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# Vector 3 THE CRITICAL JOURNAL OF THE BFSA

#### **CONTENTS**

3 Editorial – The View From the ICA

by Andrew Butler

4 YO Letters to Vector

5 Orcadian Fantasies

Tanya Brown Interviews Juliet Marillier

8 The Deeks-Wells Case

E.J. Hurst on H.C. Wells and possible plagiarism

12 First Impressions Book Reviews edited by Paul Billinger

#### COVER

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#### Editorial

#### The View from the ICA

Every ten years or so, science fiction seems to get taken under the wing of the Institute for the Contemporary Arts. I'm pretty sure it was here, in 1975, that Philip K. Dick didn't talk about sf, but Thomas Disch, Ursula Le Guin, Robert Sheckley and others did, producing a collection edited by Peter Nicholls called *Science Fiction At Large.* I recall a later no-show, from Fay Weldon, who was to choose her Desert Island Dicks at a tenth anniversary commemoration of Philip K. Dick's death organised by Ken Campbell and Jeff Merrifield. And then this year the pre-Clarke programming occurred at the ICA – and Justina sang the praises of Philip K. Dick. There is a ghost at the banquet.

The brief of the ICA seems to be to present avant garde art and culture at the cutting edge. It is absurdly located for this, being just off the Mall that links the bottom of Trafalgar Square to Buckingham Palace. Across the park is the Ministry of Defence and ultimately Westminster. As aesthetic revolutions go, it is right at the heart of empire. I've seen leaflets over the years for sessions on fetishism and the new heterosexuality, and the organisation released *Tetsuo* into an unsuspecting country. The place itself seems remarkably shabby. There's an interesting book and video shop, but the bar is poorly laid out and expensive, and the theatre auditorium has the once-black dusty look of municipal drama studios up and down the country.

There were a number of events held there this year: a talk about and a screening of one of Nigel Kneale's Quatermass serials (I believe Quatermass and t'Pit although it is The Quatermass Experiment which is fifty years old), a session on genre as the new mainstream and a celebration of the British Boom. I didn't make it to the Boom session, largely through work commitments and nothing at all to do with the ruffled feathers of someone not a million miles from you who is coediting a special issue of Science Fiction Studies and yet wasn't invited to speak. We are not worthy, etc.

What I did attend was a session on genre as the new mainstream, which followed interestingly on the heels of a session at the International Conference for the Fantastic in the Arts on the dissolution of genre. In both cases, I'm afraid, it seemed like a rehearsal of the same old arguments that we must have had for decades, but it had the virtue of having different people doing the arguing. The panel consisted of Justina Robson, John McConnell (the literary editor of *Eime Out*), one of the *Granta* 'Best of British' young novelists Toby Litt, and Muriel Gray in the chair.

I was not much impressed by the chap from *Time Out* at first, and I have to say I held to my opinion. He made a cheap shot against what he dubbed Premium Middlebrow – Sebastian Faulks's *Birdsong* being the prime example given – which smacked of inverted snobbery, and admitted that he'd been put off reading science fiction for life by reading *Dune* at an impressionable age, which is rather like someone never wanting to eat vegetables again because they once had a manky carrot. He didn't seem to want to reverse practice and consistently feature sf in page-long reviews rather than a round-up of a dozen novels at a time, so the lines seem as drawn as ever. Obviously the William Gibsons and Margaret

Atwoods of this world do feature more prominently, as they've either lefitthe genre or have never really arrived.

In contrast, I was really impressed by Justina Robson, whom I can't recollect seeing on panels before; certainly I will take the opportunity to do so in the future. As the only true science fiction writer on the panel – Gray didn't talk about her own fantastic fiction – Robson didn't want to be marginalised by anyone.

Litt, on the other hand, made the familiar argument (hey, I've made it myself enough times) that fantasy and horror is the tradition, and realism the genre-come-lately. I suspect the fantastic as a term does not make sense until you get a highly developed notion of imitative realism to contrast it with, but I more than take his point. He also riffed nicely on the engraving with the words "the sleep of reason produces monsters," and discussed the monsters of reason, reasonable monsters. He, like the chap from Time Out, seems to be labouring under the misapprehension that science fiction is about the future, which I don't find convincing. And because science fiction actually has a rather poor record when it comes to prediction - stopped clock being right twice a day - it only allows you to dismiss the genre. He rightly notes the technomelancholia in Gibson, but melancholy is there in many sf writers, especially the new wave and post-mew wave - in particular post-imperial melancholy. Indeed, one of the tones of cyberpunk is nostalgia.

Someone – it may have been an audience member – made a point about the nature of prejudice, which allied sf, fantasy and horror with black, feminist and gay writing. It might be that these types of writing have been marginalised in the past (along with working class writers), but living conditions are a tad different. It might be that science fiction writers are comparatively poorly paid, but they don't tend to risk being beaten up on the street or arrested at random by the police. The ghetto is of an entirely different nature, and we shouldn't let any potential jealousy of some media-firiendly minority writers obscure the real prejudices against their peers.

The audience was an odd mix, being many of the usual suspects – writers, editors, critics, fans – but also non-famnish readers and members of the general public. A couple of the people who spoke – positiively, it has to be said – admitted to not having read science fiction but now being interested enough to try. It does make you wonder why they were there, buttheir open-mindedness is to be commended.

One misconception that wasn't cleared up – along with the alleged inability of these genre writers to create characters whose names are as well known as mainstream fiction's characters – was that science fiction has failed to have an impact on youth culture. You know, for kids. I would imagine that written sf has had as much impact as Premium Middlebrow and the Granta list of young writers – whereas surely the influence is felt in adverts, television programmes, films, video games and music, each of which is clearly sfnal. We might deplore them – they might be aimed at morons – but we shouldn't igmore them.

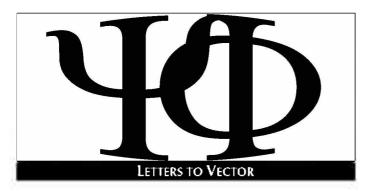
Toby Litt, one of the select band of young British writers named by *Granta*, noted that Ian Jack the compiler had specifically excluded China Miéville from contention. On the one hand, this suggests that genre is still not the mainstream.

On the other, there is surely a salutary warning from the list of twenty years ago, which included Graham Swift, Martin Amis and so on. Many of them are fine writers, and have dabbled in or on the edge of genre, but the point comes when, twenty years on, newspapers do a 'where are they now?' feature. Two of the writers appeared, to the mainstream, to have lapsed into obscurity – Ursula Bentley and Christopher Priest. Since it was already ten years since Priest's first novel, you might question the validity of his inclusion on such a list, but it is very telling

that despite continuing to publish novels through the last twenty years, he is invisible. The media can forget as well as pay attention.

Christopher Priest, like M. John Harrison, seems to be having a bit of a renaissance at the moment, with his latest novel *The Separation* winning first the BSFA and then the Arthur C. Clarke Award. Congratulations to him.

#### Andrew M. Butler, Summer 2003, High Wycombe



#### From Nick Dale via email:

I believe you've recently been running a competition to select which sf book best reflects life in Britain today (a competition based on something that is being organised for World Book Day). I don't know what sort of response you've had (I do know I'm too late to enter) but I recently picked up a second hand copy of a collection of John W. Campbell's short stories and I thought I ought to point out that there are a lot of parallels between the story 'Who Goes There' and life in Britain today. Consider the following:-

'Who Goes There' concerns a small, isolated community (in a very cold climate) led by a man named Blair facing an ill defined and constantly changing menace, the story being suffused by an air of paranoia and fear.

There you go. Britain in 2003.

AMB: Thanks for this. The competition was less than a roaring success I confess, and attracted one (1) entry, which I then promptly lost in my filing system... The person who suggested the idea in the first place has been, well, I'm too scared of her to actually do things because of her martial arts training...

Meanwhile, one of the attractions of the annual Eastercon, aside from attempts to persuade the committee to let us actually contribute to the programme, is the Not the Clarke Award Panel, when five or six people, ideally former judges, debate who they think should win the Arthur C. Clarke Award. This is especially entertaining when one of the authors shortlisted is in the room – or two in the case of the clearly masochistic Ken MacLeod and Christopher Priest one of the years I was on the panel. Other judges felt intimidated; me, well, I have no manners or sense of decorum. The 2003 panel (including Farah Mendlesohn, Paul Billinger, Jon Courtenay Grimwood and Steve Jeffrey) caused a letter to be written...

#### From Chris Dunk, via email.

Slightly (but only slightly) tongue in cheek, I thought I would write to venture an opinion following the 'Not the Clarke Awards' discussion at Hinckley. The reason for writing is to express my astonishment that the two top-rated novels (*Light* by M. John Harrison and Chris Priest's *The Separation*) were considered difficult/inadequate (my words) by 2/5 and 3/5 respectively of the panel of judges. I don't understand how works that are acknowledged to have significant shortcomings by the panel can still find themselves in the top spot. Is this academic snobbery gone mad?

I am not a fully fledged fan and don't have a career in academia, so I may be missing something here! If so, my profuse apologies!

For the record, I have read and enjoyed both books, and agree that somehow neither seems to 'knit' into a satisfactory conclusion. So, I stress that it is the panel's insistence on rating these books as award winners, despite notable flaws, rather than their critique, that I find difficult to understand.

Since the session has prompted me to write this note, you will deduce that I enjoyed it immensely!

#### Farah Mendlesohn, one of the Not Judges, responds:

The panel split this year. Those who loved Harrison had problems with Priest, those who loved Priest had problems with Harrison. Clearly, more than any other year, this was a choice in which taste determined our differences, not issues of quality. In each case, the issues we raised were arguable. Not faults, but fault lines, and that in itself is what makes these two books so exciting.

#### As indeed does Steve Jeffrey, another Not Judge.

Yes, they may be regarded as 'difficult', challenging books, but that's why we came to that choice. Science Fiction is supposed to be a literature of ideas (preferably ones that no one's asked, or not asked in quite that way, before), and of 'cognitive estrangement'. And both *Light* and *The Separation* splendidly succeeded in estranging my cogs.

**AMB:** As a former judge and not judge I can remember the case of a book – which I'd better not identify – which I really liked, but there were things wrong with it that stopped it being finally shortlistable for me; it was a book each of us had wanted to shortlist. Indeed, taken together all of our misgivings meant that this book, actually quite liked by all of us – for different reasons presumably – didn't make the cut. I'm not sure whether that is better or

worse than a 'faulty' book making the list.

You need to remember that the Clarke books are read and re-read by the judges, so a book which is a challenge often improves on re-reading, or becomes a richer experience (alternatively it could still be a pile of doo-doo). Books that simply deliver the goods first time can fall apart on second reading. I don't think it's academic snobbery to see flaws as interesting – I actually quite enjoy some of Shakespeare's lesser plays where the dialogue creaks, because I can understand how it works.

Light clearly impressed the Tiptree Jury and it would be interesting to know at which point Light dropped out of the running, and The Separation shot ahead in the actual Clarke Award. It must have been an interesting three horse race between these two and The Scar (I hold no brief for the other titles having not read them). I want go back and revisit Priest's endings, as I found the ending of The Separation at first baffling and then appropriate. I won't say more to avoid spoiling it, but I had the sense at first of a ball being dropped, missing Priest prestidigitation. I recalled the dissatisfaction (expressed in the Not panel I took part in) over The Extremes, where we'd lost a character halfway through the novel and had gotten stuck

in virtual reality (compare the end of the UK cut of Brazil), and indeed at the ending of The Prestige. I'm beginning to suspect I missed something – so I'll go back, re-read, rethink.

Of course, the Clarke has had a reputation of being a difficult award – the page-turning thriller with characters from central casting need not apply. Is it snobbery? Well, awards are elitist by their nature when they are jury awards – because one book is promoted above its peers. For the record, The Separation won first the British Science Fiction Association Award (prompting a letter to the BSFA from long time correspondent Syd Foster [this I believe will or has appeared in Matrix] denouncing the award) and then the Arthur C. Clarke Award. It's a snobbery, perhaps, shared by many people, although presumably no one voted for it because they thought it had a difficult ending.

I wonder what our readers think?

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# **Orcadian Fantasies**

#### an interview with Juliet Marillier by Tanya Brown

Tanya Brown: Your novel Wolfskin is the superlead launch title for Tor UK, but it's not your first novel - you've written a fantasy trilogy, haven't you?

Juliet Marillier: Yes, the Sevenwaters trilogy – the first one's called *Daughter of the Forest*. They're set in Celtic Ireland in approximately the ninth century. They were published by HarperCollins under the Voyager imprint. The third in

the series just came out in paperback in January this year. They've done very well, particularly in America and in Australia.

The trilogy started with my wish to retell a favourite fairytale from childhood, 'The Six Swans'. It's the story about a girl whose brothers are turned into swans by their stepmother, and she has to maintain her silence while she weaves shirts for them out of a very prickly plant. She undergoes all sorts of trials while doing that. I've always liked that particular story because it has a strong female character at the centre of it, and that was the story I really wanted to do as my first novel. I wanted to put a real

family in the heart of it, and a real historical and geographical setting, and to see how they responded as individuals to the terrible tests that befell them. Each of the six brothers has his own character and develops in his own way.

While writing that first volume, Daughter of the Forest, I became interested in the setting and the family, and the fact

that catastrophic events don't only affect one generation, but can affect the family for years and years. That theme developed into a trilogy that followed three generations of the same family. Each one of those stories is told in the first person, narrated by a young woman. They're particularly popular amongst women readers because even now there are relatively few fantasy books that are so female-focussed

and based on women's psychology and women's personal journeys.

TB: The cover of Wolfskin, with its longship on a sunset sea, makes it look like a typical Viking novel, and for the first hundred and fifty pages it is a typical Viking novel. Then you introduce Nessa, who's a Pictish priestess.

JM: Yes, Wolfskin starts with Eyvind's upbringing as a Viking warrior. This is obviously a big contrast with my first series, because I've moved away from the female narrator. I'm telling the story in the third person and sharing the narrative between Eyvind, who's a berserker – a

Viking warrior par excellence – and Nessa, who is a Pictish priestess from Orkney. I'm exploring the way that the two cultures of those protagonists clash violently, and what the fall-out is from that.



JM: My imagination tends to be sparked by little bits of history or little bits of story that I hear. My daughter and her



husband travelled to Orkney while they were working in the UK. They were tremendously struck by the layer upon layer of history that exists there, starting with Neolithic times and going through the Pictish settlement and then the arrival of the Vikings. The islands changed hands between Norway and Scotland: they were sold off, and given away as a dowry. My daughter instantly knew that the place would attract me. She said, "You've got to go there, there's got to be a book there," and this was true: I went and was absolutely captivated by the history and the folklore.

I was particularly interested in a part of Orcadian history that we don't really know much about, which was what happened to the Pictish settlement that was there prior to the first Norse arrival. It just disappears. Suddenly, we have Norse Orkney, with the jarls in charge and settlers coming across from Norway. The written record – the Orkneyinga Saga – was written in about 1200, which is quite a few hundred years after those events happened. It doesn't say anything about the inhabitants who were there before the Norse. It simply says that the Norse arrived in the islands. It's as if those Picts that we know about from Roman histories and so forth had just vanished.

There's a lot of debate amongst historians and archaeologists about what actually happened to them: whether they were overrun and annihilated, or whether Norse settlers came in dribs and drabs and settled down thinking, "This is a good place for an anchorage, a good place for farming", and intermarried, and became the dominant culture. Being more of a fantasy writer than a historian, I immediately thought, "That's a story that's just waiting to be told." I had a go at portraying a version of what happened in this book.

That's half of it. The other half is the Viking culture, and particularly the berserk warrior. I guess when you think about berserkers, you think of someone like Conan the Barbarian – the insane warrior who fought with no thought

for his own safety, who slashed and murdered and maimed. And yet in the old Icelandic sagas the berserkers are not really described like that. They're certainly very much to be feared, but in between their viking episodes, they go back home and put in a crop and father a child and keep an eye on the farm. The berserker was part of an elite guard to a nobleman, who could also turn on this amazing trance-like courage when required. I discovered strange things like the fact that there were whole bands of berserker brothers who would be hired: you'd hire six brothers all at once to go and fight together. I was quite fascinated by that, and I decided to have a berserker as the central character of the novel. I tried to

think through his psychology so that in one aspect he could be a mad killing machine, but he could also be an ordinary, pleasant family man. I went out of my way to make Eyvind someone who'd had a very happy, stable childhood, and who was a very pleasant and well-liked person; not particularly forthright except when he was doing what he did best, which was fighting and killing. So there's that dichotomy within him, which eventually becomes quite difficult for him.

### TB: I've always associated the berserkers with Odin, but you've made an association with Thor...

JM: I've added a historical note at the end of the book that explains why I did that. They were followers of Odin, and I made one of those arbitrary creative decisions that my Wolfskins would be followers of Thor, because I see Thor as a straightforward god who doesn't play nasty tricks the way Odin does. More wholesome, even though somewhat warlike! The particular band in this book are straightforward men who have great friendship and loyalty to one another. They see things in fairly simple black-and-white terms and I decided Thor suited them. I knew I was going to have to put that in the notes: I guess the reasoning is, it's a fantasy history!

TB: Eyvind starts off by seeing things very much in black and white terms. It's when he begins to see things in shades of grey that it all starts to go wrong for him. He may have bravely slain the enemy, but he's also killed the kinsmen of the woman he wants to marry. It's as though his conscience wakes up, and he begins to realise that his blood brother is not what he seems.

JM: That's right. Up till then, because he has this bond of blood brotherhood with Somerled who is his childhood friend, he has tried very hard to see Somerled in black and white. Eyvind has a tendency to try to see the best in everyone and everything, and that's because he himself is such a good, courageous and honourable person. Once he starts to see beyond the obvious, that bond of blood brotherhood, that loyalty, becomes very difficult for him.

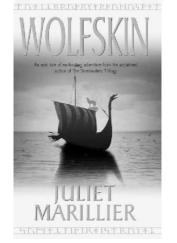
Of course, in those days, you were expected to adhere to these bonds, and they would be more important than your own conscience or your own personal inclination. A Wolfskin was expected to adhere to his oath to Thor, which meant that he would be a warrior until his death and that he would have a life expectation of only three to five years. And that was fine, because if you died in Thor's service you

went straight to the table of the gods. An oath of blood brotherhood was also binding for ever, regardless of everything else. One of the themes of the story is that while Eyvind still holds to his oath, even at the end, it's not quite the thing that it at first seemed to be, where you stick up for your blood brother against all enemies. It's more a case of being responsible for his behaviour.

TB: Somerled is a really interesting character: I kept reading him as someone who was born before his time. He's too complex for the rest of them. He belongs in the Renaissance, really!

JM: Where he could have plotted, schemed and moved upwards! Yes, he is too clever

for his time. A lot of the speeches and pronouncements he makes are absolutely spot-on in terms of where his people will go. He's quite right about the fact that the Norse are a stronger people who will eventually take over the islands. They are the dominant culture. He's the kind of man who was very much admired in his time, because he's decisive: he doesn't really care who he tramples on in order to make what he sees are the right decisions. Being cruel and inhumane wasn't so important in those times. He's the kind



of man who was more likely to succeed than a man like Eyvind who probably has far too many scruples.

TB: Another interesting aspect of Wolfskin is the prophecies. Although there's no definite magic in the novel, there is something that works. At least, the characters are experiencing something that works! It's never explained or questioned, it's simply there.

JM: I think that the way I use magic, not just in this book but to a certain extent in my previous books, is different from the way that quite a lot of fantasy writers use it. That's why I see my books as veering slightly more towards history, slightly further away from fantasy. I will always include a mystical and magical element to my fiction, because real life has a mystical and magical element. And in *Wolfskin* that element is shown as part of what those people would have believed.

So you've got prophesy, certainly: once you've got a dire curse like that over you, you know that some day it's going to catch up with you. Ulf knows that's how he's going to die some day, but, being the man he is, has just decided he's going to cram in as much as possible of the stuff that he wants to do before it overtakes him. Another scene that would be read as mystical or magical, is the initiation ceremony where Eyvind becomes a Wolfskin, and again I've tried very hard not to spell out what happens in

that scene. While there is something that is supremely mystical and life changing, I don't spell out how much of it is physically real and how much of it is in his head. Even towards the end, where the magical harp plays its music, I've tried not to say how it sounds, just that it's different for each person. It's not overtly magical, but that magical thread is there throughout.

I have to say that in the Sevenwaters books, there is more overt magic. There are characters in those books that are otherworld characters, based on Irish mythology, who interact with human characters. The human characters firmly believe in the mythological characters that share the forest with them. Therefore, if they happen to meet someone who is not human, it's somewhat wondrous but it's not a shock.

# TB: In Wolfskin you have the Hidden Folk, who I thought of in terms of the Neolithic tribes who came before the Picts...

JM: I'll have to tell my folkloric advisor from Orkney that you thought that. Originally the Hidden Tribe were much more obviously magical than they are in the final book, and his advice was to make them

something that's halfway between a magical portrayal and something that could be an ancient ancestor.

TB: There are three women in the book – Nessa, Margaret and Rona – who can be seen as typifying the three faces of the Goddess: maiden, wife and crone.

JM: Initially Margaret was a fairly minor character, but I was

very interested in her and her relationship with Somerled, and what happens to both of those people. I tried to make her the typical young wife of a Norse chieftain who, like the other Norse characters, is very much bound by duty and by her sense of what she feels is right. But she's a character who is able to step across the boundaries of cultural expectations. Somebody said to me that there's a natural bond and understanding between women that's shown in this book, which surmounts culture and custom.

### TB: It's a gradual understanding: Margaret and Nessa don't get along at all to start with.

JM: No, they don't even want to speak to each other at first. There comes a point where they have to extend a hand to help one another. All of the women in the book have the sense of 'the right thing to do', and they all eventually take that step in the right direction.

The other interesting thing with Nessa and Rona is their religious faith and their beliefs, which I more or less had to create. We don't know very much at all about the Picts, except that they were a Celtic-type race. They disappeared not only from Orkney but also from the Scottish mainland. They've left behind artefacts, and they've left behind the standing stones that have all sorts of wonderful carvings of what might be family symbols. In order to show that clash of cultures, I had to create their religious faith, and I

decided the most likely thing was that it would be a Goddess faith. I've made it a fairly peaceful nature-based religion, in contrast with the warlike gods of the Norse invaders. There is a theory, hotly debated, that the royal line of the Picts came down through the women rather than through the men. I liked that idea, so I've kept that for them. I felt that the fact that there were influential priestesses was tied in fairly closely with the women's line being the bloodline.

# TB: The harp of bone is a fascinating myth: I'd never encountered it except in British ballads.

JM: I mention a couple of Norse stories where it comes up, but I have to say that they were completely invented. It's historical fantasy! I can't prove to you that it comes up in Norse mythology, but it does pop up in a lot of different cultures, so I think that leap is probably not too unlikely. In terms of what happens in the story, without wishing to give too much away to the people who haven't read it, it's essential that the characters are familiar with that particular piece of

folklore. It is a pretty universal idea, that the bones of the dead will speak ... it's the idea behind casting the bones, or burning them and using the ash as a tool of divination. I do love that story about the harp made of bone, and hair. You hear these ballads that sound so wonderful, and then you think about actually making such a harp, and what the difficulties would be, and how such an instrument couldn't possibly make a musical sound.



#### TB: Wolfskin is the first in a new sequence, isn't it?

JM: That's right. It's a two-book sequence. The second one's called Foxmask, and that's already written: it actually comes out in Australia in August of this year. It skips a generation between book one and book two. At the moment it's a two-book sequence, but I have a strong feeling that some of my readers are going to want a third one!

#### TB: You were born in New Zealand, yet you're writing historical fantasy set in Scotland. Why Scotland?

JM: My ancestors come from the north of Scotland. I grew up in a part of New Zealand that was settled by Scottish people, and all the street names are named after Edinburgh streets. I grew up surrounded by Scottish culture and music and stories, so I couldn't escape it, and I'm sure that's why now, even though my first series was set in Ireland with the Celts, I've now gone back to Scottish history. Those old stories are deep in my blood. The book I'm working on now is also based on Scottish history.

#### TB: Can you tell us more about that work in progress?

JM: I'm writing a trilogy based on Bridei, who lived in the sixth century. He had some confrontations with Saint Columba, to do with whether his Pictish territories were going to be allowed to become Christian, or whether he was going to adhere to the faith of his upbringing, which was more of a pagan druidic culture. It's a very interesting period of history.

® Tanya Brown 2003.

A review offjuliet Marillier's Wolfskin is on page 23 offthis issue.

H. G. Wells was an originator of science fiction and a populist writer of non-fiction. But just as SOME AUTHORS DISPUTED HIS PRE-EMINENCE IN SCIENCE FICTION, SO SOME DISPUTED HIS AUTHORSHIP OF HIS NON-FICTION. L. J. HURSTINIVESTIGATES...

## The Deeks-Wells Case

### by L. J. Hurst

or the last twenty-five years of his life H.G. Wells's main source of income was not science fiction - it was history. If he had not achieved a worldwide successa costists. Whith Orbiti Orbit been birrenratherratherremorgaiteoiridurgistamogsans/benwhen Ithose accounts are based on second-hand information. wrote The Shape of Things to Come (1933) and Mind at the End of its Tether (1945), and when he met Joseph Stalin or Franklin D. Roosevelt they might have noticed that his clothes were shabbier than if he had not had the royalties

from The Outline to support him. Though it was alleged at the time, a Canadian historian has now come closer to proving that Wells was living on ill-gotten gains having plagiarised The Outline of History from a Canadian feminist's history of civilisation, a work which remains unpublished to this day.

Dr A.B. McKillop's The Spinster and the Prophet is a parallel account of Wells and Florence Deeks, leading to her court case in Canada in 1925 when she first

sued Wells and his publishers for the pirating of her work, through her judicial defeat and her failed appeals to the Privy Council in London in 1932. In interviews Dr McKillop has said that he had not heard of the case until a passing observation in the 1990s, probably because he is not a historian of sf. Wells mentions the case in his Experiment in Autobiography: Discoveries and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (Since 1866) (1934), where he presents Deeks as slightly dotty and a nuisance, and it gets brief mentions in biographies of Wells. Oddly, I have found the case mentioned in more detail in religious literature - I

came across it in 1977 when reading Alan Hayward's Cod's Truth: Why a Scientist Believes the Bible (interested browsers can find this and similar treatments today by

The Outline of History seemed a ground-breaking work when it appeared: it was one of the first near-complete histories of the world in one book, and it included unusual detail. It admitted it was not a work of academic

scholarship and that it relied on secondary sources, but Wells also wanted to know and then to detail everything that had caused (Western) civillisation to be as it is today. He started with the supernovae in physics; he went back to hominids in anthropology. He produced a work that was first published in weekly parts, and then in two large volumes. As if to reassure doubters of his scholarship. he listed the names of four co-authors on his title page - eminent academics including Sir Ray Lankester the biologist and Gillbert

Murray the classicist. Whether it was the name of Wells, the names of the co-authors, the appealing quality of the book, or a universal demand for education, The Outline soon began to sell - it sold in Britain, it sold in Europe, it sold in the Empire, it sold around the world. It did Wells and his publishers proud.

Given little emphasis at publication time, the five authors had produced this book within one year of starting, and in spite of the principal author's (Wells's) never having studied history professionally nor written any previous historical work. As later inquiries showed, the five had also

...the five authors had produced this book within one year of starting...

produced the book without leaving any notes, any plans or outlines, or any draft manuscripts. (There were some typed sheets that bore written amendments.) These lacunae were later to prove embarrassing to Wells since, when challenged later, he was never able to show how some of his facts, some of his transcriptions of names and some of his misspellings had slipped into his work, nor why they had not been edited out at the proof-reading stage.

In Toronto, Canada, Florence Deeks unsuspectingly bought and read The Outline of History and could explain all of Wells's errors - he had copied them from her manuscript of The Web, another large history of civillisation.

Florence Deeks was both a common and an unusual woman. She was a late but common example of that Victorian creature - the excess woman. She was middleclass, single, shared a house in a good area of Toronto with her mother and sister, and was supported by her brother, a successful civil engineer: she was what Wells's friend George Gissing thirty years before had called an "odd woman". A slow developer, she had graduated (in its north American sense) from high school only when she was

nearly thirty, had enrolled in the University of Toronto, was interested in the arts, and was active in the Canadian proto-fleminist, protosuffragist movement. These details of her life make her unusual. McKillop includes some statements of law from Canada of the period which shows that the judiciary had difficulty in even accepting woman as human beings which, as her slow academic career and her feminist opinions show, meant that Deeks was not only unusual but steadfast. It is

possible, though, that this feature of her character was not noticeable - if anything, Florence Deeks' life seemed to be guiet and provincial to her neighbours.

Unnoticed, but inspired by her feminist opinions, Deeks had spent ten years researching a history of civilisation, she had identified that many of the fulcrum points of history had been turned and then maintained by women, and had written The Web. Even when the manuscript was complete she was not convinced that it was a work that stood up academiically, and she had a second concern as well. She had done no primary research, but relied on her detailed reading of secondary sources, which she quoted and acknowledged. Even so, she was worried about breaches of copyright in her collations offfact.

Thus, when she presented her typescript to Macmillan of Canada she had two questions - were they interested in publishing it? and, regardless of publication, could they reassure her about copyright clearance should she wish to submit the book elsewhere? It took a long time for the manuscript to be returned, and the copyright question never seems to have been answered. Someone had been interested in the book, though, as its well-thumbed pages showed.

It was five years after the publication, and her first reading, of The Outline that Deeks brought her case alleging plagiarism. This was a long time, but during it Deeks had made detailed comparisons of her manuscript and Wells's book, and she had then sought experts to consider her points. Finding experts was difficult - not

because her case was evidently weak, but because of an old-boy network of men of affairs, academics, publishers and the broader establishment, sympathetic to Wells. This bonding had grown in the immediate post-war years as Wells's international connections had grown through his involvement in the League of Nations, but he was also helped through long-term friends such as Sir Ray Lankester who were comfortably at home in North America, lecturing, publishing, promoting tenure, looking for new scientific brains - this was true in both the USA and in Canada. Deeks was able to find experts eventually, but as McKillop points out, any expert speaking on Wells's behalf may have had an undeclared interest due to patronage, tenure and silence, to which the judiciary paid no attention. (This problem is better known today; though no one has produced any amswerto it).

Deeks had sent her manuscript to Macmillan of Canada and it was them she sued, along with Wells. Although a company in their own right, managed as such and with their own lists - they were large educational publishers, for instance - they were part of the Macmillan family of companies, with head offices in London and a thriving

...Deeks

was not

only

unusual but

steadfast...

network she was dealing with, in the business of publishing, with possible authors trying to keep their publishing editors happy, and the different offices trying to build profits, passing opportunities from country to country. Macmillan did not publish The Outline of History, although they had published earlier works by Wells and the company in Britain were trying to persuade him to return to them at this time.

New York branch. So here was another

Frank Wise, Managing Director of Macmillan of Canada, had a thriving sideline, publishing the Canadian edition of The Times History of the First World War profitably in his own right, using an office in the Macmillan building to reduce his costs. This was not a standard business practice, but Wise was not a standard man. So non-standard was he, in fact, that by the time of the Deeks trial he was in prison for fraud, albeit not one to do with his publishing career. On the other hand, as McKillop points out, he was a man who would have been tempted to use any subterfuge to sweeten an author and so persuade him to return to a company's lists, if only to save his salary and career dropping into crime. Such a sweetener could have been the offer to provide a detailed, unpublished history of the world to a man who wanted to write something similar though he had no experience of how to go about it but wanted to produce it quickly.

One of the peculiarities of the British judicial system is that it is not required to explain all evidence, either by fitting it into a whole, or explaining away inconsistencies. This failure is obvious in the Deeks case when the physical presence of the manuscript is considered. Those religious sources I mentioned earlier mention phrases used in the trial; for instance, that Florence Deeks' manuscript was in a "vault" at the Macmillan offices, and so Wells could not have had access to it. Wells was not a safebreaker, after all. and no one suggested that he had hired one. However, what the staff at Macmillan called "the vault" was a corridor lined with shelves in which were kept the manuscripts for reading (what would today be called the slush pile), and "the vault" was little more than a nickname for that open, insecure area. There was, though, a register kept, and it showed the manuscript of The Web being booked in and later booked out for return to Deeks. Physically, there was nothing to stop a manuscript being removed without being registered, but in the Deeks case there was something more strange - a second Deeks manuscript appears in the register, though she had supplied only one, and that manuscript was given a chapter title from The Web as its title. Miss Deeks argued that it was The Web itself, mis-recorded by the librarian of the vault, as it was taken out to be sent to Wells.

However, another witness - John Cameron Saul, the publisher's editor with whom Miss Deeks dealt - supplied a different story: the manuscript of The Web was never in the vault. One reason why Miss Deeks had accepted the

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long delay in returning her manuscript was that she knew that the editor was on a months-long business trip through the Canadian provinces. Saul thought that he had taken the manuscript with him to read, had never got round to reading it and that the manuscript had remained in the bottom of his bag (perhaps this was an old fashioned travelling trunk in which such a thing might be lost). This was a recollection for a witness statement, four or five years after the event, due to Miss Deeks's delay in bringing the case, but if true meant that the register for the vault was inaccurate. No one suggested

that the manuscript had been sent out to Saul on the road, thus accounting for that second register entry.

The courts never stated where the manuscript of The Web had been during the problem period (it was not their responsibility to do so). It cannot have been in both Toronto and the provinces at the same time, but that does not mean that Wells had it in a third place. Equally, nothing proves that Wells could not have had it.

Another of Wells's friends, Richard Gregory (not today's namesake at Bristol University), the editor of Nature, but not one of the co-authors, was going to and fro across the Atlantic; he advised the Macmillan group; Macmillan were trying to win back Wells to their lists; Wise, the Canadian MD, was desperate to keep his place in the company and as events proved possessed a immoral character; Wise knew that he had a manuscript which could supply Wells both as a template and a source for his work. McKillop has to make only one further link - it has never been found; it is a supposition - that Gregory was willimg to help Wells by transporting the manuscript to England and later ensuring that it was returned.

As McKillop shows there was little likelihood that Wells would have shown any doubts about accepting the use of the manuscript - Wells was a "right man", convinced of his own correctness. Historically this had allowed him to escape from shop work and drudgery in his teens; it meant that he went on trying to change society (for the better, as he saw it) regardless of his treatment at the hands of "respectable society"; but it also meant (as an acquaintance

such as George Orwell would later discover) that he was pigheaded to the extreme. Fond of his comfort, and living beyond his means, he was also, once established, extremely selfish, and an abuser of others, partiicularly women. He would have felt no qualms in using the feminist manuscript of a provincial woman in constructing a Wellsian history of the world. However, since Wells was so single-mindedly Wellsian, a feminist manuscript in itself would have been no use to him - it could be no more than a template.

Here McKillop is less certain about how The Web might have been transformed into The Outline of History, but it is clear that Jane Wells, H.G.'s wife, who acted as his gofer, housekeeper and amanuensis played a part as well. It was most probably Jane Wells, working quickly, who reduced The Web to a detailed outline and paragraphs of significant detail, which Wells then filled and wrote by further

> reference to his library. Thus the Deeks text was not kept - only the order and facts, and the incriminating errors. If Jane had performed the summarisation it would allow Wells to say honestly that he had had nothing to do with the manuscript of The Web.

> The courts do not seem to have commented on typed it) and they had sent back their

> something extraordinary. When his co-authors came to give evidence on Wells's behalf not one of them said that he himself had written or even suggested any part of The Outline of History - Wells had sent them the finished manuscript (lane had

observations, some of which Wells included as footnotes. None of them had made any other contribution and not one of them had helped Wells with his sources. Even today booksellers itemise the multiple authors on their websites when listing the title and title page attribution (as a search on Abebooks will show), as the reprinted editions continued to list the multiple authorship, despite the admission in court that those "authors" were nothing of the kind. Wells was hiding behind their names.

McKillop considers whether Wells was known for other acts of plagiarism. Deeks was contacted by at least one author who alleged it, though he never seems to have succeeded in having his complaint heard. It had been suggested before, though; for instance, when Robert Cromie alleged that Wells had pillaged his 1890 story 'A Plunge into Space' to write The First Men in the Moon (1900). Cromie had persuaded some authors, including Jules Verne, of his case and Verne's bitterness against Wells when he complained in a 1903 interview that he extrapolated but Wells invented (the one memory many sf fans have of Verne and Wells) may have been reinforced by his knowledge of the Cromie case against Wells. 2

While she was in England Miss Deeks made contact with the mathematician and astrologer (not astronomer) P.J. Harwood, who alleged that Wells had plagiarised his work in The Science of Life (1930) in the late twenties. In Harwood's case he had a letter from Wells's secretary acknowledging receipt of his manuscript. There was no time to bring this detail to the attention of the Privy

Council, though - the case was almost at an end.

Although McKillop deals with Wells's weakness of character to show that he was innately devious, and a psychological abuser of women, someone who would happily take advantage of a manuscript, he misses another

of Wells's weaknesses, though it was one that would leave its traces in the evidence of plagiarism: Wells was a poor editor of his own work, who even when he had a good opportunity (with a new edition, even of his Collected Works) never went back and corrected errors. George Orwell, who knew Wells in the thirties and then fell out with him in the forties, detailed this failure.<sup>3</sup>

As McKillop points out, Florence Deeks used some unusual sources – probably having

to rely on whatever was in the Toronto central library on the successive periods of anthropology, prehistory and history she described. She wrote, partly, during the limitations of World War One and inter-library loans were unknown, so if she found a name spelled out in the only book she could find, that was the name that appeared in her manuscript - she did not know whether it was the name commonly used or transliterated for that historical character. Similarly she made some errors – she took one date away from another, calculated the wrong result but wrote that dubious number as the duration of some event or period, and she misread blood relationships. This is what trapped Wells - those unusual names, those wrong figures appear in The Outline of History; they had not been double-checked against titles in, say, any of the University of London libraries or the Library of the British Museum and, when challenged, Wells could not show that they

appeared in the books he claimed to have consulted. This is not to say that Wells did not do research - The Outline was twice as long as The Web. Counsel for Macmillan admitted, as did Wells himself later in his Experiment in Autobiography, that the Encyclopaedia Brittanica had been his major source. However, where Deeks found that Wells had used her material his tendency was to include her detail and then to add more of his (or someone else's) own. No one seems to have commented on his failure to reconcile the two.

Consider, though, the errors in Wells's own works: they show that neither he nor his wife Jane were used to editing his books – if he made a mistake it stayed in regardless. If Wells or Jane Wells had transcribed a detail from the manuscript of *The Web* it would have gone into *The Outline of History* and neither husband nor wife would have bothered to check, change or correct it – that is what events suggest. Wells's co-authors seem to have failed to spot these errors as well, or else Wells treated his colleagues so contemptuously as to ignore their corrections. Whichever is true the position condemns them

all.

Wells was

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work

Florence Deeks had to bring a case in civil law against Wells. Clearly the case was something more elaborate – it reads like a detective story, and probably required a detective investigation. Even better than a bobby would

have been an investigating magistrate who could have demanded an account of every inconsistency in the arguments of either side. The verdicts at each successive level appear to have been inconsistent with the evidence heard meaning that bluster and bluff won. It has taken seventy years for some sort of truth to emerge. We can only look at the many inventions of H. G. Wells and wonder – he may have given sf to the world. Unfortunately, just as he let other worlds run free, so too he felt free to

misappropriate the works of other minds. Selfishness, unlike war, was something innate in him.

#### **NOTES**

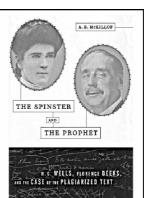
- **1.** A. B. McKillop. The Spinster and the Prophet: A Tale of Plagiarism, H.G. Wells and the History of the World (London: Aurum Press 2000)
- **2.** Cromie's brother was a King's Counsel and Wells settled out of court, but Florence Deeks had to pay for every professional's time and Wells attempted to wear her down by raising her costs. Robert M. Philmus is more sympathetic to Wells in "H.G. Wells, Robert Cromie, and Literary Crime" in *Science-Fiction Studies*, 20: 1 (1993) 137-138, but ignores his settlement of the case. I have not seen Ingvar Raknald's *H.G. Wells and the Critics*, mentioned by McKillop, which has a whole section entitled

"Originality or Plagiarism". [David Lake discusses the plagiarism in an article in *The Wellsian* (15 (1992): 40-46) which leads in SFS to Philmus noting Jules Verne's fulmination against Wells's anti-gravitational sphere, the detail allegedly lifted from 'A Plunge into Space'. Ironically, the second edition of this book has a preface by Verne praising Cromie – although there was no French translation of the book and Verne's English would not have been sufficient to read 'A Plunge into Space'. Arthur B. Evans (SFS 20: 1 (1993), 138-139) backs up Philmus's allegation of Cromie's own literary fraud by noting the lack of any

connection between Verne, Cromie and Cromie's publishers, although suggests it might have been Verne's son Michael who wrote the preface — Ed.]

**3**. The detail in which Orwell studied this is only now apparent in Orwell's recently published *Complete Works*, it is only mentioned in passing in his *Collected Essays*, *Journalism and Letters*.

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# First Impressions

# Book Reviews edited by Paul Billinger

All novels marked: 🕞 are eligible for the 2002 BSFA Award for Best Novel All collections and anthologies marked: 🖋 contain stories eligible for the 2002 BSFA Award for Best Short Fiction

Catherine Asaro – The Moon's Shadow

Tor, New York, 2003, 476pp, \$25.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-30425-2

Reviewed by Andrew A. Adams

This book is part of a larger set called The Sage of the Skolian Empire. I've not read the others but that hasn't turned out to be a big problem. Amazon.co.uk lists "other customers bought books by" Lois McMaster Bujold, Lee and Miller, and David Weber, which should give you an idea of the oeuvre we're in here: this is Space Opera with a military-political bent.

Asaro does quite well at introducing her universe without seeming to do an information dump, giving bits and pieces of the background as you need them. The book starts out with what may be a direct continuation of a previous book, dropping you straight into the action, but it does so through the eyes and viewpoint of one of the main characters, Jaibriol Qox, as he takes part in a cold-war-style prisoner exchange. This is a prisoner exchange with a difference as Jaibriol (Jai to his friends, not that there's many of them in this book) and Eldrin (the other "prisoner" in the exchange) will each become ruler of an interstellar empire before the end of the book.

The vast majority of this book follows Jai as he becomes Jaibriol III, emperor of the Eubian Concord, following a war in which his father (the former emperor) and his mother (Imperator, or warleader, of their opponents the Skolian

Empire) were killed. Occasional snippets are shown of various Skolians. I get the feeling that this is the first book which shows the Eubians in detail. I'm reminded of Union in C.J. Cherryh's Merchanter books: the implacable monolithic enemy as shown in *Downbelow Station*, but the complex society revealed in *Cyteen. Cyteen* this isn't, though few things come up to that standard.

We gradually meet the Eubians, good, bad and indifferent. It's a strange society, and I'm not altogether sure the concept works fully, but, suspend disbelief and you have an interesting tale mixing coming-of-age, moral dilemmas and some interesting SF military, political and emotional challenges. This is a complex universe Asaro has set up and it's to her credit that I managed to enjoy this book without any previous knowledge of her work. It's good enough that I'm planning to hunt up the others in the series.

Fun, lightweight Space Opera. Perfect for long train or plane journeys or to take on holiday. I doubt she'll knock Bujold or Weber off their pedestals but if you like that sort of thing this should keep you entertained until the next one comes along.

#### Steven B<u>arnes – Charisma</u>

Reviewed by Jain Emsley

Tor, New York, June 2002, 380pp, \$24.95, h/b, ISBN 0-312-87004-3

Charisma is labelled as an sf thriller and, it must be admitted, pretty much does what it says on the dust jacket. Set in a near-future world, an experiment is carried out on a group of young children to increase their intelligence based upon an imprint taken from a successful business man, Alexander Marcus. As the experiment goes on, it becomes apparent that Marcus has a murderous secret life which manifested during his military career. During the subsequent abandonment of the trials, the coordinators seek to kill the children. Renny Sands covered the original trial which saw the end of the experiment, but after a hit and run accident which kills one of the children, he begins to investigate what happened to the others.

Patrick Emory is one of the children, living in a ghetto, having formed a collective to maximise their earnings from small jobs. One of their jobs is to deliver fliers for his mother's business. Whilst his parents' marriage collapses, the Emorys are offered a place at a summer camp, where

Patrick is banded together with other members of a chat room which is based around the Samurai philosophy of Musashi Miyamoto. However, the camp is soon recognised for the trap it is, and the children must fight against the conspiracy which fears them.

Set in an increasingly hostile urban environment, Barnes offers the reader a fast paced novel which explores a world that's recognisable but alien to most of us. The rationale becomes thriller-like, relying upon conspiracy theories and the Samurai philosophy, as explored and experienced by the children. The book becomes more human towards its conclusion yet fails to really develop this part of its world. *Charisma* is a run-of-the-mill thriller that revels in its action rather than the human consequences of its premise, almost as if it is afraid to fully delve into them. The novel is well paced and entertaining but only really for those who enjoy thrillers.

#### Max Barry - Jennifer Government 🖾

Abacus, London, 2003, 335pp, £9.99, t/p, ISBN 0-349-11598-2

Reviewed by Dave M. Roberts

Jennifer Government is one of those books that attempts to satirise the corporate consumer society by taking the worst elements of it to extremes. In a near future world the United States has expanded to include Australia and a number of other countries. Government has been reduced to a sort of impotent police force, no taxes are paid and everybody takes on the name of the corporation that they work for. Hence characters like Hack Nike and, of course,

Jennifer Government herself. There are two characters called John Nike (Hack Nike's boss and his boss), both playing significant but very different roles. This is taking the joke a little too far, as it seems to serve no purpose other than simply to have two characters with the same name. The police can be contracted out for murders, and the NRA appears to be a mercenary army.

There are some really good ideas in this book. The leaping-off point is that Nike, as a marketing campaign for a new line of training shoes, withholds selling them to make them really desirable, then spreads rumours that certain shops will have them available. At this

point they flood the market place with the trainers at \$2,500 a pair. To increase the desire for them, Hack, a junior lackey within Nike, is paid to murder ten people who have just bought them. The idea being that the trainers are so good that people will kill for them. I'm not convinced it would actually work, but as an example of extreme marketing it's quite neat. The scene towards the

end of the first section, where a young girl is killed shortly after buying the shoes, is fairly effective.

Unfortunately, this is where anything good about the novel comes to an end. The plot very quickly turns into a by-the-numbers thriller with Jennifer Government hot on the trail of the Nikes (that's the people, not the shoes) while trying to bring up a daughter single-handed. Hack is racked with guilt over what he has done. Billy joins the NRA by

accident and gets confused with Bill NRA, a senior officer. The characters are very two-dimensional and all too frequently appear to be there just to advance the plot: Jennifer's daughter seems to be there simply to get kidnapped. In spite of taking place all over the globe, the story feels distinctly like the action is all happening in a very small area.

Jennifer clearly has a history. She has a barcode tattooed under one eye and keeps being recognised by corporate types from her previous life. This should add some depth to both the plot and Jennifer's character. Sadly, the history is so heavily flagged in advance that it just gets in the way of the action.

All this could be meant to emphasise the dehumanising effect of the corporate driven, trade name obsessed world, but, if so, this idea does not come through. The satire is restricted almost entirely to the backdrop and very soon gets forgotten, and any attempts at humour simply don't work.



#### Adrian Berry – The Giant Leap

Tor, New York, 2000, 342pp, \$14.95, t/p, ISBN 0-312-87786-2X

Reviewed by Stuart Carter

The Giant Leap has the subheading 'Mankind heads for the stars' just in case readers are in any doubt what the

eponymous giant leap is. This is a book about spaceships voyaging to other planets and stars. Crucially, though, it's

not a work of fiction, it's a piece of speculative research looking at 'why it will happen, how it might happen and why it is a good idea'. I don't know about you, but simply putting will in that sentence instead of should had me hooked before you could say 'ion drive'.

Berry runs through all the problems manned starflight holds in store, such as fuel requirements, journey times, cost (to name just a few!) and then goes on to look at the state of current, practical thought upon these. If some of his ideas are rather prosaic (compound interest on money invested before near-lightspeed journeys will pay for them upon return, very good computer games will offset the boredom of long space journeys), then Berry is to be applauded for remaining practical without disillusioning the reader.

But he also explores ideas beyond these, poking at such sf perennials as wormholes, FTL travel and even time travel with a stick to see if they respond. Generally they don't, but this reader appreciated the attempt since I now at least know what the big problems are.

The science and engineering in *The Giant Leap* is uncomplicated enough for the virgin reader but not too stolid and patronising for those with a reasonable grasp of current scientific advances. No, where Berry falls down is where I was most hoping he would perform – that earlier

question of 'why it will happen'.

Berry obviously has his own articles of political faith, but these seem to me to have left him blind to alternatives and he has turned chapter three of *The Giant Leap*, entitled 'The Twilight of the State', into a promotional pamphlet for Libertarian thought.

Berry tells us that the internet and encryption will be a Götterdammerung for government and taxes, both of which are holding 'us' (by which he means private enterprise) back from a future in space which is not only gloriously profitable but inevitable:

'The proof of this thesis lies in the fact that it is already happening. Government is rapidly weakening while the power of private entrepreneurs is growing stronger.'

I would suggest to Mr Berry that he seek out Iain M. Banks' 'A Few Notes On The Culture' on the internet, talk to some of the thousands of anti-globalisation activists, and, perhaps, contact a few disillusioned Marxists – their future was once inevitable, too...

With a little more thought, balance and insight (and a lot less polemic) *The Ciant Leap* could have been an absolutely fascinating profile of our futures. As it is, if you skip chapter three altogether, it's merely quite an interesting pop science book.

#### Steven Brust, PJF - Cowboy Feng's Space Bar and Grille

Tor, 2003, 297pp, \$13.95, t/p, ISBN 0-765-30664-6

Reviewed by Tanya Brown

Thirteen years after its first publication, Steven Brust's most science-fictional novel – Cowboy Feng's Space Bar and Grille – has been reissued by Tor US.

With hindsight it's easy to detect Brust's debt to Roger Zelazny: there's a particularly metaphysical twist to some of his metaphors, and a cavalier disregard for modern English that's reminiscent of Zelazny at his most lavish. But the admiration went both ways: Zelazny's praise of Brust ('He's good. He moves fast. He surprises you.') appears on the cover of this and more recent Brust novels.

And he does surprise you. Cowboy Feng's Space Bar and Grille is a murder mystery, a time-travel whodunit and a love story, with plenty of other ingredients to taste – including a memorable elegy to Laphroiag, and an ingenious use for goats.

The novel is credited to 'Steven Brust, PJF', and Tor would have done well to include Brust's own explanation of the acronym. 'PJF' stands for 'Pre-Joycean Fellowship', a tongue-in-cheek agglomeration of (mainly Minnesotan) writers who, in Brust's words, 'exist to poke fun at the excesses of modern literature, while simultaneously mining it for everything of value.'

Brust (unsurprisingly) is disingenuous. Billy, who sounds from the photofit as though he bears a marked resemblance to Brust himself, is as unreliable a narrator as you could wish to encounter. The 'Intermezzos' between each chapter, which at first appear to be telling separate, disjointed tales, have an unexpected connection to the

primary narrative. And I remain mistrustful of any novel in which a major threat to humanity is described solely in terms of current jokes and references to taboo menu items. (Pancakes and flounders, if you must know).

The science-fictional trappings of the novel are more backdrop than setting: the eponymous restaurant executes a time/space leap whenever atomic war occurs in its vicinity, depositing itself and its inhabitants in a safer place. When the novel opens, the restaurant and its 'crew' – cook, handyman etc, plus an Irish folk band who happened to be playing when the first jump occurred – find themselves on

New Quebec, their first trip outside the solar system. Working out why they're there, how they're there and what they're meant to be doing there, is next on the agenda: the process drives a fast-moving, emotional rollercoaster of a plot. The action is punctuated by jam sessions as the band submerge their sorrows in music, in a way that will be familiar to any devotee of early-Nineties North American urban fantasy. (Think Charles de Lint, Emma Bull, Pamela Dean et al). If the music leaves you cold, the cooking might get to you: this is not a novel to be read on an empty stomach!

Brust's light, witty prose sits oddly, at times, with the salvation of humanity and the

weighty ethical issues underlying the narrative. Yet – in part due to the emotional honesty of the characters – it carries off Brust's narrative sleight-of-hand with considerable flair. A welcome reissue! (Oh, and Deverra's there: page 94).



#### Chris Bunch – Knighthood of the Dragon 🕮

Orbit, London, 2003, 408pp, £10.99, t/p, ISBN 1-84149-195

#### Reviewed by Lesley Hatch

The second volume of this series finds Hal Kailas, one time tavern keeper's son, and conscript to serve in a war, moving in exalted circles, having been ennobled. Aged twenty-four, he has land, a title, and a lady to love him, but he is very much a career soldier, on whom the war has taken itstoll.

The feast to which Hal and his fellow officers have been invited is a deception intended to facilitate a decisive attack against the enemy: he has to take over three other flights of dragons and provide aerial security along the battle front. However, the battle does not go according to plan; Hal gets taken prisoner and is consigned to an escape-proof castle, where magic is used to good effect in restraining the prisoners. Naturally he sets about escaping, and in the process finds another way to strike back at the enemy.

His next plan is to form a squadron of dragons and fliers, as the means to end the war, and in particular kill the leader of the enemy dragonfliers, with whom he has a score to settle: the death of the man who first taught him about dragons and how to care for them, back before the war.

As the war progresses, his thoughts turn to what will

happen after the war – to himself, his wife, and to the dragons he and his squadron rely on. He feels that they cannot be abandoned to either fend for themselves or be reduced to providing rides for ordinary people, and there are several members of his squadron who feel the same way. However, no definite solution is reached to this problem.

How things progress, both on the home and away fronts, involves a great deal of forward planning and inspiration by Hal and his fellow conspirators, along with a certain amount of experimentation with magical matters. Some of these plans work, and some do not.

Against the backdrop of the war, the author throws in a totally unexpected turn of events, which causes a considerable challenge for Hal and a magician who assists him from time to time.

Chris Bunch has maintained the high standard of characterisation and action on several fronts established in *Storm of Wings*, and I would definitely recommend this second novel. I eaggetly awaits ubsequent wollumes.

#### Lindsay Clarke - Parzival and the Stone from Heaven

HarperCollins, London, 2001, 229pp, ±6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-00-710929-6

#### Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

Described as 'a Grail romance for our time', this book is a reworking of the thirteenth century poem *Parzival*, by Wolfram von Eschenbach. The most obvious way in which Clarke's book differs from its source material is that it is much shorter and simpler, yet it is not a retelling for children, even though Clarke hopes that older children will find it accessible. Rather it's a version of the same material in which Clarke concentrates on themes which he believes speak to our present-day condition. In reading it, it's clear that 'simpler' doesn't necessarily mean 'simplistic' or 'superflicial'.

The complexities of Wolfram's poem are beyond the scope of this review; Clarke's version preserves the basics of the storyline, while leaving out many of the incidental episodes. In both a preface and afterword he discusses his fascination with his source and the importance which he places upon works of the imagination. Fantasy, he believes, is an essential tool for shaping the world and understanding ourselves.

Because he has pared away all but the essentials of the story, the themes which Clarke chooses to highlight come across all the more clearly. There's a powerful sense of the destructiveness of male aggression, in the way that the

noble fighting spirit of the male characters so often leads them to abandon the women they profess to love, and to die violently and unnecessarily. Yet withdrawing from the world isn't the answer: Parzival in his igmorance is as destructive as the rest. The Grail itself – here a stone rather than the more usual cup – is explicitly identified as the union of darkness and light, and this theme is embodied in the second half of the book, where Parzival's journey from igmorance to true wisdom is contrasted with the development of Gawain, the worldly sophisticate, embodiment of true knighthood, who must learn the simplicity of faiithfulness in love.

Clarke doesn't claim that this book is a novel; its handling of plot and character belong to the traditions of romance. Nor does he see it as a substitute for Wolfram's poem, more as a stepping-stone to encourage more readers to go back to the source. I feel it will do that, but shouldn't be regarded just as a baby version, to be discarded once the real thing is apprehended. It has value in and for itself, and it reworks material in much the same way as the mediaeval romance writers, making something new and independent.

#### Steve Cockayne – The Iron Chain 🔝

Orbit, 2003, 356pp, £10.99, Up, ISBN 1-84149-156X

#### Reviewed by John Newsinger

I had the good fortune to be sent the first volume of Steve Cockayne's Legends of the Land novels for review but based on just the single volume I reserved judgement as to exactly how important the book was and how significant its author. Well, now that the second volume has arrived what

conclusions can be drawn?

The Iron Chain is every bit as well-written as the first volume with at least some of the same characters making their way through a well-realised world. The book explores the mundane lives of ordinary people in a fantasy world

that is successfully portrayed in an everyday way. There are no great swashbuckling adventures. Instead, the novel proceeds at a moderate, restrained pace with the characters attended by success and failure, happiness and misery, life and death, living out private lives. The magiician, Leonardo Pegasus, must be one of the most ordinary magiicians in fantasy literature. It was Pegasus who let loose the imp, Lee, who is wreaking an inevitably low key havoc throughout the electronic signal system and who is charged with putting matters right, but there is no real urgency.

Pegasus finds happiness, at least for the moment, but for Rusty Brown there is a rise and fall engineered by an acquaintance/friend of whose enmity he was entirely unaware. Presumably his mapping skills will prove vital in the hunt for Lee in a later volume. And all the time, the Wolf Boys under their leader, High Master Fang, are taking

overthe government.

The Iron Chain is every bit as enjoyable a read as the first volume. What is missing, however, is any sense of big issues unresolved, of mysteries to be explored. Indeed, not only are the big issues not resolved and the mysteries not explored, but they seem to have disappeared to be replaced by the everyday lives of ordinary people. Presumably there will be a third volume in which the 'big issues' will return, in which the malevolent Lee will reveal itself more fully and the question of the Land will be resolved. Only then will this reader be able to decide whether or not The Legends of the Land are just an entertaining read (and certainly very worthwhile in that respect) or a significant work of fantasy that can be recommended as one of the wonders of the field.

#### Louise Cooper – Doctor Who: Rip Tide 🚟

Telos, Tolworth, 2003, 152pp, £25 deluxe h/b, ISBN 1-903889-13-8, (Standard h/b: £10, ISBN 1-903889-12-X)

#### Reviewed by Gary Dalkin

R/p Tide is the sixth Doctor Who novella – there is a new title approximately every four weeks – from Telos Publishing, an imprint dedicated to high quality editions of science fiction, fantasy and horror titles. The current volume is available as a standard hardback with cloth-effect cover and foil-stamped logo and title; and a signed and numbered limited edition deluxe hardback. I was fortunate to be sent the deluxe edition, and it is a beautifully produced volume, sewn, with heavy boards, printed on acid free paper and with a striking full colour frontispiece by Fred Gambino. Both versions have an engaging foreword by Stephen Gallagher.

As to the story, it is an Eighth Doctor adventure, featuring the version of the Doctor as embodied by Paul McGann in the 1996 TV movie. I say 'featuring' because the focus is on seventeen year old Nina and her brother Steve, a lifeboat man in a tiny Cornish fishing villagge/resort. It is a coming of age tale in which both siblings fall in love with the wrong people and learn some painful lessons as a result. Steve falls for the mysterious Ruth, who dresses wrong and won't go out in the rain, while Nina finds herself increasingly attracted to a beach-combing Doctor. There is suspense and danger, and Louise Cooper ratchets the tension until the tale becomes a quite exciting race-

against-time, but there is little that is essential to the genre. The SF elements could easily be removed and the plot reworked to similar effect, indeed, the Doctor himself could be replaced with any suitably charming and competent leading man to make a perfectly acceptable tale.

R/p Tide has a very English semsibility of romantic longing, and is deeply evocative of life in a small coastal town, so much so that both elements reminded me considerably of the 1970s work of Michael Coney; particularly the increasingly frantic thriller/love story Charisma and the ill-fated tale of alien first love, Hello Summer, Goodbye. Cooper's story here is not in the class of either of those sf classics, but as the first Doctor Who novel (well, at 152 pages it would have passed as a novel rather than novella not so long ago) I have read in more than a quarter of a century it proved a surprisingly enjoyable adventure with sympathetically drawn and humanly treated characters. Just don't expect the science to stack up anymomethan itdid on television.

[Telos books can be purchased online at https://www.telos.co.uk/]

#### John Connolly – Bad Men 🕮

Hodder & Stoughton, London, 2003, 407pp, £14.99, h/b, ISBN 0-340-82617-7

#### Reviewed by Paul N. Billinger

John Connolly is the author of a very successful series of contemporary crime novels featuring the damaged and driven private detective Charlie 'Bird' Parker. Bad Men, however, is a standalone novel which, superfficially, is the story of the eponymous bad men and their quest for revenge against a woman and her son. So why is this being reviewed in *Vector*? Well, because although this is a crime novel it is also a complex and subtle ghost story.

Bad Men is centred around the island of Sanctuary, off the coast of Maine, an island steeped in tragedy as a result of a seventeenth century massacre of the first settlers, an atrocity compounded by betrayal. Today, Sanctuary has a small community with one town and a scattered population. Over the period of a few days we follow the lives of an ensemble cast including the local policeman, a giant of a man and inheritor of the island's secrets, a rookie officer on her first posting to the island and a young incomer trying to escape from her past and raise her son in safety. Converging on the island are the bad men, led by Moloch, the most extreme of them all, who seeks a reunion with his wife and son, one which is umlikely to have a happy ending. The main, and strongest, character, however, is the island itself: dark, brooding, bleak and malevolent, with its own history rising to the surface to confront them all. Landscape, both urban and rural, and

man's interaction with it, has always been a key feature of Connolly's work, although never quite as fundamental as it is here.

This large cast is handled with great skill, each character being distinct and very human. This is of partiicular importance as, although the main narrative covers only a short time-span, the novel uses flashbacks to encompass the pasts of the characters and the island. Minor characters are introduced and described with special skill, avoiding what could so easily be clumsy info-dumping. The supernatural elements are well integrated and a vital part of the novel, although parts of the conclusion (shocking and unexpected as it is) would benefit from being further developed. It is by no means a 'nice' book: an examination of the resonance of evil throughout history cannot, and should not, avoid the nature and reality of violence. This is not, however, an overly explicit book as much of the violence is off-stage, buttthis still results in an uncomfortable, unsettling read.

Connolly has always shown a interest in the supernatural, writing ghost stories and stating that he doesn't write 'realist' crime fiction (see www.johnconmollly.

co.uk) and the supernatural elements of the Charlie Parker books become more explicit as the series develops, with them being used as an emphatic force to drive Parker's motivation. In *Bad Men* the supernatural is an external power, the spirit of the island, neither good nor evil but one which has been warped by the violent events of the seventeenth century. In particular it is through the actions of Moloch and the local policeman that the island tries to come to an understanding of the past and to resolve the repeating cycle of wiolence.

This is a wholly successful merging of two genres (think Stephen King crossed with a police procedural) from one of the best crime writers around, with striking, haunting imagery, a shocking and unexpected conclusion and a conviction that you've actually visited Sanctuary. Read this, then read the Charlie Parker novels (the first is *Every Dead Thing*) which just get better and better as the series progresses (and then realise that *Bad Men* is not completely divorced from the series).

#### Peter Crowther (ed.) - Cities

#### **Reviewed by Claire Brialey**

Cities is the fourth of the Foursight anthologies and this time it's ostemsibly an all-fantasy selection although, as ever, it really depends on how you define your terms. The title seems rather to be groping for a pithy connection between these stories which – while it allows for a visionary cover painting by Edward Miller – doesn't wholly convey the point of what these novellas are about. 'A Year in the Linear City' (Paul di Filippo) and 'The Tain' (China Miéville) partiicularly depend on a city setting and ambience; but what these stories really have in common is that they're about people.

Diego Patchen in 'A Year in the Linear City' (which appears on this year's Hugo Award shortlist) is a writer of his world's version of speculative fiction: fantastic stories about a world in which people die without being borne away by Yardbulls or Fisherwives, where their dead bodies thus have to be disposed of, and where the ultimate fate of their souls is unknown. And his father is near death, and his friends need help. Di Filippo's city operates like a city. His people live and work and interact like people. The differences between their lives, their society, their philosophy and ours make the points about the similarities.

'The Tain' is a story about reflections, and a story that's complete in its concept. The structure of the story and the way it distorts expectations subtly reinforces the central idea of Miéville's plot until it's hard to tell what is image and what is reflection: we are all the Other to someone. This is a novella set in at least one fantasy London, where a

Gollancz, London, 2003, 292pp, £12.99, h/b, ISBN 0-575-07504-X

lack of understanding or even a realisation that there is something different to understand has plunged society into war. Its topical resonance shouldn't disguise the fact that its subject is regrettably enduring.

Michael Moorcock's 'Firing the Cathedral' is avowedly a Jerry Cornelius story; but it, too, is almost terrifyingly topical. Each of twenty-two short chapters begins with a series of scene-setting quotations: from fiction, from news reports, from adverts and announcements. Initially I assumed that these were all Moorcock's invention until I started spotting articles by writers that I must have actually read and the circling of the real and the virtual began to accelerate. Ultimately, though, there is undoubtedly more to this novella if you're also familiar with the Jerry Cornelius canon.

'VAO', by Geoff Ryman, is chilling and heart-rending and tremendously thought-provoking. It asks who we become as we age, both in other people's perception and our own. It looks at what can happen when we become the Other in a society that we unthinkingly created. It wonders what we'd do if we had to make a choice between knowing who we are or being the person we were.

These are four stories about what people can do to one another, and what happens when we identify other people as being something other than people. It's never a bad time to think about that.

#### Cory Doctorow - Down and Out in The Magic Kingdom

Tor, New York, 2003, 206pp, \$22.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-30436-8

#### Reviewed by Dave M. Roberts

Jules is a little perturbed. This may be the fourth time he's died, but it is the first time he's been murdered. Debra took advantage of the confusion following his death to take over the Hall of Presidents, and Jules strongly suspects that she

was responsible for his murder.

This is the twenty second century, and death, scarcity, the workplace and work have all become redundant. This much we establish in the first paragraph. We are in a form

of Utopia where some sort of immortality is available for those who want it. This is not of the physical body, but of the mind. Simply remember to take a regular backup of yourself and when the body dies the mind can be downloaded to a nice, new, cloned body. The backups are done via a form of cyberspace to which all the bodies have an interface. This is pretty much taken for granted until the interface starts to fail. Being offline is quite a disturbing experience in the Bitchun Society.

In this future there is no workplace as such. Groups of volunteers, the ad-hocracies, run the institutions. No-one works for money, Whuffie is the medium of exchange. Work is done to increase your whuffie, which is really a measure of how well regarded and cool you are. Jules and the other characters all live and work in the dream location of Disney World where the ad-hocracies run the attractions. So when things are going well whuffie levels are high. Even in this utopian existence where money no longer exists, people are still obsessed with status. It's just measured in a different way.

Debra is replacing the automata of the Hall of Presidents with a form of the brain download that gives the

impression of actually being Lincoln, Washington et al. This could be seen as an attack on the artistic purity of the vision of Walt Disney. Jules' response is to entirely rethink and remodel the Haunted Mansion.

This is a novel that really should have a lot going for it. Unfortunately there is so much going on in such a short novel that nothing really gets explored in any depth. People take advantage of the downloads to opt out of society for a period. This generally happens when they feel they cannot cope with life at present and want to give it a try a few years, decades, centuries down the line. When people die they go to the last backup, which means the new person is missing anything that happened after that backup was taken. This opens up all sorts of possibilities to question whether or not the new body really contains the same person. Some experiences are always going to be missing. Sadly, the best ideas are handled in a superficial manner that just about allows the plot to be structured around them

This is still a fairly enjoyable romp, but little more than that. While it is occasionally funny it is more often simply trying too damn hard to be quirky.

#### Kate Elliott – The Gathering Storm 🗐

**Reviewed by Fiona Grove** 

Orbit, London, 2003, 903pp, £12.99, Vp, ISBN 1-84149-092-X

The Gathering Storm is the fifth of six books by Kate Elliott, which follows the fortunes of Alain, Liath, Prince Sanglant, and Stronghand of the Eika, as they endeavour to prevent the destruction of their lands as catastrophe gets ever nearer. The Lands of Wendar and Varre are in chaos following the departure of King Henry who, controlled by his priests and wife, is aiming to become Emperor of the Western World. His daughters and son, Prince Sanglant, are left to cope with a warring land as best they can, but their internal bickering and strife only makes this more difficult, and Sanglant is troubled by the disappearance of his wife, Liath, which has left him caring for his young daughter, Blessing. Parallel to this Alain, the one-time Count of Lavas Holding has realised that, following the death of his wife Adica, and his return from between the worlds, the world is rapidly approaching a great cataclysm. when the land of the Ashioi, cast out into the aether several thousand years ago, is about to return.

At the same time as this, Anne, Skopos and the ecclesiastical leader of the people, are desperately trying to ensure that the Ashioi lands never return by recasting the original spell that separated the lands.

Each of the countries of Novaria is beset by changes in weather and strange storms and droughts, but through these Prince Sanglant goes in search of Griffons, the feathers of which will break magical bonds, thereby allowing him to free his father from captivity. He is aided in this search by the Bwr people, and a few loyal troops, including Hanna, Liath's oldestfriend and a sworn Eagle of the King.

Stronghand, the Eika leader, born of man and dragons' blood, but linked with Alain, is crushing the people of Alba, whilst searching for Alain, whom he has been ordered to find by the Wise Mothers, the leaders of the Eika people. Whilst doing this he begins to free slaves in the captured Alban lands and gains the loyalty of people who previously would have feared him. But suddenly he is recalled to Eikaland by the Wise Mothers, because the cataclysm is at hand and the plan has changed....

This is a long, and long-awaited book from Kate Elliot, and takes some commitment to read, but it is well-written, and whilst a little slow in some places is well presented and has an exciting mix of stronylines that entwine in an interesting manner, drawing together disparate parts of the previous four books. It is not a book to read alone, you must have read the previous four to enjoy this, and it does leave me wanting to know how the final book *Crown of Stars* will finish this saga.

#### Mary Gentle - White Crow

Reviewed by K. V. Bailey

In 'Beggars in Satin', the opening story of her 1989 collection, Scholars and Soldiers, Mary Gentle created the characters 'White Crow' Valentine, a wandering scholar/soldier woman, and Baltazar Casaubon, Lord Architect, gross and dishevelled, yet a creator of harmonious order. In that collection's last story, 'The Knot

Orion, London, 2003, 847pp, £9.90, t/p, ISBN 0-575-07519-8

Garden', they have become a pair, subsequently a married pair. This volume reprints these and other stories and novels of the 80s/90s featuring them: 'Black Motley', Rats and Gargoyles, The Architecture of Desire and Left to His Own Devices.

Mary Gentle makes clear in her Foreword the extent to

which her writing has been influenced by hermeticism: that view of the universe which sees correspondences between all existing things, animate and inanimate, and to which is central the proposition that what is below is as that which is above. A powerful symbol of renaissance hermeticism is the meeting of form and growth apparent in an

architecturally planned garden, such a one as, in *Rats and Gargoyles*, it is Casaubon's ambition to create: 'Laid out in pattern and proportion, but built of growing things: flowers, mosses, trees. A microcosm laid out in concentric circles, with the plants of each Celestial sign growing in their proper places.' This garden motif occurs in several of the stories, being at its most symbolically powerful in 'The Knot Garden', where it is the arena of interaction between humans and those descending energies designated Lords of the Shining Path.

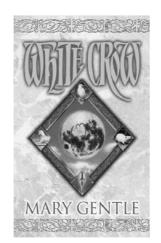
Another characteristic motif is a postmodernish historical fluidity and topsyturvydom, and yet another is the Renaissance

technique of memorising. The two may converge, as in 'Black Motley' where a music-hall performer has learned by heart a lampoon revelatory of sleazy political intrigue which he must be prevented from uttering. Political rivals are Disraeli and Gladstone, the widowed Queen is a

plurality of tail-knotted rats, and the White Crow, as a mercenary agent, is herself a silver-furred rat of the dominant rodent race. Rat Lords are also dominant in the city of *Rats and Gargoyles*, though there is also a kind of theocracy of thirty-six Decans. Counter to the inhuman monstrosity of their crumbling Fanes, Casaubon plans his

Temple and garden of cosmic concordance. Even in the midst of future Fortress London, locale of Left to His Own Devices, there is an English Renaissance Memory Garden, and, in The Architecture of Desire, Queen Carola's accursed cathedral remains perpetually uncompleted until Casaubon is conscripted to plan it. There, Carola is a Stuart-style monarch, tolerated by the female Protector-General, Olivia, in an alternative and ice-bound London. Although historically 'playful', it is a novella darker than its companion pieces, clouded by rape and guilt, but it ends with Valentine, Casaubon, and baby offspring, happily (one imagines temporarily) holed-up in the warrens of the Northbankside, topograhic reversals

Tamys's Northbankside, topograhic reversals complementing historical ones. It is the most psychologically-oriented and dramatically memorable component of this welcome assemblage.



#### Jon Courtenay Grimwood – Felaheen 🗔

Reviewed by Claire Brialey

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This, then, is the third Arabesk. Those of you who for some reason have yet to read Jon Courtenay Grimwood, even despite his recent appearances on BSFA Award and Arthur C. Clarke Award short lists, may be put off by the idea of starting partway through a sequence. The solution is fortunately

straightforward and in your own hands: stop reading this review until you've read both *Pashazade* and *Effendi* (preferably in that order).

You could, however, start here. The novel has the fractured narrative now customary for Grimwood, with several interlinking stories revealed in various orders, and enough of the back story is included for new readers to know everything they need to for this novel. Existing fans will find some interesting new jigsaw pieces in the process.

Ashraf Bey, who until quite recently had no particular reason to waste his time disbelieving his mother's assertion that he is the son of a Swedish hitchhiker, has had a life full of experience. Having survived a childhood which included both public school in Scotland and the vagaries of his mother's career around the world, and an adolescence which featured gang warfare in Los Angeles and a prison term relating more to underworld politics than any specific crime, Raf found himself in El Iskandryia bearing a diplomatic passport in a name he'd not previously used which identified him as the son of the Emir of Tunis. Apparently not yet even in the prime of his life, he's spent

Earthlight, London, 2003, 357pp, £12.99, h/b, ISBN 0-7434-6117-7.

the past two novels exploring new career options as the Chief of Detectives and as Governor whilst remaining unconvinced about his identity.

Now he doesn't really have a job to worry about, which is just as well since his past is troubling him and his personal life needs some attention. As well as dealing with the genius niece, the woman who everyone else thinks is his mistress and a dead mother who may have screwed him up in more ways than he thought he knew about, Raf now needs to come to terms with a father and two half-brothers who make his current family situation look straightforward. The fox in his head is inevitably causing some problems, too, especially since Raf's never been sure about the fox's identity either.

This doesn't even begin to express the vision of future local and global society, the intricacy of the alternate history that underpins it, the exquisite personal touch of the characterisation, the anger accentuated by humour and the elegant plotting of brutal events which marks out Grimwood's work. And a further sensual experience is added to his exceptionally deft depictions of sex and gender relations, as Grimwood brings into the foreground the food and its preparation which have previously added depth and colour to the portrayal of life in Iskandryia.

Raf finds some answers: about his father, his mother, the rest of his family, the fox. Thus this part of the sequence draws to some conclusions, and it all makes sense in a twisted kind of way. Read it. Go now. Run.

#### Laurell K. Hamilton - Cerulean Sins

Orbit, 2003, 470pp, £10.99, ISBN 1-84149-139-X

#### Reviewed by Elizabeth A. Billinger

This is Hamilton's eleventh novel about the diminutive but feisty vampire hunter, Anita Blake. If you haven't read any of the other books in the series I urge you not to start here; if you're already a fan, then this is more of the same, so satisfaction is pretty much guaranteed.

The pleasures of Hamilton's Anita Blake novels are various and dubious and absolutely do not include fine writing. Hamilton is a good storyteller and her earlier novels kept one anxiously turning pages. Anita Blake is delightfully unsqueamish about gore and gruesomeness and kicks ass with great success; as the series progresses her sex life becomes increasingly complicated and increasingly explicit. There was a point in the series where sex seemed to have won the battle against plot, but a degree of balance is achieved in this latest volume.

Blake operates in a world where vampires are Out, coexisting with humans and enjoying similar rights. Magic, voodoo and raising the dead are everyday facts of life, but being a werewolf is something that you may still want to hide from your colleagues. Seduced by vampires and lycanthropes (in previous novels) Blake is not the free agent she once was. Hamilton stirs the blood/sex pot and gives Blake a need for sex that cannot be ignored and when acted upon restores her energy levels, a vampiric lust rather than blood-lust.

Cerulean Sins follows the usual pattern of Hamilton's books: Blake struggles to juggle her job raising the dead, her job as a Federal Marshal with jurisdiction over preternatural crimes, and her position as assistant to one of the most powerful vampires around. Caught in the fallout of power struggles amongst the elder vampires, her abilities to deal with a series of especially vicious murders are compromised. Blake needs the help of the entire cast of characters from the previous novels to pull off her latest contribution to saving the worlds of the living and the dead.

Although Hamilton uses a very familiar formula for the book it is noticeable that her writing style has changed over the course of these novels. Some of the roughest edges have been smoothed away, the repetitive references to Blake's clothes (her Nikes with the blue swoosh in particular) have been minimised, the worst instances of telling rather than showing have been cut. Unfortunately, these improvements rob Hamilton's writing of its rather endearing clunkiness; her voice becomes less recognisable, pushing her work away from the delightfully trashy and towards mediocrity.

#### Thomas Harlan - Wasteland of Flint

Reviewed by Tony Cullen

Aztecs are rather in vogue in this country after the success of the Royal Academy's recent exhibition. Admirable timing, then, for Thomas Harlan to turn from the Oath of Empire series of alternate histories of the Roman Empire to an alternate future of the Aztec Empire.

In this universe, Japanese traders crossed the Pacific to sell weapons to the Aztecs long before the Spanish got there. Over subsequent centuries, the Aztecs conquered the world, then stretched their empire to the stars. This merely

forms the social and political backdrop to this hard sf novel rather than taking centre stage.

Gretchen Anderssen is a xenoarchaeologist, working for a corporation whose business is the discovery and exploitation of the technology of the long-dead 'First Sun' civilization. The First Sun mysteriously vanished millennia before, leaving behind ruins and artifacts throughout human space. On her way to another routine dig, Anderssen is ordered to lead a rescue party to Ephesus III to discover the fate of a survey team whose communications have inexplicably fallen silent.

Something about this mission is particularly out of the ordinary. The team will be transported on an imperial warship, rather than a commercial transport, and will be accompanied by Green Hummingbird, an Aztec noble. What they find may not only answer the riddle of the fate of the First Sun, but also be a very real threat to the human race.

Tor, New York, 2003, 430pp, \$27.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-30192-X

All of which sounds fairly routine in these days of Alastair Reynolds and Paul McAuley. Harlan's unique spin on what is becoming one of the standard tropes of modern of the Aztec milieu in which his tale is embedded. Anderssen, who only achieved her position by tremendous good fortune, is effectively a third class citizen, who knows she will never earn enough to ensure her children a proper education. Hadeishi, the warship's captain, being merely Japanese, knows he will never be promoted further, while

his young first officer will eventually achieve flag rank because she is Aztec. The downbeat tone is closer to recent British sf than the usual gung-ho of American space opera. This is perhaps best illustrated by the thread of the story that follows the warship, which never descends into the kind of hardware-fetishising that characterises much military sf. Instead, the focus is on the complex web of relationships and trust that bind together the tight-knit crew.

A solidly written book, then. The characters, particularly Anderssen and Hadeishi, are very

well drawn. By the end I'd developed quite a soft spot for the proud old officer. I hope he turns up again in the promised sequels. I had read nothing by Harlan before this, and came to the book expecting nothing special. I was very pleasantly surprised. This is a good story, well told. Not a classic, but if what one might call humane hard sf is to your taste, then I can recommend this without hesitation.



#### Robert A. Heinlein – Podkayne of Mars

Robert Hale, London, 2003, 204pp, £17.99, h/b, ISBN 0-7090-7139-6

#### Reviewed by Simon Morden

Podkayne of Mars is a Robert Heinlein story written in 1963 for the young adult market and recently republished in hardback by Hale.

The eponymous protagonist, named after a native Martian saint, has just turned sixteen. She and her younger, hyper-intelligent brother, Clark, are due to take a long-anticipated voyage to Earth with their parents, when a mix-up at the cryogenic baby store scuppers their plans. Wise old warhorse Uncle Tom steps into the breach, and whisks the two children away for adventures between planets and later on Venus. The story romps through social and political shenanigans, romantic entanglements and radiation storms. Heinlein tells a good story, and plot-wise he doesn't disappoint.

Science hasn't been kind to this tale: we know for sure that Mars is a freezing near-wacuum, and Venus a corrosive hell-hole. There might be indigenous life on either planet, but it'll be no bigger than a microbe. That's fine: disbelief can be suspended.

But there are more serious problems than outdated planetary data. Poddy, shown to be bright and sensible and independent, is made – forced by the author, in fact – to

quote Heinleinian cant. Her thoughts on the nature and status of the female sex are not just at odds with modern sensibilities, but at odds with her own character and family background. Her younger brother, an irresponsible hooligan with a penchant for chemistry, is allowed room to breath and develop. Poor Poddy never gets the chance, the artificial social straightjacket tightening its straps from page one. The main adult character, Uncle Tom, is set up to be the hero. The reader is told as much all the way through: this is a man to look up to. When it turns out that he is a cold, calculating abuser of his position of trust, he is still shamelessly written as someone to emulate. Perhaps, in Heinlein's universe; not in mine.

As the recent 'Masterworks' series from Gollancz has shown, some sf stands the test of time; they grow in stature, and becomes classics of the genre. This isn't one of them. The story is fine, but there's too much political and cultural baggage that comes with it. The subtexts and no-so-subtexts might fly over younger readers' heads, but they'll strike adults with full force.

#### Erin Hunter - Warriors: Into the Wild

Reviewed by Elizabeth A. Billinger

This is the first in a series of cat books for children. It's an exploration of community and allegiances, made fantastic by the use of cats rather than humans. It's also about the difficulties of being a child, about learning self-sufficiency, interpreting relationships and discovering that adults are not necessarily always to be trusted.

Rusty is a domestic kitten. He's old enough to be gaining some understanding of the world around him, but not quite old enough to have been neutered. He's a restless spirit, a cat who appreciates the comforts of home but can't help longing for something else besides. One night he discovers that there are tough, wild cats living in the woods beyond the safe territory of his garden. Offered the opportunity to join these wild, warrior cats, Rusty has to make a tough decision, choosing to leave behind his domesticated friends to take up a life of which he knows nothing and join a clan who greet him with hostility and derision.

The area is divided into four territories where the four local clans hunt but, because food is becoming scarce, enemy raids are on the increase. Rusty must make his peace with the rest of his own clan, learn how to be a

HarperCollins, September 2003, 304pp, £4.99, p/b, ISBN 0007140029

warrior and help to defend Thunderclan territory. Naturally, none of this is as easy as it sounds.

The descriptions of cat behaviour in this book are pleasingly accurate to a cat-owner, movements and behaviour patterns seem very familiar, though there is of course a high degree of anthropomorphising, because this is a tale intended to encourage a child who feels that the whole world is against him. What it lacks, however, is a convincing degree of characterisation. The cats are given distinctive names derived from their physical appearance, but they are introduced en masse early in the book without taking time to sketch in strong personalities. Fortunately the cast is handlily catalogued at the front of the book, otherwise the reader is in danger of feeling as confused as poor Rusty.

Although the characters are developed as the story progresses, the book fails to draw in the reader. The language is always slightly stilted and self-comscious, and everything is explained as though the author does not trust the reader to work things out for himself. This is not a bad book, but there are many more accomplished and captivating books available for the younger reader.

#### Nancy Kress – *Crossfire*

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

This novel describes the journey of a group – or, rather, several groups including New Quakers, a deposed Arabian Royal farmily, and a wannabe tribe of Cheyenne – of settlers to the somewhat tweely named planet of Greentrees, and their early attempts to build their own visions of society, sixty-nine light-years away from a decaying Earth. The

Tor, New York, 2003, 364 pp, \$424.95, h/b ISBN 0-765-30467-9

whole enterprise of setting up a human colony on another world has been instigated by Jake Holt, through his company, the Mira Corporation. Like many of the other colonists – the troubled New Quaker with the rebellious daughter, the nervous palaeontologist, the argumentative geneticist – Jake is starting out on a new world without

having rid himself of the baggage from his old life on Earth, but his personal problems have to take a backseat when, contrary to surveillance reports, Greentrees proves to be home to sentient alien life. The reactions to the discovery of the first small group of aliens, who are living a primitive existence and are apparently uninterested in their new neighbours, vary considerably amongst the colonists, particularly when it is discovered that there are in fact two species of aliens who have an interest in Greentrees and they are at war with one another. The colonists are soon divided as to which side they should be on.

Crosslire may be set in the future, but for the reader it is surely reminiscent of the past. Here is science fiction as it used to be, with interstellar travel not that much more difficult than catching or piloting a plane, furry humanoid aliens (known as Furs) at war with plant-like aliens (known

as Vines). The problem of communication with said aliens is overcome by the "translators" of superior alien technology, while a small band of intrepid humans try to prevent the newly built Mira City, and its thousands of inhabitants, becoming a pawn in the aliens' war and destroyed.

The effect of reading this novel is very much like that evoked by watching early episodes of *Dr Who* – a trip down memory lane. It is science fiction of the cosiest variety but succeeds well enough on its own terms and within its own parameters. It is a novel that is out of step with the cutting edge of the genre, but if you are looking for a light read to see you through the proverbial train journey then you could do worse.

#### David Langford – *Up Through an Empty House of Stars* Reviewed by Chris Hill

Cosmos Books, 2003. 310pp, \$21.95. t/p. ISBN 1-59224-055-0



Up Through an Empty House of Stars is a selection of David Langford's non-fiction writing from 1980-2002, most of the pieces not previously collected. The articles come from a variety of sources: Vector, SFX, The New York Review of SF, Interzone,

Foundation, etc.

I find it quite difficult to be entirely objective about the reviews and essays in this book. I was a teenager when I first came across Langford, when he was the book reviewer for *White Dwarf* magazine. He was the first reviewer I read who talked about the individual books in their own right rather than trying to fit them into some grand scheme of science fiction. The articles were witty and fun and made a fairly large contribution towards the development of my adult sf reading.

However, *UTaEHoS* is a salutary reminder of an important fact about Langford that, in his role as the 'clown prince' of sf criticism, is often forgotten: he is incredibly well read both inside and outside the sf field. As several of the items show, Langford knows as much about detective fiction as he does about sf. He uses a review of a collected edition of Nero Wolfe novels as a springboard to discussing the merits of Rex Stout's creation and also discusses the more obscure Ernest Bramah. Perhaps of particular interest to *Vector* readers, there is also an introduction to a collection of Anthony Boucher's detective stories.

On the sf side, there are a number of reviews, some familiar (his review of Heinlein's *The Number of the Beast* is perhaps one of his most well-known pieces), many less so. The reviews are of the normal high standard and manage to be both intelligent and entertaining. As an admirer of Gene Wolfe it is nice to have all of the *Book of the Long Sun/Book of the Short Sun* reviews finally collected together.

A particular pleasure in this volume are some of the longer essays on the science fiction of G. K. Chesterton (1980), silly gadgets in science fiction (1992), and, perhaps the most impressive, an examination of the changing use of revenge motifs in the novels of Jack Vance. Also included are his introduction to the Science Fiction Foundation's Terry Pratchett: Guilty of Literature and an adapted version of the introduction to Maps: The Uncollected John Sladek, recent winner of the non-fiction BSFA Award.

The only negative comment I have about the book is regarding the 'Original Appearance' index which lists the pieces in alphabetical order, rather than in the order they appear in the book which I would have found more helpful. I was not particularly taken with the rather 1970s-style orange cover either.

Nitpicking aside, this is a fine volume which should find a place on any self-respecting sf fan's shelf. But I really do not need to tell *Vector* readers this, do !?

#### Stephen Lawhead - Patrick 🛄

Reviewed by Kathy Taylor

Patrick is a pseudo-historical fantasy set in fifth century Europe. It follows the adventures of Succat, later known as Patrick, the arrogant son of a Romano-British family, starting with his kidnap and enslaving at sixteen, through his time as a druid, as a Roman soldier, and later rise in Roman society, and finally his return to Ireland as a leading exponent of the Christian religion.

The book is written largely from the first person perspective of Succat, with a heavy dose of authorial voice

HarperCollins, London, 2003, 454pp, £17.99, h/b ISBN 0-00-714884-4

added in. I disliked both aspects. Stephen Lawhead skilfully portrays Succat as a three-dimensional character and shows his flaws and development clearly, but the character was one I could neither like nor empathise with. At sixteen Succat is unbearably self-centred, shallow and arrogant to the point of gross stupidity. After eighty-odd pages of a book written from the viewpoint of this character I had long since lost the capacity to care when he failed or bad things happened to him. Bad things do happen, and not just to

Succat; and a kinder review could agree with the description of 'gritty and unsentimental'. Unlike John Wilson's Guardians of Alexander, where the callous realism added to the atmosphere, in Patrick it almost seems just added for 'local colour'. The authorial voice was used to give irritatingly vast information dumps that seemed designed to show off his research into the period, and endless pages of description that padded out rather than

added to the story. To me the story seems bloated and in need of a strong editor to remove a lot of the padding and pull outthe story which may be somewhere in here.

This is the first Stephen Lawhead I've read so I don't know how typical it is. I can't recommend it at all; others of his may be better, I don't know. If you want to learn about life in this period find a good history text; if you want decent light fantasy go elsewhere.

#### Barry N. Malzberg (ed.) – The Best Time Travel Stories of All Time

ibooks, New York, 2003, 440pp, £10.99, t/p, ISBN 0-7434-5814-1

#### Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

The title is a hostage to fortune. How far has Barry Malzberg travelled to determine that no better time travel stories ever have been, or will be, published? The answer is, not very far at all. The earliest stories contained here, 'Time Trap' by Charles Harness and 'Brooklyn Project' by William Tenn, both appeared in 1948; the most recent, 'Time Travellers Never Die' by Jack McDevitt, came out in 1996. The greatest time travel novella of all, 'The Time Machine' by H.G. Wells, is absent. But then, it was probably excluded by reason of geography, since Malzberg has not ventured outside the continental United States for his cast list; which means that one of the most inventive of all time travel stories, 'The Very Slow Time Machine' by lan Watson, is also missing.

Another (partial) absentee is Ray Bradbury's 'A Sound of Thunder', the tale of a tourist in the Jurassic who steps on a butterfly, and changes history. I say 'partial' because, while there is no reference to it in the contents list, in the copyright acknowledgements, or in Malzberg's introduction, stuffed into the middle of this book is a full-colour graphic adaptation of Bradbury's story. The graphics are quite good, but the subtlety of the original is missing. And one is left to ponder why Bradbury's story was not included in Malzberg's collection in the first place.

Actually the omissions tell us a great deal about this collection. These are not time travel stories, they are, rather, time paradox stories. With the exception of Poul Anderson's bitter comedy of a twentieth century American soldier who finds himself in tenth century Iceland, 'The Man Who Came Early', and Robert Silverberg's 'Hawksbill Station', in which left-wing dissidents are exiled to the early Paleozoic (and which he expanded into a novel almost

immediately after it was first published in 1967), these stories are awash with history being changed, with travellers trapped in an endless loop, with characters confronting themselves. Which means that an awful lot of time travel fiction is excluded simply because its focus is on characters out of their time. True, paradoxes make for intellectually stimulating puzzles, and have often resulted in the most interesting examples of the sub-genre, but they are nottthe whole story.

Thus, although there are excellent stories here - Philip K. Dick's 'A Little Something for us Tempunauts' (the first time travellers attend their own funeral after burning up on William Tenn's 'Brooklyn Project<sup>\*</sup> extraordinary prefiguring of R.A. Lafferty's 'Thus We Frustrate Charlemagne'), 'Ripples in the Dirac Sea' by Geoffrey A. Landis (a traveller trapped in time because he can't avoid coming back to the moment of his death) there are too many others - 'On the Nature of Time' by Bill Promzini, '3 Rms Good View' by Karen Haber, 'The Chronology Protection Case' by Paul Levinson - which do no more than jump repeatedly through the same overfamiliar hoops. A paradox really isn't all that interesting if you already know the particular twist it takes, or the particular trick for avoiding it.

As a themed collection of 15 stories (and one 'graphic adaptation') this is an entertaining book. The word 'Best' in the title probably makes us more conscious of the few that don't come up to scratch than we might otherwise be – though it does excuse the reappearance of stories that most of the intended audience are likely to be very familiar with. But as a serious survey of time travel fiction it is partial and misses out an awful lot of what the sub-genre has done.

#### Juliet Marillier – Wolfskin 🚟

Tor UK, 2003, 560pp, £16.99, h/b, ISBN 1-4050-0038

#### **Reviewed by Tanya Brown**

Juliet Marillier's earlier fantasy novels – the Sevenwaters trilogy – have earned her a cult following in the US, but a rather lower profile here in Britain. It's something of a surprise, then, that Tor have chosen her new novel, Wolfskin, as their lead title for the launch of Tor UK.

Wolfskin tells the story of the Viking colonisation of the Orkneys, which is gemerally believed to have taken place some time before 1000 AD. There are two protagonists: Eyvind, a Viking berserker, and Nessa, a Pictish priestess. Nessa doesn't appear until Eyvind's character is well established, but after that the two viewpoints alternate and intertwine. A man, a woman, a dramatically wild setting:

the ingredients for the colonial romance of your choice. But the story isn't that simple, and Juliet Marillier's blend of speculative history and fantastical elements is more effective than many attempts to portray a magical past.

Eyvind grows up in a close-knit Viking community, his sole ambition to be a Wolfskin like his brother. He befriends an outsider – Somerled, awkward younger brother of the nobleman Ulf – and ends up swearing bloodbrotherhood to him. Ulf's ambition is to found a new colony on the 'Light Isles': a colony which can then be used as a stepping-stone to the riches (whether traded or raided) of the British mainland. When he sails for the islands, both Somerled and Eyvind accompany him.

Nessa, meanwhile, has been leading a blameless life as a priestess, learning the rituals and becoming more in tune with the natural forces that shape life on the islands. She observes the initial meetings between the Folk and the incomers, and shares her observations with the Christian priest Tadhg.

For a while it seems that the colony might be established peacefully. Butthen a terrible, apparently ritual, murder sparks violent retribution and threatens a way of life that has existed for time out of mind.

The historical element of the story is credible enough, and this would be an accomplished historical romance if there were nothing else to the story. But this is fantasy, though the magic that underpins the story is subtle rather than spectacular. Eyvind's initiation as a Wolfskin, and Nessa's rituals as priestess, are magical experiences: whether they are objectively real is a different matter. Magic isn't a tool for making things easy, or for breaking natural laws. In part, it's a belief system that is embedded in

both Pictish and Viking ways of life: a sigmificance attached to events, actions, places.

This is a novel about ties and bonds: about the natural loyalty that exists, or should exist, between kin, and the loyalty that is manufactured between a Wolfskin and his Jarl, or between blood-brothers. (There's a strong theme of brotherhood: Eyvind's love for his true brother Eirik and his blood-brother Somerled, Somerled's difficult relationship with his own brother). It explores the ways in which women gain power in a male-dominated society, and the choices each individual must make in order to live well.

Eyvind and Somerled, Tadhg and Nessa and Ulf, are all utterly credible characters, embedded in their time and their culture. Somerled is especially fascinating, a man too clever for the culture into which he's born. The meeting of Pict and Viking cultures, a dry historical event, is given a human dimension in *Wolfskin's* exploration of that encounter's life-changing consequences for all involved.

#### L.E. Modesitt Jr – Archform: Beauty 🕮

#### Reviewed by Iain Emsley

Archform: Beauty is a return to sf for Modesitt, currently better known for his fantasy series, with a curious book that perhaps loses itself in its own machinations and constructions. In the future, technology ensures that the basic needs of everyone are met but there is little actual meaning to everyday life. Modesitt takes us through this world with five characters, each struggling to find their own meaning. A singing teacher works through the bureaucracy surrounding her course and performing for an indifferent elite. A news reporter begins to suspect that there is a deeper story to the one he is researching. A police investigator begins to see a deeper pattern to the crimes that he is investigating. Meanwhile a politician tries to get re-elected on a platform of honesty, as a businessman continues his search for power and wealth. As each story progresses, historical roots are uncovered - hatred from the Nazi party and beauty from a piano recital - and a strangely old-fashioned sftale reveals itself.

Each plot arc unfurls itself as a fractal, endlessly reworking its own internal algorithms, to produce a multistranded novel that occasionally loses itself in itself. Whilst Orbit, London, 2003, 434pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 1-84149-251-5

the reader is able to jump to their own conclusions as to how the strands and time periods may match up, there is still enough ambiguity there to unsettle. *Archform: Beauty* has a tendency to lose itself in its attempt to be multi-linear and occasionally descends into a welter of varying voices and questions.

However, each story plays out the notion of what it is to have a meaningful life and the book is essentially a wonderfully human novel. Modesitt asks difficult questions, rarely looking for a cheap and easy answer to them.

Archform: Beauty is an entertaining, read which tries to be something different, to be a deeply human sf novel which looks at the effects of having a highly technologically evolved society. However, it comes across as being messy and in need of some bolting together before it fully works.

#### K.L. Morgan – Castledance: from the Chronicles of Fiarah

TriQuest Publishing, Orem, 1997, 405pp, \$14.95, p/b, ISBN 1-58308-183-6

#### Reviewed by Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc

The first impressions are bad: lightning-fingered fantasy couple on the cover complete with pious 'arty' stare-away-from-the-wiewer expressions, pointy ears and dodgy facial hair. Maps, badly reproduced by what appears to be a dot matrix printer. Letter of endorsement from Terry Brooks. A mention of JRRT. And the ultimate recommendation: that we'd want to read this book for the 'pure....goodness of it'. Goddess Hryxqator spare your humble servant and smite these omens with the might of your blessed trident! A little way in and the faux archaic language coupled with the worrying prospect of gnomes appearing at some point raise the level of concern to boiling point. But despite these anxieties (meerciifully the aforementioned gnomes are

teasingly only referred to in passing) there lurks a spritely and, dare we say, enjoyable tale of adventure.

Relatively young delf, Wit, has unwittingly discovered a secret hidden fortress (indeed the plot bears many similarities to Kurosawa's epic film), and the surrounding countryside is littered with murdered bodies from all races (bar those bloody gmomes). He manages to make it back to civilisation and asks the ruling council to set up a team to engage on a reconnaissance mission to discover the reason for the fortress popping up out of nowhere. Naturally the team are made up of all races (bar those bloody gnomes). Meanwhile Lady Fiarah the Historian has been kidnapped in a maggically superior ambush by... well that would be

telling... leaving her ballad-writing paramour floundering in his elven court. Why has she been abducted and who, if anyone, can save her?

Irotting along at a decent pace, Castledance stumbles occasionally but regains its footing well. There are a number of twists to keep things fresh (trolls are not necessarily bad and have a penchant for long and flowery names) while the realisation of the magic is imaginative and clear. The level of detail in throwaway touches such as

descriptions of fauna or bread help flesh out the world far more than the aforementioned maps. And when Wit comes across dead bodies it affects him, even if he doesn't know them - there is an inherent humanity in him that is often replaced with angst or testosterone in other works. Overall it's nothing new but as an undemanding read for early teens you could do a lot worse, the goodness of it notwithstanding...

#### Robert Reed - Sister Alice

#### **Reviewed by Graham Andrews**

Sister Alice had its long beginning in Asimov's SF Magazine: 'Sister Alice' (November 1993); 'Brother Perfect'

(September 1995); 'Mother Death' (January 1998); 'Baby's Fire' (July 1999); 'Father to the Man' (September 2000).

The novella is the awkward cuss of short-form fiction. As Leo Margulies once wrote, in his editor's introduction to *Three in One* (Pyramid, New York, 1963): "Though preferred in magazines as a lead-off story, the short novel is uncommon in paperback [or hardcover] books." Except, that is, when several novellas are fused into synergetic continuity as in the 'fix-up' novels of A.E. van Vogt (*Rogue Ship*, *The Silkie*, etc.).

But Sister Alice has been produced on the 'modular' plan. Each novella stands alone, with no sore-thumb 'frame story' to lend interstitial support. James Gunn is the Past and Present Master at this patchworky thing, a prime example being Crisist (1986).

Foreshadowing: 'I was reveling [sic] in how perfectly carefree my first taste of life had been... and that was the moment when my instincts first warned me, whispering in my countless ears that our work had gone seriously, tragically wrong...' (opening epigraph from Alice's testimony).

Alice is Sister Alice Iwelve, venerated co-instigator of an immortality program that makes Methuselah's children look like the proverbial gleams in the eye. She has lived through the Great Wars and the subsequent Ten Million Year Peace, which is maintained by umpteen ironclad

of this ultimate multi-generational saga.

Orbit, London, 2003, 403 pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 1-84149-125-X

rules. There are exactly one thousand Families scattered to every solar wind in the galaxy and beyond. But the Ords and the Chamberlains dominate most

Now big-Sister Alice has returned from starfaring to warn the Families against their own perversity and against the Universe itself, seething with righteous indignation. *Everyone Has Blundered* would serve as a good overall

Arch fix-upper van Vogt wrote all of his stories in 800-word scenes, working through a new concept/situation in each self-contained unit. Don't hoard ideas, he advised fellow sf

writers, but start a flow. Once such a flow is underway, the problem is to turn it off, not to keep it going.

Reed does much the same thing in *Sister Alice*, while making more sense than the overly tangential van Vogt. Take terraforming, for just one rethought example: '. . . a ringed gas giant. World-sized continents built of hyperfoams floated in its atmosphere, linked together like chains, the winds carrying them with a dancer's precision'. Why, he even puts a new spin on snowball fights!

Better still, Reed has a wondrous way with words – especially last-line words. Check out the fate of Xo Nuyen (a tourist guide and/or galactic gillie): 'And the Core was glorious, and hideous, and he steered for it while wiping every flavor of tear from every sort of eye.'



#### Mike Resnick - The Return of Santiago

#### Reviewed by Colin Bird

Mike Resnick is prolific, even by the standards of a genre which is saturated with trilogies and multi-volume epics, seventy-six sf novels is a pretty respectable total. And much of his work has been critically lauded, particularly the Kirinyaga series, which according to his website, is the most honoured series of stories in the history of science fiction. He is a writer who has embraced the coming of the ebook and is well represented by various web publishers.

The Return of Santiago is a sequel to the bestseller Santiago published in 1986. However, it's unnecessary to have read the previous volume to follow events in this follow-up. The titular outlaw and assassin vanished over a century before the new book takes up the story. Danny Briggs, a petty thief who lives by his wits on the frontier of

Tor, New York, 2003, 464pp, \$25.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-30224-1

known space, stumbles upon the original manuscripts of a huge narrative poem by the legendary Black Orpheus which details the exploits of Santiago. The original verse reveals the truth behind the myth: Santiago was not one brigand but a series of freedom fighters who took up the persona and fought an ongoing battle against the tyrannical empire of the Democracy using the perception that they were outlaws to mask their true mission of liberation.

Danny sets out on a quest into the lawless territories of the Inner Frontier to find a man capable of taking up the mantle of Santiago's legend and renewing the battle to overthrow the Democracy. He comes across a motley band of outlaws and lawmen with colourful names like Waltzin' Matilda, The One-Armed Bandit and Virgil Soaring Hawk. The novel follows Danny's efforts to find one good man and to convince him of the need for a new Santiago.

The 'Western in Space' theme is played out a little too comprehensively for my taste; Resnick's future is never a believable one. But that is, perhaps, missing the point of what is clearly intended as a colourful romp. Many of the staple western cliches feature; impossibly hard-boiled

dialogue (which occasionally devolves into banal chatter), a bank heist, running from the posse, the saloon showdown and double cross after double cross.

Resnick's breezy prose reveals the hand of a skilled storyteller and fans of sweeping space opera will surely enjoy this novel despite its bursts of repetitive dialogue and a predictable climax.

#### Alastair Reynolds - Redemption Ark

**Reviewed by Peter Young** 



Alastair Reynolds is one of the few authors who now go immediately to the top of my reading list, and I know I am not alone in this. If there are lovers of space opera who have still not sampled the dark Reynolds universe, then the best point of origin is of course Revelation Space, though

the 1999 short story 'Galactic North' is also an excellent place to start (and is, one suspects, where the entire story arc has to finish).

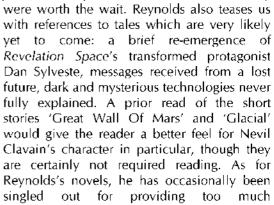
The threads that make up *Redemption Ark* are also continuations of several stories first begun elsewhere, and it is more of a direct sequel to the earlier novel *Revelation Space* than to its immediate predecessor *Chasm City*. We are also treated to the welcome reappearances of memorable characters such as Ilia Volyova, Ana Khouri and the plaguestricken ship *Nostalgia for Infinity*; along with Nevil Clavain, Remontoire and Felka, (who have all appeared elsewhere), this time as Volyova's adversaries. *Redemption Ark* takes Clavain much further than in his previous

adventures: as an old enemy of the hive-mind Conjoiners who defected from the Demarchists, the Conjoiner Closed Council needs to trust Clavain to formulate a defence for humanity as a makeshift response to the alien Inhibitors. The Inhibitors are now, in the early twenty-seventh century, descending on the Delta Pavonis system and the colony world Resurgam. Knowing that humanity's only hope for the future lies in a missing cache of Conjoiner weapons,

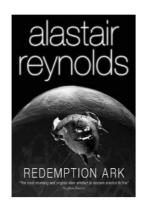
Gollancz, April 2003, 646pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07384-5

Clavain must track them down before the Inhibitors can strike, but this may mean defecting once again to spread word of the danger. This leads him into dangerous dealings with the bizarrely augmented Conjoiner factionalist Skade, and the newly-introduced lovers Antoinette Bax and Xavier Liu, brought into the tale by Clavain's timely intervention in an earlier event, who soon learn they are involved in something that will pull them into very deep waters indeed.

Central to the story are of course the Inhibitors, whose fearsome and remote nature was only hinted at in Revolution Space, and they are here revealed in full. They



background so that things sometimes run a little slower than they might; but this is a well-realised and detailed universe and worth spending time in. He also knows when to keep the language spare and taut, and the solidity of his writing is more apparent in his full-length novels than in some of his shorter works. Until his next novel *Absolution Gap* appears in October, *Redemption Ark* provides enough action, conceptual depth and good storytelling to please anyone. This is definitive space opera.



#### Robert J. Sawyer - Humans

Tor 2003, New York, 384pp, \$24.95, h/b, ISBN 0-312-87691-2

#### Reviewed by Mark Greener

Some 40,000 years ago, the universe split in two. In one reality, Cro-Magnons evolved into *Homo sapiens* and replaced the Neanderthals as the dominant human species. In the other universe, Neanderthals remained on top. An accident with a quantum computer opened a conduit between the universes and Ponter Boddit, a Neanderthal physicist, entered the sapiens' world.

In *Humans*, the Neanderthals deliberately open a pathway between the universes. Ponter returns with his colleagues and rekindles his relationship with geneticist Mary Vaughan, still devastated following a rape. Culture and knowledge begin to flow between the universes, while Mary and Ponter fall in love. However, some members of

the Neanderthal hierarchy aren't happy with the growing links. Then one of the Neanderthal delegation is shot outside the UN and Mary's rapist strikes again ...

The pedant in me quibbled over some of the details. I can't accept, for example, that as one Neanderthal notes: the humans 'exterminated us'. For example, some skeletons show morphological features of both Neanderthals and sapiens, but date from several thousand years after the former died out. These could not arise from occasional interbreeding.

Sawyer mentions, almost in passing, that there are other theories, however, I felt that the book didn't give enough weight to the alternative explanations for the Neanderthals'

demise. After all, Sawyer's Neanderthals are supposed to respect the primacy of scientific data, yet they cite the extermination as a reason for closing the conduit. And Sawyer doesn't really take the opportunity to examine the clash between conflicting evidence and prejudice in science or society, largely because he emphasises only one side of the debate. Normally such quibbles wouldn't especially bother me, but I felt that *Humans* was flawed in more fundamental ways.

For example: *Humans* is hard sf, and Sawyer employs cutting-edge science – genetic cartography, quantum computing, neutrino analysis – so there's a lot of information to get over. Sawyer is clearly a good writer and often weaves the essential information into the narrative with considerable skill, but on a number of occasions it reads more like pop science than a novel.

Moreover, the book has several polemic messages, many of them familiar from alien contact stories over the years; pacifism, the advantages of world government, respecting the wisdom that comes with age and so on. In many cases, these are motherhood and apple pie, so in general, I agree with Sawyer or at least respect his position. And on occasion he can be brilliant: his pithy examination of the paradoxical basis of the Vietnam War is insightful and witty. On other occasions Sawyer labours the point too much; I would have found some of the messages in *Humans* much more effective had Sawyer been a little more restrained.

Sawyer is undoubtedly a good writer. The characterisation – especially of Mary and Ponter – plotting

and style is effective. However, for the book to work well, he needs to highlight the difference between the two universes. There is a sojourn in the Neanderthal universe, but it's too brief and too late so that comparisons must be made retrospectively.

Most of the comments about the Neanderthal Earth seem somewhat superficial – the shape of the car, their 'sensible' marriage arrangement and tolerance of bisexuality. In the latter two cases I wanted more detail, more analysis. I wanted an approach closer to, for example, Le Guin – someone to really get under the skin of a society.

At heart *Humans* seems to be another alien encounter novel. The Neanderthals simply put a new spin on an old sf trope. The contrast between the two human species could be more powerful, evocative and insightful than that with a reptile or humanoid, but you could almost replace Ponter with Klaatu or any number of other 'alien strangers' in the human strange land and make the same points with the same force. It seemed, to me, to be something of a wasted opportunity.

I couldn't, in all honesty, recommend *Humans* unreservedly, admittedly without reading the first book in the trilogy. But equally I can't condemn it out of hand. It's a reasonably entertaining way to while away a few hours. Yet Neanderthals can engender a real sense of wonder; just read Shreeve's non-fiction book *The Neanderthal Enigma*, for instance. This might be one example where truth is better than fiction.

#### Andy Secombe – Limbo

Reviewed by Paul Bateman

Why is it that comic fantasy has almost always to be about Armageddon? It's all right for a while. Some of it can even be quite good, but how many times has the fate of

Discovorld or Brentford hung teetering over a vat of warm marmalade? And it's this staleness of dējā vu that Limbo

reeks of. At least Douglas Adams had the decency to destroy the Earth in the first place, tell some amusing jokes and get on with the story. And I'd better get on with telling the story of *Limbo*.

The Queen of Limbo Castle gives birth. This worries the King, not because he hasn't slept with his wife for ten years, but because having read the full text of The Prophecy in The Book he knows that a terrible fate awaits him when his heir reaches his first birthday. To stop this happening the Wizard advises the King to rid

the land of all reference to The Book. This backfires and the Great Terror begins. Worse yet, the King's two long-banished brothers are plotting their revenge. The Wizard escapes to Earth with the heir in order to save him, but accidentally loses him, not knowing whether he's survived.

Meanwhile, Rex, fantasy fan and newsagent from Brighton, is caught up in the events emanating from Limbo. A monster created from the amalgamation of the King's brothers is wreaking havoc in time, and reality is Tor UK, London, 2003, 277pp, £10.99, t/p, ISBN 1-4050-0484-3

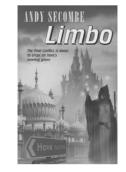
unravelling. Oh, and Armageddon is looming, but isn't it always? Could Rex, beyond all hope, be our unlikely hero, the like of which we've only previously seen incarnated in umpteen *Discovorld* novels?

And herein lies the problem. The unlikely hero saves

the day as million-to-one chances happen nine times out of ten. (Don't worry, I'm not spoiling the ending; I haven't mentioned the Roman legions, a bowls captain who buys up local businesses or genetically engineered giant clams, but there's only so much I can summarize given limited space.)

Despite what I've written above, I actually enjoyed *Limbo*, probably more than some of Terry Pratchett's more tired work. The characters are reasonably well drawn, the plot logical enough, but the quality and inventive use of

language one would expect of Rankin or Pratchett is lacking. Secombe wants to break into a market dominated for the past two decades by these authors, but needs to let himself relax and not be so controlled, to get the *freshness* of prose and ideas to make headway in this sub-genre. With a book or two more, I can see me potentially nibbling at these words in years to come.



#### Roderick Townley – The Great Good Thing

Simon & Schuster, London, 2003, 210pp, £9.99, h/b. ISBN 0-689-83708-9

Reviewed by Farah Mendlesohn



The Great Good Thing is a classic about a classic. It is a book for readers. I have no idea if it is a book for child readers.

The bare bones are these: Sylvie is a character in a book, a book which has not been read for many years. The book is a 1917 fantasy in which

a young princess seeks to do a Great Good Thing Before she marries. Her adventures are sequential and unrelated and she is rewarded at the end of the story with a Prince.

It's a good story, but a little predictable. Those who know their fantasy will recognise the influence of Carroll's *Sylvie and Bruno*, or Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*.

When a new Reader picks up the book Sylvie looks up. Her vision of the Reader tempts her to the edge of the page, and thence to the edge of the book and into the Reader's dreams. When the book is destroyed she rescues her family and moves permanently into Memory, and from there, aided by a girl with dark blue eyes, she finds a way to have her story retold and become, once again, a character in a book.

So much for the framework. The Great Good Thing is entrancing. From the moment we meet Sylvie charging through the shortcuts between descriptions to arrive in time to be on page three for the reader; as she and her parents pant and puff their way through the dialogue; we know that this is something different. When they realise the boy isn't even 'listening' we know we are elsewhere – the metatext has become the text. But this is not simply a tale told from the other side of the portal. Townley imbues Sylvie's life, and our understanding of that life, with a sense of the reader. Read it again: the boy is not listening. This is a tale that is being told.

This is a book about what happens when the Child that Books Built, reads. 'The princess could feel the cool shadow of the Reader overhead and hear her breathing. Storybook characters live for the sound of Readers breathing, especially as it softens and settles like the breath of dreamers. It gives the characters courage to go on through the most difficult plot twists.' The boundary between reader and book is blurred; the naturalness, the sheer necessity of reading is a central assumption.

True readers read a book more than once, cherishing the cosy familiarity of repetition, along with difference of texture and tone that even a day's growing up brings with it. From Sylvie's point of view, the interpretations change with *her* mood, funny when she forgets her lines or moving in too much of a hurry when a reader enters the book in the middle.

The Great Good Thing plays with borders and boundaries and it is here that Townley really produces something unusual, for The Great Good Thing is told entirely from Sylvie's point of view, and Sylvie is, in the end, a character from a book. Townley never lets us forget the implications of either. Although Sylvie travels into her reader's dreams, she cannot wholly understand what she finds there, nor is she ever allowed fully into our world.

Eventually, Claire's brother destroys the book and Sylvie and her family must discover the difference between being characters in a

book and in a dream. They must discover *spontaneity*. It does not come easily. And Sylvie must discover the lessons of the other world, about age, and grief and impossibility, without ever being let fully into that other world. There is a guide: the girl with dark blue eyes appears as mysteriously as she disappears. There are several hints that the girl with dark blue eyes may be not just the First Reader, but the writer, though as with many other apparently crucial pieces of information in this book, we are never told.

The beauty of *The Great Good Thing* is what is demanded of us. This tale is as much about us and who we are as readers, as it is about Sylvie. It is a tale of childhood, of the passage of memory. It is the telling, as much as the story that it is at stake. It is rather a shock to reach the end and realise that little has happened, but that much has gone into the telling.



#### Scott Westerfeld - The Risen Empire

Tor, New York, 2003, 304pp, \$24.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-30555-0

**Reviewed by Stuart Carter** 



Parochialism can be a terrible thing. There was I thinking we Brits pretty much had space opera all sewn up these days when along comes Scott Westerfeld to poke me in the eye with a ravening death beam. Well, a top quality piece of transatlantic sf anyway.

The Risen Empire is the first of a two-part piece of far-future hard-ish sf wherein humanity has split into at least three different branches and seems to have explored and settled a small but respectable

percentage of our galaxy. The Risen Empire at the centre of this tale consists of 80 worlds ruled by – surprise, surprise – the Risen Emperor. The Emperor developed a form of immortality some 1,600 years ago and has deftly wielded this powerful tool of social engineering to hold the empire together ever since by granting eternal life only to those he favours.

One group the Emperor definitely does not favour are the Rix, a cyborg offshoot of humanity who worship godlike, Al, compound minds and see it as their life's work to propagate them all across the galaxy, much to the chagrin of all non-Rix humanity.

The Risen Empire successfully fended off a Rix incursion almost a century ago but now it looks like they may have to do it again, although this time the Rix have not come in force but have struck at a single outlying world and – disaster! – captured the Emperor's beloved sister. Only the Lynx, a single, medium-sized Empire frigate that happened to be in the system, stands a chance of stopping the Rix invaders. The Lynx's commander happens to be in love with one of the Empire's senators, who is safe in the heart of the Risen Empire, and thus we get two stories for the price of one: a gripping action tale on the front line and a Machiavellian political one back 'home'.

Scott Westerfeld's writing shares some qualities with that of our own Richard Morgan - he writes combat sequences *very* well and has the same slightly geeky fascination with the stunning technology he envisages.

There's nothing really that new in Westerfeld's galaxy, but he makes old stuff cool all over again.

Thankfully the Rix are no mere clone of the Borg but are presented as a rather misguided segment of wider humanity – all the more so because their 'gods' don't actually care about them at all. The Risen Empire is also not just another America in disguise but a complex and increasingly archaic social throwback, one that looks destined to lose this war; maybe not soon, but eventually and inevitably.

Clever, well-thought out and absolutely gripping – Scott Westerfeld can write deadly, cool spaceships just as well as fragile, warm people – sometimes even in the same sentence!

#### Tad Williams - The War of the Flowers 🖾

viewed by Estella Bahauts

**Reviewed by Estelle Roberts** 

Goblins, fairies and other traditional mythical entities appear in this tale of Faerie, but Tad Williams also manages to create a thoroughly modern Fairyland, where hand-held mirror devices take the place of mobile phones, and the aristocracy do not live in castles, but in gigantic, city skyscrapers. It is a place similar to reality, yet very different.

Theo Vilmos, a thirty year old musician and deliverer of flowers, is having a bad time. His girlfriend has just dumped him, having recently lost their baby, and his mother has just died from cancer. He's also beginning to feel that his life lacks focus, that he has achieved very little as middle age starts to loom. While sorting through his mother's things, he comes into possession of a book written by his deceased great uncle, which tells of a supposed visit to Faerie many years before. Theo is inclined to regard it as a work of fiction, but is drawn into the narrative. He takes it with him when he retreats to his family's cabin in the mountains. There he is attacked by a monstrous unearthly entity, and is only saved by the intervention of Applecore, a sprite, who, opening an interdimensional portal, drags him into Faerie. Caught in the middle of an impending civil war between the ruling houses, all named after flowers, Theo discovers that the technological advances of his home world are having a extremely detrimental effect here, as some of the aristocracy are so in thrall to this technology that they are prepared to pay a very high moral price to have it in their world. He also finds out that the almost inevitable war will lead to the mortal world's practical destruction if the wrong side is victorious.

Orbit, Landon, 2003, 686pp, £17.99, h/b, ISBN 1-84149-127-6

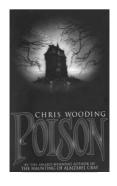
This book draws in the reader, and you do empathise with most of the characters, particularly Theo, as he tries to understand and find a place in this strange new world. Some of them are a little too precisely delineated with regard to being good or evil, particularly certain members of the ruling families, but Applecore, who could have been very irritating, is actually quite endearing, and Poppy, the young, rebellious daughter of a Flower family, is a wonderful character. When battle between the factions is finally, and dramatically, joined, the action moves along very swiftly, but there are scenes which are both very moving and harrowing, as certain characters will, it seems, stop at nothing in pursuit of their objectives. The treatment of Fairyland's own ethnic groups is also a fairly major focus of the novel, the goblins being a down-trodden and subservient race, who eventually seize their chance to rebel, their binding contract to serve the faires having been literally broken on prime time broadcasting by their selfsacrificing leader. This is a page turning book with depth, which has encouraged me to read more of the author's work.

#### Christopher Wooding – Poison

Reviewed by Iain Emsley

Chris Wooding has carved out a niche for himself as a master of writing books that appeal to a wide variety of ages, never talking down to the reader. In *Poison*, he continues his path as a writer of distinction but perhaps he has pushed his ambition slightly further than his talents currently allow.

Poison is a wilful child, determined to have her own name rather than one chosen by her disapproving stepmother. When her baby sister is stolen by the Phaeries, she decides to go into



Scholastic, London, 2003, 269pp, £12.99, h/b, 043998162X

Phaerie to rescue her. Having sought advice, she hitches a ride across the border, meeting up with the Phaerie Lord. As the tale goes, she is drawn into a plot to destabilise the multiverse and to steal an artefact from the Spider Queen whilst the Hierophant, the scribe of Phaerie, is close to dying. Wooding's writing comes alive when the true nature of the plot is revealed as the Phaerie Lord plots to overthrow the human Hierophant and to assume the writing of the Story.

Wooding pushes his characters and universe

to the limits and then some, creating a wonderfully inventive Fantasy of Phaerie, one that rescues the land from the clutches of Disney and its ilk. Far from being saccharine stories, there is an edge of danger, of daring, in these exploits. This is pushed to the limits when Poison meets with the Hierophant's right hand man and he recognises that she has seen through the façade of Story, so changing the novel into something else entirely.

The characters are wonderfully strong, especially the women in the novel. One senses that, rather than being a deliberate comment upon the role of women in Fantasy, this is more because he is interested in them as active

characters. Even the citizens of Phaerie are wonderfully realised, each with their individual traits, rising above the standards set by others.

Wooding doesn't quite meet with his own expectations in the book, his not inconsiderable talent comes close to his ambition, but falls a little short. Despite this *Poison* is a wonderful novel which revels in itself; one that does not talk down to the readers and indeed plays along with their expectations. This should be on the reading list of anyone at all interested in good writing.

#### Roger Zelazny – Changeling

#### Reviewed by Alan Fraser

Changeling is, by today's doorstopper standards, a short book and this reprint is now marketed as an adult novel, but I understand that it and its sequel, Madwand, were originally published for teenagers. At the start of this fantasy, the evil sorcerer Det Morson is overthrown by the white wizard Mor. Det and his wife Lydia perish in the ruins of his castle, Rondoval, but their baby son, Pol Detson, is discovered alive. Pol has a dragon-shaped birthmark that marks him as a future sorcerer. Unwilling to kill the child, Mor takes him to a world where fantasy is only a myth – ours. However, the laws of symmetry demand that Mor takes a child from our world back to the magic world. He exchanges Pol for baby Daniel Chain, son of an American university science professor.

Twenty years later both boys are misfits. The real Daniel Chain, now called Mark Marakson, has become a mechanical genius, making gadgets and vehicles that first amuse and then frighten the people of his village. The fake Daniel Chain is a student of Mediaeval Studies, frustrating his scientific father, who also plays guitar in a club, but has developed mental powers that he does not understand and can barely control. Also, Michael Chain is becoming sure his son wasn't born with a dragon-shaped birthmark...

Then things go really wrong. Driven out for making a steam-driven car that the villagers call a demon, Mark Marakson makes his way south to a ruined city, where he discovers a still-working avatar for the computer systems of a lost city. This world is not pre-treatmonology, but post-

ibooks, New York, 2003, 252pp, \$11.95, p/b, ISBN 0-7434-5819-2

technology, with all such devices banned after a cataclysm almost destroyed it. With his technical skills and the surviving computer, Mark is able to tap into this forbidden technology and use abandoned manufacturing facilities to build an army of mechanical servants together with planes, tanks and weapons. At this point the ageing wizard Mor realises the threat and what has to be done about it. No longer able to confront Mark himself, he travels to Earth and abducts the fake Daniel Chain, staying behind on Earth to maintain symmetry. Pol Detson/Daniel Chain is then stranded on the magic world, and needs to work out what's happening fast and use his unharnessed power to save the world from the menace of Daniel Chain/Mark Marakson and his mechanical army.

Changeling is a competent fantasy, but I didn't like the demonising of Mark Marakson, turning him from a young version of Nick Park's Wallace into one of Jules Verne's evil scientists who wants to rule the world. He was, after all, the wronged party, an innocent child abducted from Earth and dumped in a place where his talents could never be used legitimately. Back home, the Chains now have to face up to the disappearance of a son they are starting to suspect wasn't really theirs. I would have appreciated the book more if Zelazny had found a different way of resolving the conflict between the changelings. Zelazny was known for his innovative plotting and characterisation, but none of it is in evidence here.

#### Sarah Zettel — The Usurper's Crown Reviewed by Carol Ann Kerry-Green

TOR, New York, 2003, 525pp, \$27.95, h/b, ISBN 0-312-87442-1

In Zettel's first novel of Isavalta, A Sorcerer's Treason, we met Bridget Lederle, the lighthouse keeper from Sand Island, Kalami, the treacherous sorcerer and Medeoan the embittered, old-before-her-time Dowager Empress. The book followed Bridget's attempts to come to terms with the fact that her father was not Everett Lederle, but a sorcerer of Isavalta, Avanasy, and that her mother had willingly followed Avanasy to Isavalta, returning alone and pregnant.

In *The Usurper's Crown*, we meet Bridget's parents, Ingrid Lottfield and Avanasy, the exiled sorcerer. Medeoan is a young princess, just married and very much in love with her husband, Prince Kacha. Avanasy is her personal sorcerer, teacher and mentor. But, Avanasy angers

Medeoan by trying to tell her that Kacha is not all that he seems, and she banishes him from Isavalta.

On Sand Island, Ingrid lives with her parents and sister, Grace. Returning from Bayfield, Grace is rescued from drowning by the ghost of a drowned sailor. Enthralled, Grace tries to join him; Ingrid, in attempting to save her, meets the fisherman Avan, who agrees to help. Using his magic, which is harder to utilise on Sand Island than in Isavalta, Avan(asy) manages to free Grace. Ingrid and Avan begin a tentative courtship.

All is not well in Isavalta though. Medeoan's parents have died from a mysterious illness that her magic could not cure, and she is thrust into becoming Empress, the job

she never wanted. Eventually, she begins to suspect that Avanasy is right about Kacha. Why does he have one eye and one hand that appear more aged than his other hand and eye? Discovering that he means to bind her to him, Medeoan makes her plans to escape. Taking on the form and identity of a palace servant, and with the aid of her Captain of the Guard, Peshek, she escapes Isavalta.

Avanasy is summoned by lakush, the court sorcerer, with the grim message that his mistress needs him and that she has left Isavalta. Torn between his duty and his new love for Ingrid, Avanasy knows he must return. Ingrid though is not prepared to lose him and agrees to go with him across the Land of Death and Spirit, where she meets with the Vixen and Baba Yaga who both appear to want something from her. When they do manage to meet up

with Medeoan, who is being held captive in Hung Tse, they are too late to stop the Nine Elders of the Heart of the World from releasing the Firebird against Kacha's armies that are marching against them.

This novel takes the unusual step of going backwards in the story, to portray the earlier lives of characters only mentioned in *A Sorcerer's Treachery*. Even though you know who lives and who doesn't, the story is gripping and it helps to put into perspective the embittered Medeoan you meet in the earlier novel. Again, Zettel intertwines fantasy with alternate worlds and mystical stories from Russia and China. A brilliant read and a well-portrayed fantasy world. Hook forward with interest to the next book, *The Firebird's Vegeance*.



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

#### Poul Anderson - Conan the Rebel

Tor Books, New York, 2003, 223pp, \$13.95, p/b, ISBN 0-765-30073-7

Paperback reissue of Anderson's version of the muscle-bound oaf hero Conan, first published in 1980. Conan leads a band of savage pirates to free a land from the tyranny of an evil reptilian god. You get the idea. Could be seen to have particular relevance to our times given recent events in Iraq although I may be reading too much into this.

#### Neal Asher - The Skinner

lor UK, London, 2003, 583pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-330-48434-6 Paperback of Asher's second full-length novel with his third, *The Line of Polity*, reviewed favourably in *Vector* 229. Three travellers arrive on the ocean planet Spatterjay, each with apparently conflicting missions: Janer does not even know why he is there, only that he must bring the hornet hive-mind to the planet; Erlin searches for an ancient sea captain; Sable Keech, who has been dead for seven hundred years, continues his vendetta. But it is the planet Spatterjay that is the strongest and most well-realised character, with an ecosystem deadly to most visitors. A recommended excursion into Asher's future history (but not for those with a weak stomach).

#### Anselm Audley - Inquisition

Earthlight, London, 2003, 550pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-7434-1502-7 Continuing directly from the events in *Heresy* with our heroes searching the Archipelago for a fabled artefact which can predict the devastating storms and is a weapon in its own right. Reviewed in trade paperback by Vikki Lee in *Vector* 225 who found it to be disappointing and very much suffering from 'second volume of trilogy' symptom, with much 'running around with little progress'.

#### Terry Brooks - Morgawa

Earthlight, London, 2003, 401pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-7434-1496-9 Concluding volume of the Voyage of the *Jerle Shannara* trilogy (others not received) with the centuries-old sorcerer, Morgawa, pursuing the crew of the *Jerle Shannara* with a fleet of airships crewed by the dead. Airships in fantasy are almost always a good sign (especially if it's Moorcock).

#### James Clemens - Wit'ch War

Orbit, London, 2003, £7.99, 710pp, p/b, ISBN 1-84149-190-X James Clemens – *Wit'ch Gate* 

Orbit, London, 2003, 530pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN I-84149-197-7 Books 3 & 4 of the Banned and the Banished series. Wit'ch War tells of the young Wit'ch Elena's search for Blood Diary which contains the secrets she must master to defeat the Dark Lord. Wit'ch Gate continues Elena's quest as she tries to build an alliance to free the land of Alasea after the Weirgates have been opened, allowing elemental magick to seep through. Andrew Adams reviewed the first of the series in Vector 225 finding it difficult to overcome the spurious punctuation (which isn't just restricted to the title).

#### Ben Jeapes - The Xenocide Mission

Corgi, London, 2003, 388pp, £5.99, p/b, ISBN 0-552-54815-4. This excellent book was reviewed in hardback by Farah Mendlesohn (Vector 226) and although published as a young adult novel is likely to appeal to all ages. A sequel to His Majesty's Starship, this novel centres on the relationship between a human and two aliens; one a Rustie, the other from a race known as XT. The relationship is complicated by Earth having decided that the XTs are cowardly and dishonourable killers and so have set out to exterminate them. The discussion of the politics surrounding this action are especially timely. Strongly recommended.

#### Paul Kearney - Ships From the West

Gollancz, London, 2003, 296pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07400-0 Book 5 of the Monarchies of God series. Sixteen years after the events of the previous volume (Second Empire) and the Torunnans and Merdulks have become allies. Which is just as well as the lands are threatened by a fleet of ships from the west, crewed by a new race of men, lead by the immortal archmage Aruan.

#### Stephen King - Everything's Eventual

New English Library, London, 2003, 538pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-340-77074-0 The first volume of short stories for nine years from this author, the last collection being *Dreamscapes and Nightmanes*. This contains fourteen tales plus author introduction including the first printed version of the e-book 'Riding the Bullet'.

#### Brian Lumley - The Whisperer and Other Voices

Tor Books, New York, 2003, 333pp, \$14.95, t/b, ISBN 0-312-87802-8 Selection of short stories from an author more commonly known for his doorstopper horror series Necroscope. Contains eight stories, some, such as 'The Stattement of Henry Worthy', inspired by Lovecraft. Also contains a short novel *The Return of the Deep Ones* (Lovecraft again).

#### Anne McCaffrey - Freedom's Ransom

Corgí, London, 2003, 368pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-552-14909-8 Fourth volume in the Catteni sequence (space opera not dragons). The inhabitants of the penal planet Botany now have independence and are allied with a deteriorating Earth. A team from Botany must set off to recover stolen goods, including all the communication satellites, which are vital to the recovery of Earth and the future of Botany.

#### Sean Russell - The Isle of Battle

Orbit, London, 2003, 562pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 1-84149-193-4 Following the events of *The One Kingdom* Tam and his friends must search Stillwater, a fog-bound place hidden from the sun, for the injured Alaan, a mysterious character being hunted by the sorcerer Haffyd. Vikki Lee reviewed the first volume in *Vectior* 216 concluding that although 'routine fantasy fare' it was 'a cut above the average and well worth a look'.

#### Brian Stableford - Dark Ararat

Tor Books, New York, 2003, 352pp, \$15.95, t/b, ISBN 0-765-30596-8 Reviewed in hardback by Steve Jeffery in Vector 224, this is the fifth book in the six-volume Future History series (see Vector 201, 209, 213 & 218 for details). Following a 700 year slower-thanlight journey, the starship Hope arrives at Ararat, but the expedition is a shambles with revolution and divisions between the crew and scientists. A genomicist and a policeman are unfrozen from suspended animation to solve the fledgling colony's first murder. Simple question: why have these books not been published in the UK? Answer? Anyone...?

#### Vector #230 - Index of Books Reviewed

Poul Anderson - Conan the Rebel [F]	31	Paul Kearney - Ships From the V
Catherine Asaro - The Moon's Shaddow [AAA]	12	Stephen King - Everything's Eve
Neal Asher - The Skinner [P]	31	Nancy Kress - Crossiire [LB]
Anselm Audley - Inquisition [P]	31	David Lamgford - Up Through a
Steven Barnes - Charisma [III]	13	Stephen Lawhead - Patrick [KI]]
Max Barry - Jennifer Government [DMB]	13	Brian Lumley - The Whisperer a
Adrian Berry - The Giant Leap [SQ]	13	Barry N. Malzberg (ed.) - The Be
Terry Brooks - Morgawa [P]	31	to be a sign of the services.
Steven Brust, PJF - Cowboy Feng's Space Bar and Grille [TB]	14	Juliet Marillier - Wolfskin [TB]
Chris Bunch - Kmighthroodoofthe Dragon [LH]]	15	Anne McCaffrey - Freedom's Ra
Lindsay Clarke - Parzival and the Stone from Heaven [CB]	15	L.E. Modesittir - Archform: Bea
James Clemens - Wit'ch Gate [P]	31	K.L. Morgan - Castlledance: from
James Clemens - Wit'ch War [F]	31	Robert Reed - Sister Alice [GA].
Steve Cockayne - The Iron Chain [JNN]	15	Mike Resmick - The Return of Sa
John Commodily - BadiMen [PNB]	16	Alastair Reynolds - Redemption
Louise Cooper - Doctor Who: Rip Tide [GD]]	16	Sean Russell - The Isle of Battle
Peter Crowther (ed.) - Cities [CB2]	17	Roberttj. Sawyer - Humans [MiG
Cory Doctorow - Down and Out in The Magic Kingdom [DMB]	17	Andy Secombe - Limbo [PB]
Kate Elliott - The Gatthering Storm [FG]	18	Brian Stableford - Dark Arrarat (1
Mary Gentle - White Crow [KWB]	18	Roderick Townley - The Great (
Jon Courtenay Grimwood - Fellaheen [CB2]	19	Scott Westerfeld - The Risen Em
Laurell K. Hamilton - Cerulean Sins [EXR]	20	Tad Williams - The War of the F
Thomas Harlan - Wastelland of Flint [TQ]	20	Christopher Wooding - Poison [
Robert A. Heinlein - Podkayne of Mars [SN]]	21	Roger Zelazny - Changeling [Af
Erin Hunter - Warriors: Into the Wild [EAS]	21	Sarah Zettel - The Usumper's Cro
Ren Jeanes - The Xemocide Mission IP1	31	

Paul Kearney - Ships From the West [P]	31
Stephen King - Everything's Eventual [P]	32
Nancy Kress - Crossifire [LR]	21
David Lamgiford - Up Through an Empty House of Stars [OH]	22
Stephen Lawhead - Patrick [KI]]	22
Brian Lumley - The Whisperer and Other Voices [P]	32
Barry N. Malzberg (ed.) - The Best Time Travel Stories of	
All Time [PK]	23
Juliet Marillier - Wolfskin [TB]	23
Anne McCaffrey - Freedom's Ransom [P]	32
L.E. Modesittjr - Archform: Beauty [暗]	24
K.L. Morgan - Castlledance: from the Chronicles offFiarrah [COMLB]	24
Robert Reed - Sister Alice [Gif]	25
Mike Resnick - The Return of Santiago [CB3]	25
Alastair Reynolds - Redemption Ark [PY]	26
Sean Russell - The Isle of Battle [P]	32
Roberttj. Sawyer - Humans [MKG]	26
Andy Secombe - Limbo [PB]	27
Brian Stableford - Dark Ararat [P]	32
Roderick Townley - The Great Good Thing [FW]]	28
Scott Westerfeld - The Risen Empire [SQ]	28
Tad Williams - The War of the Flowers [ER]	29
Christopher Wooding - Poison [III]	29
Roger Zelazny - Changeling [Aff]	30
Sarah Zettel - The Usurper's Crown [CAKG]	30

Reviewers Key: AAA – Andrew A. Adams; AF – Alan Fraser; CAKC – Carol Ann Kerry-Green; CB1 – Cherith Balldry; CB2 – Claire Brialey; CB3 – Colin Bird; CH – Chris Hill; COMLB – Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc; DMB – Dave M. Roberts; EAB – Elizabeth A Billimger; ER – Estelle Roberts.; FC – Fiona Grove; FM – Farah Mendlesohn; GA – Graham Andrews; CD – Cary Dalkin; IE – Iain Emsley; JN – John Newsinger; KT – Kathy Taylor; KVB – K.V. Bailey; LB – Lynne Bispham; LH – Lesley Hatch; MC – Mark Greener; P – Particle; PB – Paul Batternan; PK – Paul Kincaid; PNB – Paul N. Billimger; PY – Peter Young; SC – Stuart Carter; SM – Simon Morden; TB – Tanya Brown; TC – Tony Cullen;