fates of the rival houses of Palindrake and the ruling Malagashes is also underscored with the alchemical symbolism of their alliegances to elemental powers – the sea dragon queen, Foy, of the Caradorean Palindrake house and the fiery mandrake, Magradore, of the Malagash. Valraven Palindrake, the former Caradorean Sea Dragon Heir, has risen to a leading position in the Magravandian army at the same time that the ruling house has been destabilised by the death of the emperor and the succession of a weak and unstable king. Hopes are pinned on Valraven to heal the growing rift between the houses, but has his military position made him too much a Magravandian tool to be worthy of the Crown of Silence?

**Charles de Lint – *Forests of the Heart***

Gollancz, 2002, 521pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-575-07294-8

*Forests of the Heart* shares a theme of sorts with Gaiman's excellent *American Gods*. What happens to the elemental and mythological being of people who for one reason or another have left their old lands behind and settled as immigrants in a new country? De Lint's dispossessed and dissaffected Irish Faerie, the 'Gentry', hanging around the bars and alleys of Newford, are bored, frustrated, and vicious; you cross them at your peril.

On the other side of the mythological tracks is Bettina San Miguel,

part Indian, part Mexican, part something older still, a fledgling *curandera*, and between them Ellie, a young woman from a privileged background and unsure about all this magic. First reviewed in Gollancz hardback by Sue Thomason in V220, "a thought-provoking and gripping modern urban(ish) fantasy, and thoroughly recommended."

**Jeff Gardiner – *The Age of Chaos: The Multiverse of Michael Moorcock***

BFS Publications, 2002, 115pp, £7.99 ISBN 0-9538681-1-7

Just arrived in time for a brief mention, this slim paperback is the latest in a series of publications (ranging from critical appreciations to anthologies and collections) by our sibling rival The British Fantasy Society and comes with a short introduction by Michael Moorcock and a cover and frontispiece illustration by Bob Covington. The chapters cover , as suggested by the subtitle, Moorcock's interpenetrating 'Multiverse' stories, from the Eternal Champion stories of Elric, Hawkmoon and Corum, The Jerry Cornelius tales, von Bek, Colonel Pyat, Dancers At the End of Time, and also weave in *New Worlds*, *Gloriana*, *Mother London*, *King of the City* and a range of other linked works, such as the 'Hawklords' books. The 'Select Bibliography', at just 7 pages, is too short to be of real help to academic researchers and scholars, listing the Millennium/Orion omnibus reprint editions only of the Eternal Champion stories (14 vols, 1992-1993), but a comprehensive bibliography of Moorcock's work would likely be as large as this whole paperback (as well as being a compiler's nightmare, given the various different and revised editions of many of the stories).
[from The British Fantasy Society, c/o 3 Tamworth Close, Lower Earley, Berks RG6 4EQ]

**Tom Holt – *Falling Sideways***

Orbit, 2002, 406pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-84149-110-1

Holt's nineteenth comic fantasy (if we stretch the definition of fantasy to include intergalactic travel, cloning, and frogs, along with the multitudinous descendants of a long dead witch and sundry disquisitions and asides on car dealers and art auctions and British Columbia.) Previously reviewed here in Orbit hardback edition by Jon Wallace in V223.

**Mercedes Lackey – *Burning Brightly***

Gollancz, 2002, 406pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-57507-296-2

A standalone fantasy novel, although linked to Lackey's popular Valdemar series, and which looks back to tell the early story of Lavan Firestorm, whose legend is referred to in the Valdemar books.

The trade paperback edition was first reviewed by Fiona Grove in V200, and this is the mass market paperback edition.

**David Langford (ed.) – *Maps: The Uncollected John Sladek***

Big Engine, 2002, 359pp, £9.99 ISBN 1-903468-08-6

Technically, I suppose this must count as a first British and First World Edition, a scoop for new independent press Big Engine as well as a labour of love and dedication from editor Dave Langford.

*Maps* contains nearly 70 pieces, from short fiction to poems, essays, collaborations (with Tom Disch), and perhaps the first 'programmed novel', *The Lost Nose*, produced in a single copy edition for Sladek's girlfriend Pamela, well before the Fighting Fantasy multiple choice gaming books of Jackson and Livingstone, or more recent examples such as Ryman's *253* or Kim Newman's *Life's Lottery*. (It's a shame Big Engine's budget doesn't extend to a full facsimile edition of the original, with its gummed-in collages of found objects and cigarette cards, along the lines of artist Nick Bantock's charming 'Griffin and Sabine' books.) But here it is, a genuine treasure-trove from one of the most gifted and witty writers of the genre (or, indeed, outside it), a true original who died far too early at the age of 62 in March 2002.

**Ken Macleod – *The Star Fraction***

Tor, 2002, 320pp, £14.95 ISBN 0-765-30156-3

The US trade paperback edition of Macleod's first novel (©1995). It's taken the US a while to catch on to Macleod but Tor are now steadily working through the back catalogue of both his first Fall Revolution series, albeit in a different order (starting with *The Cassini Division*, then *The Stone Canal* and *The Sky Road*) and the new Engines of Light series (*Cosmonaut Keep*, *Dark Light*). Luckily, as Macleod points out in a new introduction to this American edition, the four books of the Fall Revolution series can be read in any order, with two of them (*Cassini Division* and *Sky Road*) presenting possible alternate futures springing from the imagined world of *The Star Fraction*.

**Paul McAuley – *Whole Wide World***

Voyager, 2002, 388pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-00-651331-X

Something of a seeming transitional novel for McAuley, a near future thriller whose sfnal elements (a society under repressive, near-total surveillance – compare Clarke and Baxter's *Light of Other Days*, reviewed above) are largely background to a gripping police procedural murder mystery. Whether this is a first indication of a move into the (presumably more lucrative) mainstream techno-thriller market remains to be seen, but *WWW* hedges its bets, with a number of clever sfnal allusions that you feel would largely be lost on readers outside the genre. First reviewed in hardback by Steve Jeffery in V221

**Michael Moorcock – *Corum: The Prince in the Scarlet Robe***

Gollancz, 2002, Fantasy Masterworks 30, 486pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-575-07366-7

Omnibus reprint edition under Gollancz's Fantasy Masterworks line of the three 'Swords' novels, *The Knight of the Swords*, *The Queen of the Swords* and *The King of the Swords*, originally published as single volumes in 1971 and later combined as *The First Book of Corum* (1992). They tell the story – influenced by Cornish legend and language – of the maimed Corum Jhalen Irsei, the last of the Vadhagh (also known as The Prince with the Silver Hand), crazed with vengeance against the Mabden, until he falls in love with a Mabden woman, a match that may tip the balance in the eternal war of Law and Chaos.

**Adam Roberts – *On***

Gollancz, 2002, 388pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-575-07299-7

Roberts's second novel (his third, *Stone*, has just been published by Gollancz and is reviewed elsewhere in this issue), here in mass market paperback edition and first reviewed as a trade paperback original by Stuart Carter in V219 – "an unusual and thought-provoking book that avoids clichés and admits no easy readings". With a premise initially reminiscent of Christopher Priest's *Inverted World* , *On* follows the adventures of a young boy, Tighe, who ekes a harsh and precarious existence on an immense, seemingly infinite, vertical plane, the 'worldwall'. Until, one day, he falls off, but survives by crashing into an aerial army attempting an invasion of a neighbouring village miles below. Like his debut, *Salt*, the world depicted in *On* is harsh, amoral, and unrelentingly cruel (too much so at times for your editor, who found the catalogue of child abuse in the first half of the book disturbing.)

**Robert Silverberg & Karen Haber (eds.) – *Science Fiction: The Best of 2001***

ibooks, 2002, 496pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-7434-3498-6

**Robert Silverberg & Karen Haber (eds.) – *Fantasy: The Best of 2001***

ibooks, 2002, 424pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-7434-5247-X

If your pocket doesn't extend to the comprehensive (and shelf-breaking) annual anthologies of sf and fantasy/horror from Dozois, Datlow and Windling and by Hartwell and Cramer then you may want to check out the contents pages of either these two anthologies. Each contains 11 stories, compared with 26 in the Dozois sf anthology and 16 for Hartwell and Cramer's *Year's Best SF 7* (only Patrick Kelley's 'Undone' and And Mike Swanwick's 'The Dog Said Bow-Wow' are common to all three, although several other stories overlap with one or other of the other anthologies, indicating both the vagaries of personal selection as well as the constraints of space) . Of the fantasy anthologies, the Silverberg/Haber is again the shortest, outgunned 2:1 by Hartwell and Cramer's *Year's Best Fantasy 2*, while Daltow and Windling (now on their fifteenth annual collection) cast a wider net to take in horror, poems and a comprehensive overview of the year. Here, Le Guin is the only author to appear in all three ('The Bones of the Earth'), while Silverberg and Haber include Ted Chiang's excellent 'Hell is the Absence of God' (also in Hartwell/Cramer, but a surprising omission from Datlow and Windling) and some stories (Rosemary Edgehill's 'The Mould of Form' and Greg van Eekhout's 'Wolves Till the World Goes Down') which are not in the other two. You pays your money and you takes your choice.

**Fred Smith – *Once There Was a Magazine***

Beccon, 2002, 110pp, £7.00 ISBN 1-870824-45-8

As it says on the cover (which incorporates a nice pastiche of the later *Unknown Worlds* magazine covers), "A personal view of *Unknown* and *Unknown Worlds*. Compiled and annotated by Fred Smith. Included are complete indexes by title, by author, by artist and even by letter writer. Together with cross-reverenced contents lists for both American and British Reprint Editions." Which is all you need to know really. Except to mention that this is also a labour of love and some dedication, the painstaking and detailed indexes take up over half the book, while the first half is an overview of the publication history, dates and format changes of *Unknown* / *Unknown Worlds* with short reviews of each of the novels, novellas and stories and even illustrations (from Hannes Bok, Cartier, Isip to Kramer – who gets a particularly hard time from Smith) in each issue, making this an invaluable reference for researchers and scholars or anyone with an interest in the history of sf/fantasy magazines. Illustrated throughout by Sue Mason. Splendid.
[Available from: Beccon Publications, 75 Rosslyn Avenue, Harold Wood, Essex RM3 0RG]

**Neal Stephenson and Frederick George – *Interface***

Arrow, 2002, 641pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-09-942775-3

William Cozzano is the perfect presidential candidate, not only is he a likeable Midwestern governor, he has his head wired into a computerised polling system that makes him instantly responsive to the mood of the electorate. Originally published as by 'Stephen Bury' in 1994. Although this edition claims "First Published in the United Kingdom in 2002 by Arrow Books", I have a copy a trade paperback edition under the Bury pseudonym ("a brilliant black comedy for the network age") published by Michael Joseph, 1996. *Interface* contains an absolutely splendid nerd joke: "Did you hear about the programmer's wife?... She is still a virgin. Her husband just sits on the edge of the bed every night and tells her how great it's going to be." A dark, funny *Catch 22* for the politics of the computer age.

**Vernor Vinge – *The Collected Stories of Vernor Vinge***

Orb, 2002, 464pp, £15.95 ISBN 0-312-87584-3

Trade paperback edition of a largely retrospective collection first reviewed here in Tor hardback by Chris Hill in V222. *Collected Stories* contains 17 stories, ranging from 'Apartness' (1965) to 'Fast Times at Fairmont High', new to this collection. (The seminal 'True Names' (1981) is omitted, but forms the locus for the simultaneously published collection *True Names and The Opening of the Cyberspace Frontier* (Tor, 2001), reviewed in V222).

**Margaret Weis & Tracy Hickman – *Guardians of the Lost***

Voyager, 2002, 676pp, £7.99 ISBN 0-00-648615-0

Second volume in the Sovereign Stone Trilogy, here in mass market edition. *Guardians of the Lost* is set some 200 years after *Well of Darkness*. The lost portion of the Sovereign Stone, split into four parts and entrusted to the four races of Humans, Elves, Dwarves and Orken, has finally been recovered by the human Dominion Lord, Gustav, who entrusts it on his deathbed to the young Trevenici warrior, Bashae, to deliver it to safety. First reviewed in hardback by Vikki Lee in V223: "an absolutely engrossing read and an excellent follow-up... It's dark, it's all action, and is highly recommended. Weis and Hickman are storytellers par excellence!"

## *Vector* 225 – Index of Books Reviewed



**Reviewers Key:** AAA – Andrew A. Adams; AF – Alan Fraser; AS – Andrew Seaman; BJ – Ben Jeapes; CA – Chris Amies; CAKG – Carol Ann Kerry-Green; CB – Claire Brialey; CH – Chris Hill; EAB – Elizabeth A. Billinger; GA – Graham Andrews; IE – Iain Emsley; JN – John Newsinger; JW – Jon Wallace; LH – Lesley Hatch; LJH – L.J. Hurst; P – Particle; PH – Penny Hill; PK – Paul Kincaid; SC – Stuart Carter; SJ – Steve Jeffery; VL – Vikki Lee;