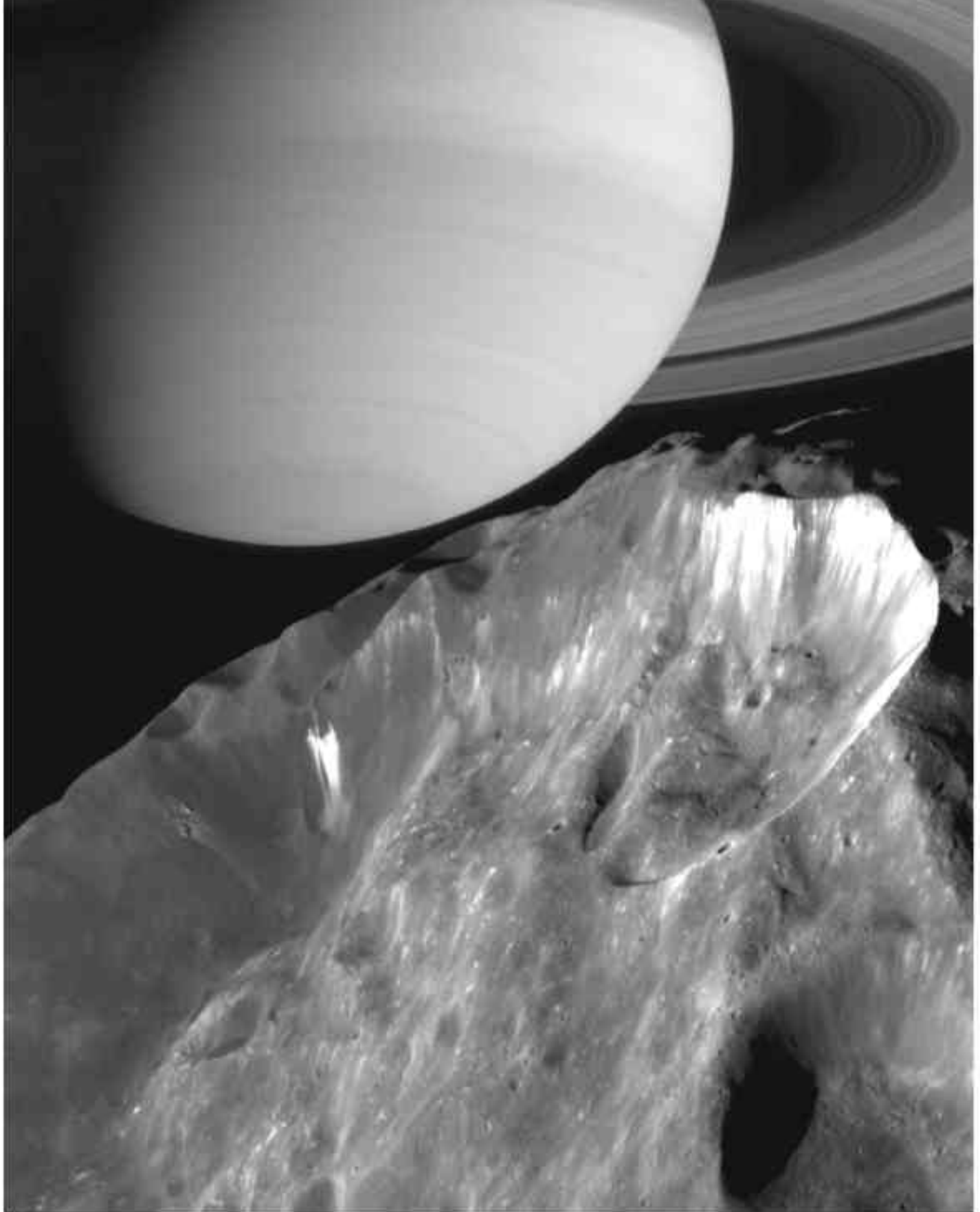


# **The Critical Journal of the BSFA** **Vector**

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# Vector

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THE CRITICAL JOURNAL OF THE BSFA

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## The View from the Pioneer

It has been very disconcerting – and a salutary lesson – to find myself reviewed at least three times in the last few issues. I hasten to add that I've no complaints about any of the reviews – and I certainly had no hand in the selection of reviewers or the editing of the reviews – although I am twitching ever so slightly. Did I really say that in my introduction? Not knowingly. Was it fair for a reviewer to borrow another respondent's complaint? Do I feel my own work to be admirable?

Of course it puts me in a difficult position – aside from the politics of when authors should respond to reviews – since I can't exactly write a letter of comment to *Vector*. Nor should I ask a friend to write on my behalf. Nor indeed should I use an editorial for this.

At the same time, I see criticism as being a conversation – as well as being the telling of a story about something which has moved the critic in some way – and you can only have a conversation if someone answers back. Some reviews can reveal something to the author which they hadn't actually thought of, but can now see in their writing. (I once set one of my own poetic efforts for a practical criticism analysis, and was amazed by the response. This is not to claim that my poem was great art or anything, but many of the things the students said about it were more profound than anything I'd intended. I've been suspicious of authorial intention ever since.)

They even give critics awards, sometimes. There's the Hugo Award for best related book, which has sometimes gone to criticism (but also to art books), and there was a BSFA equivalent, suspended for this year until we iron out some of the anomalies about what can and cannot be nominated. The IAFA have various awards, some based around their annual conference. And the SFRA give out a Pilgrim Award for a body of work and a Pioneer Award for best article of the year.

As Andy Sawyer revealed in his review of the British boom issue of *Science Fiction Studies* in the last *Vector*, my article '13 Ways of Looking at the British Boom' has won the Pioneer Award. Gosh. Personally, I'm more inclined to accept the verdict of *Interzone's* review in calling it a 'farrago' – but then my self-loathing is at particularly high levels at the moment which somewhat cranks up the self-deprecation. I was very surprised (and gratified) to receive the award, and never thought that it was something I was ever likely to

win.

A pioneer is not particularly how I imagine myself – to me it either suggests carts being pulled west across America or hacking your way through the jungle. Neither of these images seem appropriate, somehow. Although a week or so ago I nearly had to do some hacking when what was planned as a slightly longer walk than usual turned into charting *terra incognita* (ok, a failure to read the map correctly in trying to locate a footpath which would take me over, under or even towards the A2, nearly followed by an inability to read the map because it was dark) and finding rights of way distinguished by the extra density of nettles. Despite my concerns over the title, I'm flattered to receive it.

So the plan was for me to go to the SFRA conference in Skokie, Illinois, to receive the award from ... well, someone who lives about twenty minutes down the road from me, who happened to be the chair of the judges. Alas life has intervened in the form of some (hopefully temporary) health problems, and the discovery that there's no real way I can get out of the marking I need to do that week with a clean conscience. Various people have tried to persuade me, but I fear that it might be the straw that breaks the camel's back if I try to do it on top of everything else that needs to be done.

And that leaves me in Canterbury, trying to get some sun but mostly dodging out of the gloom, editing another *Vector* – something that I'd not factored into the timetable when I'd planned to go to the States.

There are a few apologies to make from the last issue – the first regarding my last editorial where the crucial word 'not' was omitted from 'Certainly when Gary S. Dalkin and I took over as feature editors in 1995, we were given instructions about the party line and told not to frighten the horses. Perhaps the horses are beyond frightening now'. Admittedly, the sentence still needs a rewrite, but as far as I recall (and the sense of the editorial hopefully made this clear) from the start we had a completely free hand in editing *Vector*, without any no-go areas being declared.

Secondly, a couple of web addresses were askew. The British Boom issue of *Science Fiction Studies* should be located at [www.depauw.edu/sfs](http://www.depauw.edu/sfs) and Wildside Press are at [www.wildsidepress.com](http://www.wildsidepress.com). Our apologies to all concerned – and see Dave Langford's letter elsewhere in this issue.

Andrew M Butler – Canterbury, early Summer 2004



### From David Langford, via email

I was greatly cheered by Gary Dalkin's generous review of *Different Kinds of Darkness* in *Vector* 235. But I must confess that this and the parody collection *He Do the Time Police in*

*Different Voices* don't in fact contain all my published short fiction. There are secrets of the universe with which Man was not meant to meddle, I felt as I studied certain early Langfordiana with appreciative little whimpers. Seekers after truth can learn more from the bibliography at [www.ansible.demon.co.uk](http://www.ansible.demon.co.uk).

By the way, *Vector* misprinted the URL for the above books' publisher, which should read [www.wildsidepress.com](http://www.wildsidepress.com).

*Apologies to Dave again for the error.*

Letters to *Vector* should be sent to Andrew M. Butler, Dept of Media, Canterbury Christ Church University College, Canterbury, CT1 1QU or emailed to [ambutler@enterprise.net](mailto:ambutler@enterprise.net) and marked 'For publication'. We reserve the right to edit or shorten letters.

THE YEAR SEES THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PUBLICATION OF THE SEQUEL TO A CHILDREN'S BOOK – A SEQUEL WHICH HAS SPAWNED AN INDUSTRY AND A TRILOGY OF HIT FILMS. BUT IT'S ALSO BEEN CONDEMNED BY A HOST OF CRITICS. *VECTOR* INVESTIGATES THE BOOK OF THE CENTURY...

# The Enduring Popularity and Influence of *The Lord of the Rings*

by Michèle Fry

When I was invited to write this article about the popularity and influence of *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955), my immediate thought was along the lines of 'I could write a whole book on that.' In fact, entire books have been written about the popularity of *The Lord of the Rings*, and chapters of books or lengthy articles have discussed its influence on fantasy writing. I read most of them in the course of preparing to write this article and one thing they all agree upon – whether they are written by Tolkien's supporters or detractors, is that the reasons for the popularity and influence of this epic fantasy are many. As H.G. Wells said, just over a century ago: 'To account for the vogue of certain books, the popularity of certain writers, has always been difficult, and in our time the task appears to have become impossible.'<sup>1</sup> Whilst I do not believe it to be impossible, it is not an easy task to explain just why *The Lord of the Rings* caused thousands of readers to vote it to number one in the Waterstone's poll of 1997 or the BBC's Big Read of 2003, nor indeed why dozens of critics in newspapers during the next few days condemned the results in horror. Interestingly, this horror was not duplicated in the United States, where Amazon.com customers voted *The Lord of the Rings* as the greatest book of the millennium, not merely of the century; rather, says Andrew O'Hehir the 'members of the US intelligentsia [...] fully expect to have their tastes ignored, if not openly derided, by the public at large.'<sup>2</sup> This seems to indicate that the horrified reaction of the British intelligentsia has as much to do with their expectations of having their views taken seriously, as it has to do with the allegedly inexplicable behaviour of the general reading public.

It has been suggested that W.H. Auden's comment at the time of the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, that:

Nobody seems to have a moderate opinion: either, like myself, people find it a masterpiece of its genre or they cannot abide it [...] That a man like Mr Tolkien, the English philologist who teaches at Oxford, should lavish such incredible pains upon a genre which is, for them, trifling by definition, is, therefore, very shocking<sup>3</sup>

is still applicable fifty years later. Auden's view has been echoed more recently by Anne C. Petty who believes that the critics' problem with Tolkien is that he:

was not one of the unlearned masses who could be ignored off hand by academics. He was *one of them*. Tolkien was an intellectual with academic credentials no one could dispute, and this meant he would have to be punished for writing beneath his station, so to speak.<sup>4</sup>

If the academics did feel that Tolkien's fantasy writing was a punishable offence, then he has received at least a fifty year sentence. I am inclined to agree with Auden's comment about the lack of 'moderate opinion', since most of the critical views which I have read have been passionate, whether they are in support of, or opposition to, Tolkien's work. One of the more startling, at least to me, reactions was that reported by Susan Jeffreys in *The Sunday Times* on 26 January 1997 describing a colleague, who, upon hearing that *The Lord of the Rings* had topped the Waterstone's poll said: 'Oh Hell! Has it? Oh my God. Dear oh dear. Dear oh dear oh dear.' According to Jeffreys this reaction was 'echoed up and down the country'.<sup>5</sup> One might expect such a reaction had an erotic novel won, but

for an epic fantasy written by an Oxford Professor, the reaction seems over the top. Of course, such polls as Waterstone's or the BBC's 'Big Read', are not a guide to the literary merit of a novel, any more than are the astronomical advances and global sales lately received by a number of authors. However, what continues to baffle both the general readers of Tolkien's work, and his supporters amongst the professional critics, is that Tolkien's detractors seem largely incapable of explaining just why they hate it so much. The detractors do not seem to offer much in the way of a reasoned argument, preferring instead to 'hint and sneer', calling readers 'retarded' or Tolkien himself 'childish'.<sup>6</sup> As Tom Shippey points out in his, arguably controversially titled, book *J.R.R. Tolkien Author of the Century*,

the assumption seems to be that those of the right way of thinking [...] will know without being told [what is wrong with *The Lord of the Rings*, whilst] those of the other party do not deserve debate;

these are the standard tactics of those who are attempting marginalisation.<sup>7</sup>

To go back to the initial critical reactions to the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, Edmund Wilson wondered why this 'balderdash' was so popular and concluded that 'it was because certain people – especially, perhaps in Britain, have a life-long appetite for juvenile trash'.<sup>8</sup> Wilson appeared to have forgotten his own advice from a quarter of a century earlier to take at their own word those readers who say they have responded to and derived 'pleasure or profit' from an 'outlandish-looking piece of writing' which 'we may be tempted to characterise as "nonsense", "balderdash" or "gibberish"'.<sup>9</sup> Colin Manlove seems to share Wilson's view about there being a national taste for fantasy, although Manlove seems to prefer to blame the United States and 'the perennial American longing for roots'.<sup>10</sup> Many critics consider the characters of *The Lord of the Rings* to be flat, alleging that:

there is not enough awareness of sexuality; good and evil are presented as absolutes, without a proper sense of inner conflict within individuals; there is something incoherent in the 'main pattern' of the story which prevents one from reading it as 'a connected allegory with a clear message for the modern world'. Most of all, *The Lord of the Rings* is felt not to be true to 'the fundamental character of reality', not to mirror 'an adult experience of the world', not to portray 'an emotional truth about humanity'.<sup>11</sup>

As Shippey observes, some of these reviewers' statements go 'beyond compromise'.<sup>12</sup> When appeals are made to "truth", "experience" and "reality", still more to "the fundamental character of reality", then those people who make these appeals "imply strongly that they know what these things are, an insight not likely to be shaken by argument".<sup>13</sup> Shippey considers it likely that 'at the bottom of the confrontation between *The Lord of the Rings* and its critics there lies some total disagreement over the nature of the universe, a disagreement surfacing in strong, instinctive, mutual antipathy which is incurable'.<sup>14</sup> He feels that the reasons for this antipathy should be made clear, and in doing so it can be shown that 'whatever may be said of Tolkien's view of reality, it was neither escapist nor thoughtless'.<sup>15</sup>

Douglas Anderson, in reviewing the critical reactions to

Tolkien's tale, notes that 'from the very beginning Tolkien's writings have evoked an initial reaction more emotional than intellectual', but he feels that the 'critical antipathy' has as much to do with Tolkien's 'style and tone' as it does to their genre.<sup>16</sup> Whilst it may be true that Tolkien's style and tone arouse antipathy there abounds, argues Ursula Le Guin, 'a deep puritanical distrust of fantasy' because to many people 'fantasy is escapism' and it gets confused 'with infantilism and pathological regression'.<sup>17</sup> This confusion angers Le Guin, who observes that whilst 'children need to be [...] taught right from wrong', using 'realistic fiction' to do so generally results in a 'simplistic moralism [...] so that you end up with baddies and goodies all over [...]'.<sup>18</sup> Or children are given the 'problem books', which cover the:

problem of drugs, of divorce, of race prejudice, of unmarried pregnancy, and so on – as if evil were a problem, something that can be solved, that has an answer, like a problem in an arithmetic [...] book,

and that

is escapism, that posing all evil as a 'problem', instead of what it is: all the pain and suffering and waste and loss and injustice we will meet all our lives.<sup>19</sup>

Hugh Brogan has claimed that Tolkien's mythology:

became a world where he could master all the grief and horror and ugliness of the modern world, giving it dignity and significance. It was therapy for a mind wounded in war, and before that by deep sorrow in childhood and young manhood.<sup>20</sup>

John Garth rightly scorns this view saying that it holds that 'Middle-earth was just a kind of fantastic laudanum for its author', and that 'many commentators clearly believe by extension, that it is nothing but a general opiate for millions of readers'.<sup>21</sup> That might explain the reaction of Jeffreys and her colleagues to the poll-topping achievements of *The Lord of the Rings*. The view of Tolkien's epic tale as an opiate brings us to the charge of escapism, which has frequently been levelled at *The Lord of the Rings*, but as Garth notes 'Tolkien was not purveying opiates: disgust, anger, and condemnation were perennial factors in his "escape" into fairy-tale, myth, and ancientry'.<sup>22</sup> It is Garth's belief that some of the success of *The Lord of the Rings* 'may be attributed to a sense of depth and detail unparalleled in an imagined world'.<sup>23</sup>

Going back to Anderson's comment about Tolkien's style and tone, both Tolkien's use of language, and his invention of languages have been discussed by critics, sometimes positively, but at other times, negatively. Garth, in his study *Tolkien and the Great War*, comments that *The Lord of the Rings* 'has earned [Tolkien] the opprobrium of reviewers who cannot see his prose style without suspecting him of jingoism' since the influence of First World War poets such as Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves on 'high diction' means that 'a taint has attached itself to this sort of language'.<sup>24</sup> And Brogan asks 'how it was that Tolkien, a man whose life was language, could have gone through the Great War, with all its rants and lies, and still come out committed to a 'feudal' literary style'.<sup>25</sup> Brogan believes 'that in refusing to conform to the new rules established by Robert Graves and the arch-modernist Ezra Pound, Tolkien was engaged in "an act of deliberate defiance of modern history"'.<sup>26</sup> But as Garth observes, the

abuse of high diction in battlefield journalism or recruitment pamphlets does not devalue the mediaevalism that Tolkien pursued – any more than the kicking off footballs as a morale-booster during the Somme assault renders the game itself obscene or obsolete.<sup>27</sup>

Tolkien himself rebelled against what he called

the extraordinary 20th C. delusion that its usage *per se* and simply as 'contemporary' – irrespective of whether they are terser, more vivid (or even nobler!) – have some peculiar validity, above those of all other times, so that not to use them (even when quite unsuitable in tone) is a solecism, a gaffe, a thing at which one's friends shudder or feel hot in the collar.<sup>28</sup>

As Garth notes, 'Tolkien adopted a style that suited his mythological and legendary content. It was a choice as conscious and serious as the opposite but complementary decision made by Graves, Sassoon and Owen'.<sup>29</sup>

Various reasons have been offered for the enduring popularity of *The Lord of the Rings*, several of which are common to a number of critics/reviewers. Patrick Curry, in his book *Defending Middle-earth*, notes that Tolkien 'worked hard to create [...] a book that is non-allegorical. And wisely so, as that is one of the reasons it has lasted, and continues to find new generations of readers'.<sup>30</sup> I know that when I re-read *The Lord of the Rings* in the 1990s, after I had started to read literary and historical accounts of the First World War, it was the battlefields of Northern France and the comradeship of small companies of soldiers which were evoked in my head, rather than any links to either the Second World War or the Cold War. But as Tolkien himself noted in the introduction to *The Lord of the Rings*, the lack of allegory does not also mean a lack of 'applicability'.<sup>31</sup> Another reason why readers and (now) moviegoers keep coming back to Middle-earth, says Petty, is the fact that Tolkien is 'an accomplished storyteller, able to sweep his readers along on an epic journey of sacrifice, loss and redemption.' She also suggests that his 'skill as a philologist was [...] an important factor in his fiction – his invented Elvish languages could actually be parsed and spoken. The depth of historicity that infuses Tolkien's mythology is staggering'.<sup>32</sup> It is this 'sense of authentic history, fused with clarity and beauty of expression' that both 'draws new audiences' to the book and encourages readers to return to it, Petty suggests.<sup>33</sup>

Shippey feels that the 'continuing appeal' of *The Lord of the Rings*, though 'completely unexpected and completely unpredictable [...] cannot be seen as a mere freak of popular taste, to be dismissed or ignored by those sufficiently well-educated to know better',<sup>34</sup> which is particularly true given how popular it is on university campuses where the inhabitants are presumed to be reasonably well educated. It does tend to have the status of a 'cult classic', as Terry Pratchett has observed, and as he says,

we [all] know what 'cult' means. It's a put-down word. It means 'inexplicably popular but unworthy'. It's a word used by guardians of the one true flame to dismiss anything that is liked by the wrong kind of people.<sup>35</sup>

In some irritation Pratchett observes that *The Lord of the Rings* 'has well over one hundred million readers' and asks 'how big will it have to be to emerge from cult status?'.<sup>36</sup>

In Karen Haber's collection, *Meditations on Middle-earth*, which is a collection of very personal and largely unscholarly accounts of how Tolkien's Middle-earth has affected and influenced several fantasy authors, George R.R. Martin notes that 'Tolkien was the first to create a fully realised secondary universe, an entire world with its own geography and histories and legends, wholly unconnected to our own, yet somehow just as real',<sup>37</sup> and this has great appeal to many readers of *The Lord of the Rings*.

Harry Turtledove comments that Tolkien 'began building the lays and legends of Middle-earth more than twenty years

before [...] *The Hobbit* saw print. Almost twenty years more passed before *The Lord of the Rings* appeared.<sup>38</sup> As a result it is 'unique', suggests Turtledove, and 'likely to remain so. Most books come into being far more quickly'.<sup>39</sup> Even where an author has been working on writing a fantasy novel/series for some time before publication (J.K. Rowling springs to mind), the time spent is a mere handful of years in comparison to the time Tolkien spent 'world building'. Turtledove goes on to offer an explanation for Tolkien's enduring popularity:

Part of the answer lies in the ongoing, ever more rapid, changes in [...] life throughout the industrialised world [...] during the course of the twentieth century and especially after the end of World War II.<sup>40</sup>

As Turtledove notes, science and technology have brought about massive rapid changes to humanity in the last two centuries, and the changes have been so rapid as 'to grow visible in the course of a single human life'.<sup>41</sup> Tolkien's epic offers the reader a glimpse of a world where the verities underlying society endure, where moral values are strong, [...] and] where choices between Good and Evil are simpler than in the real world.' As a result, *The Lord of the Rings* is 'an anchor on a wildly tossing sea'.<sup>42</sup>

O'Hehir believes that it is 'Tolkien's whole-hearted rejection of modernity and modernism' that 'so powerfully attracts some readers, and just as powerfully repels others',<sup>43</sup> and this he feels is the answer to why *The Lord of the Rings* has caused such immense division since its publication. Meanwhile, Shippey suggests that the ability to 'read metaphorically' is what makes Tolkien's stories 'directly relevant to the twentieth century'; whilst we 'do not expect to meet Ringwraiths', "'wraithing" is a genuine danger'; whilst there is no expectation of meeting with a dragon, nevertheless, 'dragon-sickness is perfectly common'; there may not be a Fangorn Forest anywhere, but 'Sarumans are everywhere'.<sup>44</sup> Shippey suggests that these points are readily absorbed and they are the reason that Tolkien is considered 'downright threatening to members of the cultural Establishment', rather than irrelevant.<sup>45</sup>

Martin observes that 'Tolkien changed fantasy; he elevated and redefined it to such an extent that it will never be the same again',<sup>46</sup> whilst Richard Mathews believes that Tolkien 'bestowed a kind of academic blessing upon fantasy, and his lectures and critical writings were substantive contributions to literary theory about the genre'.<sup>47</sup> By bringing to bear 'a well-trained mind' that was learned in both history and philology, Tolkien helped to explain the aesthetics and traditions of fantasy.<sup>48</sup> Mathews goes on to say that it 'is nearly impossible to overstate Tolkien's importance in the history of fantasy' as the popularity of *The Lord of the Rings* 'led thousands of readers to rediscover the lost tradition of literary fantasy that originated with William Morris and George MacDonald' whilst 'new writers drew inspiration (and found an audience) for similar works'.<sup>49</sup> And Shippey observes that 'fantasy, especially heroic fantasy, is now a major commercial genre', as is witnessed by the huge box office returns for the three films of *The Lord of the Rings* directed by Peter Jackson; even the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences appears to have acknowledged this by awarding it all eleven of the Oscars for which it was nominated in 2004. Shippey goes on to say that fantasy existed before Tolkien [...], and it is possible to say that it would have existed, and would have developed into the genre it has become without the lead of *The Lord of the Rings*.<sup>50</sup>

But we cannot be certain that fantasy would have developed in the same way without Tolkien's influence. As Shippey notes,

one of the things that Tolkien did was to open up a new continent of imaginative space for many millions of readers, and hundreds of writers – though he himself would have said [...] that it was an old continent which he was merely rediscovering.<sup>51</sup>

In any given year, hundreds of fantasy novels find their way onto bookshop and library shelves, and from there into the hands of readers, and the

influence of Tolkien on [those books] is often apparent from their titles [alone, such as] the 'Mallorean' sequence by David Eddings, whose first title is *The Guardians of the West*, with *The Fellowship of the Talisman* (Clifford D. Simak), and R.A. Salvatore's *The Halfing's Gem* and *Luthien's Gamble* coming from other authors.<sup>52</sup>

The influence of Tolkien, says Diana Wynne Jones, is also observable in the following elements: a map at the front of the book that is 'dotted with invented place-names', which shows: a pre-industrial country governed by a tyrant (or Dark Lord) [who] is served by minions of a spectral and sorcerous nature, who in turn are served by a brutish soldiery [...] more than a little reminiscent of Tolkien's Orcs.<sup>53</sup>

Jones's list goes on to include the 'young and naïve' and probably orphaned hero, the 'sword with a name', and 'the mentor, a greybeard', who instructs the hero in magic but is otherwise secretive.<sup>54</sup>

Although

any full study of Tolkien's many imitators would have to be at least book-length [...] there is some interest in recording what a few of his most evident emulators have found inspirational in Tolkien, as in noting what they leave alone or cannot approach.<sup>55</sup>

suggests Shippey. The first example is Terry Brooks's 'generally derided, but still commercially successful, *The Sword of Shannara*'; Shippey notes that there was a rumour circulating when this book was published in 1977, that 'it had been commissioned by astute editors who knew they could sell anything sufficiently Tolkienian'.<sup>56</sup> If the rumour is true then the editors were quite right. Shippey feels that the similarities between *The Lord of the Rings* and Brooks's series are so close it is almost impossible to tell how good Brooks's tales are, but what *The Sword of Shannara* shows is that the fantasy reading public had developed such a strong taste (an addiction even) for heroic fantasy tales that 'they would take any substitute, no matter how diluted' if they could not get 'the real thing'.<sup>57</sup> Stephen R. Donaldson's 'Thomas Covenant' series, on the other hand, is far more original and has become 'something like a critique and even an attempted rebuttal of Tolkien', although it has a Tolkienesque impression 'deep stamped' on it, most clearly in its 'people-scape'.<sup>58</sup> Finally, in Shippey's group of emulators of Tolkien, is Alan Garner with his *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960), in which can be seen the influence of Alderley Edge; Shippey believes its influence was as strong for Garner as Sarehole's was for Tolkien, and he sees Tolkien's influence more in 'the level of scene and [...] of phrase' something which he acknowledges 'could well [...] be unconscious'.<sup>59</sup> Shippey believes that Garner learnt how to vary the style of speech used by characters so that dialectal language tinges the speech of some characters and some of the narration, making it strange yet still comprehensible.<sup>60</sup> Other emulators include Robin McKinley, who has echoes of Tolkienian architecture in her Damarian landscape, most notably the tower of endless stairs in *The Hero and the Crown* (1985), which echoes the tower of endless stairs which Sam climbs to rescue Frodo from the Orcs after the attack by Shelob;<sup>61</sup> and Ursula Le Guin who has digested Tolkien's



views on 'the importance of language [and] the importance of names'.<sup>62</sup>

It is worth also considering what authors have not attempted in the Tolkienian style, one aspect of which is the omission of the poems, in various different styles and often with complex metres, that Tolkien inserted at frequent intervals throughout his tales; Shippey suggests that one reason for this particular omission is that it 'is too much trouble, but another factor is probably the sheer depth of Tolkien's involvement with literary tradition: fantasy writers are not brought up the way he was any more'.<sup>63</sup> Alongside that is the apparent lack of interest in the 'literary gaps, errors, contradictions' that exist; whilst fantasy writers are happy to 'raid works like the *Elder Edda* or *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* for material', they are not so interested in re-writing them, pointing out their mistakes or reconstructing missing narratives from them.<sup>64</sup> Shippey says that a further feature of Tolkien's writing that tends not to be utilised are complementary narrative threads.<sup>65</sup> To be fair to Shippey, Philip Pullman's conclusion of the 'His Dark Materials' trilogy appeared in the same year as *Author of the Century*, so he was probably unaware that Pullman makes a fair stab at using several narrative threads in *The Amber Spyglass*. Similarly no other contemporary writer appears to have gone as far as Tolkien in creating imaginary languages, and it is possible that no one could, but both Tolkien's views on language and names, 'and the necessity for a feeling of historical depth' have clearly been recalled by some fantasy writers.<sup>66</sup>

Norman Talbot suggests that 'Tolkien's influence upon

later fantasy fiction is too vast to be quantified', but 'when a writer looms so inescapably over two generations of successors, 'the anxiety of influence' to use Harold Bloom's apt term, must affect even the most bare-faced of imitators and purloiners', which, it should be noted, the majority of Tolkien's successors are not.<sup>67</sup> The influence of Tolkien would probably only be inescapable if an author had never read any twentieth century fantasy fiction before writing, and the chances of that happening are very remote. As the *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer of November 1955 noted 'even a single reading [of *The Lord of the Rings*] will not quickly be forgotten' and 'it may be read [...] again and again [and if that comes to pass its influence will be immeasurable'.<sup>68</sup>

In conclusion, the reasons for the enduring appeal of *The Lord of the Rings* can be summarised as the non-allegorical nature of the tale (Curry), the applicability of its themes, Tolkien's skilful storytelling (Petty), the authenticity of the history of Middle-earth (Petty), the depth of its historicity (Petty and Garth), the beauty and clarity of Tolkien's expression (Petty), the fully-realised secondary universe which includes geography, history and languages that are capable of being spoken (Turtledove and Petty), Tolkien's rejection of modernism/modernity (O'Hehir) and the metaphorical relevance of *The Lord of the Rings* (Shippey). These are the reasons that have been identified for thousands of readers nominating it as their favourite book, and that have brought new readers to it in every year since its publication fifty years ago.

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23. *ibid.*, p. 309.
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30. Patrick Curry, *Defending Middle-earth: Tolkien, Myth and Modernity* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1997), p. 18.
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 68. 'The Saga of Middle-earth', *Times Literary Supplement*, 25th November 1955 quoted in Wayne G. Hammond 'The Critical Response to Tolkien's Fiction', in *The Proceedings of the J.R.R. Tolkien Centenary Conference*, p. 228.  
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During her brief career as a programmer, Michèle was introduced to the poetry of Siegfried Sassoon. An avid interest in Sassoon, and the poetry and history of the First World War led her to beginning a degree in English and History at the age of 30 at what is now the University of Gloucestershire. She concentrated on writing about the First World War during her degree until her final year when she wrote an essay on Harry Potter; 'Heroes and heroines: myth and gender roles in the Harry Potter Books' appeared in *The New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship* in 2001. Researching this paper re-kindled her love of fantasy and she has gone on to write a paper on J.K. Rowling's use of hero myths in the Harry Potter novels: 'Harry Potter: A Universal Hero', which was presented at Nimbus-2003. She is currently writing a paper on Tolkien's influence on women writers of fantasy to be presented at the annual Tolkien Society Seminar 2004, and has plans to write a book on fantasy heroines in young adult literature. She lives and works in Oxford—Eds.

WE MARK THE ANNIVERSARY OF A FILM RELEASED FIFTY YEARS AGO WITH ANOTHER OFFERING FROM DAVID CURL

## Kiss Those Boots of Shiny, Shiny Leather: Life Lessons of *Devil Girl From Mars*.

by David Curl

This article attempts, in the spirit of one who stands on the shoulders of giants, to add to an honourable tradition of psychotherapeutic engagement with culture: after Freud with Shakespeare and Sophocles, Yalom with Kafka and others, and Marriott with the Carpenters,<sup>1</sup> Curl with *Devil Girl From Mars* (1954). This film, directed by David MacDonald and produced by the Danzigers, seems once again topical for two reasons: first that this year marks its half-century, second and more importantly that with increased levels of environmental oestrogen, falling sperm counts, and the much-discussed 'crisis in masculinity', it seems timely to revisit – or just visit – a film in which men and women are forced to define themselves in the face of a powerful, though ambiguous (because 'from Mars' where men are now popularly alleged to be from) femininity.

I also take a step beyond Freud and Yalom in presenting a series of life lessons from the film, to cut out and keep. Freud didn't do this, but life went by at a more leisurely pace in his time and there was no such thing as television.

### **Life Lesson: Be Suspicious of Grand Narratives.**

In meeting the anxiety of difference, it's easy to peg, reduce and stereotype people and times. It's all too easy to regard the fifties as being 'about' One Nation Toryism, rationing, fog, Kingsley Amis and logical positivism, and so that decade was in part; however, as this film shows, the fifties were also about fantasies of voracious leather-clad interplanetary sex tourists menacing the Scottish highlands.

### **Life Lesson: Get Ready for Your Fantasies to Transgress All Sensible Boundaries.**

Grand systematised narratives, reducing life to one or a few essential dichotomous struggles, tend to draw a line around the facts that fit the narrative in question, rendering the rest of life impure or worthy of being disregarded.

This is a liberating film in its refusal to aim at descriptive purity; it is set, in a sense, in the Scottish Highlands, and in another sense in an imaginary transformative place into which people have wandered, *Midsummer Night's Dream*-style. *Devil Girl* is the child of two different cultural traditions, the American science fiction B-movie (think of *Attack of the 50ft*

*Woman* (1958)) and the British 'well-made play' (think of the decade before *Anger and Absurdity*; think particularly of J.B. Priestley's *An Inspector Calls* (1947), from which this film gets its avuncular chuckle); it's also inherited something from Oscar Wilde.

Your own dreams and fantasies similarly rise like vapour from the mixed stuff of your life; no ideology or system can possibly contain them.

After the film's title sequence, which includes stock footage of an aeroplane followed by an unrelated explosion (nothing to do with the plot, strictly speaking, but an intimation of the terrible power about to menace the fate of the world), *Devil Girl* opens at a remote Scottish hotel, the Bonnie Charlie, with news coming in over the radio of the Home Office's plans to investigate a meteorite which has just crashed in Scotland. There is, at this stage, no cause for alarm. There aren't many guests at this hotel, just Miss Prestwick, a smart young model from London who likes to drink tomato juice. As luck would have it, an escaped murderer called Albert (Peter Reynolds) then arrives. His sweetheart Doris (Adrienne Corri), who works at the Bonnie Charlie as a waitress, explains to her employers, Mr and Mrs Jamieson (John Laurie and Sophie Stewart) that he's a hiker who's unfortunately lost his wallet. Thanks to her quickness of thought, and because the Jamiesons 'cannot deny you hospitality,' he's able to check in. Professor Hennessey (Joseph Tomelty), the astronomer investigating for the Home Office, and Michael Carter (Hugh McDermott), an American reporter who's driving him, then arrive to stay over, en route to the crash site. Michael quickly sees through Albert's story about being a lost hiker, and announces who Albert really is. Amazingly, just as he does so, a spaceship designed by a renegade Freudian psychoanalyst with an art degree (circular and thus womb-like, yet with strikingly phallic legs; rather obvious, I mean *really*) lands, still hot from re-entry. A short while later, Nyah (Patricia Laffan), a wonderfully governessy Martian lady gets out. Later, she introduces everyone to John, her very tall robot gentleman friend.

### **Life Lesson: Don't Worry Too Much.**

Global warming, the threat of international terrorism, speed cameras: if we took too much notice of the news media we'd



all be nervous wrecks. I want to take note, here, of the difference between faith and security as elaborated by Fritz Perls, founder of the Gestalt school of therapy.<sup>2</sup> Because of the unpredictability of life (Perls suggests), and the size and power differentials between individual human beings and the cosmos, security is ultimately impossible and the search for it doomed. What we really need is faith: 'absorbed in the actual activity' of a life lived contactfully, in the moment, the faithful person 'does not protect the background but draws energy from it; he has faith that it will prove adequate.' Take no thought for the morrow, as it were... and in this film, the threat is unprecedented, the resources do prove adequate, and there is nothing that foreknowledge could have done.

What we could perhaps use in relation to current affairs is someone or something like Live TV's News Bunny, an encouraging presence who indicates to us with a thumbs-up, thumbs-down or sideways motion whether the news is good bad or neutral. Failing that, the best way to watch the television news is to turn the sound down, adopt a relaxed posture, let one's mouth hang slightly open, get close enough to the set that the image becomes slightly out-of-focus and then appreciate the shifting kaleidoscopic patterns of colour and light. Surveys indicate that 41% of the British public watches the news like this in any case. Be ready to absorb subliminally any details that might later prove critical.

#### ***Life Lesson: Work With the Media, Not Against Them.***

Some celebrities have learned this lesson the hard way: Marilyn Monroe, Keith Chegwin, Princess Diana, Vanessa Feltz.

Conversely, Professor Hennessey has the right idea, letting the American reporter Michael Carter (who comments on the Professor's inability to read a map of Scotland, given that he can read a map of the stars) be his chauffeur. In this instance, perhaps typical of a more clubbable, less procedurally driven age, a useful symbiosis has been reached between the civil service, and the fourth estate.

#### ***Life Lesson: Pay Attention.***

As we shall see, the eventual resolution of the crisis might have been imperilled if Albert had been able to go on protecting his identity (we often expend so much of our time and energy on disguise; living authentically is so much more effective!).

Michael is then able to call his bluff, having paid attention to the news media. This might seem to contradict what I outlined above, to which I would reply first that, following Walt Whitman, I contradict myself, am large and contain multitudes, but second that I described a form of sleep-teaching which will be widespread in the future (look around: this *is* the future), and third that the environment would have supplied what was necessary anyway. After all, one wouldn't need to have read the papers or heard the radio to see that Albert was romantic but doomed. When he later tells Doris that he's never killed anyone on purpose, this is momentary doubt and cowardice, given that his very looks (that hair! those eyes!) gives him away as a modern Raskolnikov, someone inspired to step outside the frame of conventional morality by reading up on the Nietzschean *Übermensch* and the Gidean *acte gratuite*. (Besides, why commit a moral crime if not to impress girls?).

#### ***Life Lesson: Look the Part.***

Nyah, in her tunic, boots, cowl and gloves ensemble certainly looks the part; she's the kind of girl that many gentlemen

would pay money to see.

The credits reveal that Nyah's costume was designed by Ronald Cobb. It's likely that he's no longer in business (this was 1954, remember), but there are some good fetishwear shops conveniently located on Holloway Road, London N7, less than five minutes walk from the Fantasy Centre, the UK's only bookshop exclusively devoted to secondhand and collectable science fiction, fantasy and horror. As Marxists say, surely this is no coincidence. For those who don't visit the capital regularly, the Internet can be a wonderful resource. Be prepared, though: a friend of mine bought a kind of rubberised catsuit for the Sydney Mardi Gras, and had to be reminded by the assistant to use talcum powder to help him wriggle into it and to prevent chafing.

Nyah, greeting the Earth people, is refreshingly direct in explaining the purposes of her visit, which is to select some of the strongest men available to take them back with her for breeding purposes to a Mars still suffering from a significant gender imbalance, following a sort of final war of the sexes and the subsequent 'decline of the male.' She shares with them some of her initial evaluations, verbally and preverbally, describing Professor Hennessey as 'a very poor physical specimen' and giving the reporter, Michael Carter, a significant look when talking of physical strength.

In her exposition, she gives some technical background, mentioning the Perpetual Motion Chain Reaction Machine that powers her craft, and the Paralyser Ray Mechanism with which she will subdue London. (It is a small mistake connected with approach vectors and atmospheric densities which brings her to Scotland rather than the capital; she would otherwise be subduing Oxford Street or Kensington and Chelsea at precisely that moment.) Later, she demonstrates 'the power of Mars... a power beyond your wildest dreams,' using her raygun to annihilate a speechless, wood-bearing, piggy-eyed working class person who bears a slight resemblance to the *Guardian* columnist David Aaronovitch, and encouraging her robot to destroy first a tree, then a tractor, then a whole barn, in a kind of mad special effects rampage accompanied by an unearthly submarine-like pinging sound.

#### ***Life Lesson: Make Us a Cup of Tea.***

The Earth people try, in their various ways, to find strength, to regroup. Professor Hennessey leans on the scientific method. Michael Carter, having learned to drink through 'the Spanish war, invasion of Italy, D-Day, Belsen and Czechoslovakia,' already has coping strategies for world-historical crises. Mrs Jamieson, the landlady, first puts her trust in the Lord, then more importantly puts the kettle on, on the basis that 'while we're still alive, we might as well have a cup of tea.' Here as in *EastEnders*, the pagan Stoicism of the British holds tea as a kind of sacred beverage, 'freedom from hatred and attachment' in a cup.

Nyah then approaches Tommy, the landlord's nephew, seeing him as 'a young specimen' and successfully tempting him away (here, she embodies the same archetype as Cruella De Ville in *101 Dalmatians* (1956/1961), or the Turkish Delight-toting White Queen in C.S. Lewis's *Narnia* sequence; she both attracts and frightens the boy by means of a warning-intimation of the shadow side of female sexuality). She also hypnotises Albert, his Nietzschean abrogation of conventional moral standards having rendered him vulnerable (it would never have worked on a Presbyterian), into first demoralising the others with talk of the human race welcoming its

benevolent enslavers, and then physically attacking them. Luckily, a knockout blow and a short period of unconsciousness restore him to normal: not the best weapon in the Martian armoury, then.

***Life Lessons: Hubris is a Bitch. The Power of the Welfare State is the Power of the Unconscious Mind.***

Nyah's desire to explain, essentially to boast, then intersects with the Professor's desire to know. Agreeing to meet his scientific curiosity, she invites him on board the ship, shows him around and explains that its propulsion system is based on 'a form of nuclear fission with a static negative codensity. Your atomic bomb is positive, causing the explosion to expand upwards and evaporate. Our force is negative and explodes the atomic forces into each other, increasing the power a thousand fold.'

There is a tension in science fiction and fantasy between our ancestral terrors on the one hand and our 'outward urge' on the other; lately, our humanness has been pulled two ways by the calls of inner space (a term first used by J.B. Priestley,<sup>3</sup> which could be said to denote the human consciousness' sense of itself in memory, history and time; the self-constructions necessary to build civil society) and outer space (a spiritually necessary exploration without which the human spirit would wither, according to many pro-space writers; 'a move, undertaken in secret despair, in the wrong direction' according to Priestley). It's worth remembering that some of the journalists who left the historic *Apollo 11* telecast starring Neil Armstrong were already bored,<sup>4</sup> and that the manned moon landings which began with the words 'It's a great leap for mankind' ended three years later with the words, 'Let's get this mother out of here.' My own association from this material is that J.B. Priestley's ghost persuaded me to study English and then work at the Housing Department when I could have studied astrophysics and worked at NASA. *Nom, jje ne regrette rien.*

***Life Lesson: Know Your Limitations.***

Nyah's implosive spacecraft, then, powered by an inner space drive, is a dream of the welfare state; Keith Joseph would've designed something quite different. Just as the postwar consensus, powered by its dreams of the perfectibility of humankind and of society, was finished some decades later by conservatives with a surer grasp of realpolitik and human limitation, so Nyah's openness and tendency to promise too much contributes to her downfall, as the Professor (like a hungry accountant) spots a simple, brutal way of shutting down the craft's power source.

When the Professor returns to the Bonnie Charlie, he explains that the craft will have to be shut down in flight, and that to do this someone will need to, as Marvin says in *Hitchhikers*, 'selflessly lay down my life for you... make the ultimate sacrifice.' At first, Michael steps up to the rostrum, but Nyah tires of his tricks (trying to shoot Nyah, for instance, and later trying to gain control of the robot by grabbing the remote control; well, it was worth a try), and Albert selects himself instead: he's been reading about the thousands and millions of stars and planets in the galaxy, and to die this way will be an apotheosis. Nyah, standing pitilessly by, calls time, and asks the Earthmen to enact their bargain. She asks Albert if he goes of his own free will; he answers in the affirmative and goes with her. The spacecraft takes off for London. For one terrifying moment, it looks as though Albert has reneged on his

deal, accepting instead a Faustian reward of a compromised share in immense wealth and power. However, the explosion that follows shows that Albert has followed through.

***Life Lessons: Sin Boldly, Repent Boldly. The Best Preparation for Alien Invasion is a Good Grasp of the Humanities.***

Albert, capable of murderous action, is also capable of the one brutal action by which he ends the Martian dream of interplanetary sex slavery, and in the process lays down his own life simply and cleanly. It just goes to show that maybe Jesus Christ was on to something in hanging around with tax gatherers and sinners... and perhaps it was a good idea to have read André Gide after all.

It's interesting and significant that Nyah asks Albert whether he goes of his own free will. What, in ordinary social life, distinguishes BDSM (the safe, sane practice of bondage, domination, and sadomasochism between consenting adults... of course, some acts, like anything with faeces, or being the editor of the *Daily Mail*, are just nasty) from coercive acts is precisely that both parties create a scene together. Similarly, in the ancient Greek rite of sacrifice as *mutatis mutandis* in other traditional cultures (we're talking about archetypes again), the animal about to be killed was pacified, calmed, and made to nod its head, as a token that it offered itself up willingly. Animals, humans and the divine all cooperated in the rite. (A transvalued ideal of the willing human sacrifice is of course central in Christianity). Nyah's an old-fashioned girl really, and her ship was an inner-space craft all along. Like most monsters (apart from the unknowable ones that might arrive tomorrow, or that SETI might find), she's from Earth. Of course, a present-day Albert could immerse himself in the highly speculative and often mediocre post-Roswell literature of alien contact; we live in a time of fragmentation and specialism. However, just as the periphery of the eye is more light-sensitive than its centre, so the alien is best glimpsed by immersing oneself in the humanities, reading sacred texts, chatting to people, checking *The Golden Bough* (1890; revised 1911-1915; supplement 1936) out of the prison library again, and watching gargoyles wink at you out of dark corners.

**Notes**

1. Harvey Marriott, an imaginary Los Angeles-based psychotherapist, has elaborated a technique called Carpenterotherapy for cases where the patient seems implacably 'in his/her head' and resistant to the emotional, relational, transference and fantasy aspects of therapy. Essentially, the therapist sings 'Why do birds suddenly appear/Every time you are near?/Just like me, they long to be/ Close to you.' He then states that he's being Karen and invites his patient to be Richard; this often brings the therapy to a biting point of existential choice (sometimes the patient leaves).
2. Frederick S. Perls, Ralph F. Hefferline [and] Paul Gestalt Therapy: *Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality* (New York: Julian Press, 1951; edition used London: Souvenir Press, 1972), pp. 353-4.
3. In a 1953 *New Statesman* article called 'They Come From Inner Space' cited in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, edited by John Clute and Peter Nicholls (London: Orbit, 1993).
4. Marina Benjamin, *Rocket Dreams: How the Space Age Shaped Our Vision of a World Beyond* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2003); Norman Mailer, *Fire on the Moon* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970).

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David Curl's previous article, "That's enough from Dr. Bimbu

## The Meaning of Judge Dredd: Fascist Satire or Post Industrial Commentary? by John F. Keane

The widespread notion that *Judge Dredd* is purely fascist satire is simplistic. This critique of that idea will build an alternative description of the story as a relatively serious commentary on post-industrial Western society. In addition, I hope to explore some of the deeper themes of the story that have helped to make it so popular.

The major problem with any link between *Dredd*'s society and fascism is that Mega City 1 is not fascist in the true sense. In fascism all individual responsibility is subsumed by the State. It is unsurprising that fascism flourished in Germany and Italy, two cultures where an organic social consensus is particularly strong for 'deep' historical reasons. MC1 is not truly fascist in this sense. The citizenry are highly individualised, as in modern Western nations. In fact, the weird lifestyle-cults abounding in MC1 are in many respects the 'stars' of the story (certainly, their omission ruined the *Judge Dredd* film).

### Fascist Satire?

First, we have to determine what fascism is. Fascism is *not* right wing conservatism or anarcho-capitalism, two right-wing ideologies with which it is frequently mistaken. It is opposed to both. Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan are probably the best examples of true fascist states. Both were authoritarian, opposed to the individual and worshipped imperialistic conquest as the highest aim of society. Both regimes encouraged national altruism (to the point of suicide) and defined people in high-flown mystical terms like 'blood and soil'. How does all this compare with MC1?

- In MC1 the military function is subsumed in a policing and general administration function. This is very similar to fascism – the different arms are all one rather than autonomous agencies. For example, the SS in Nazi Germany had military (Waffen SS) policing (Gestapo, Security Service, concentration camps) and scientific functions (Lebensborn Project, eugenics). This is not dissimilar to MC1, where Judges are responsible for both military/policing functions and Tek Division is responsible for cloning ideal Judges and creating genetically enhanced military personnel.
- The desire to breed a perfect elite seems to characterise both the MC Judge system and say, Nazi Germany. Although the latter could not call upon the advanced cloning and genetic manipulation only now starting to be developed, the aim of their crude eugenics was to improve better features and eliminate the unfit. This is also characteristic of MC1, which clones ideal Judge material from the great judicial figures of the past. This process is a sacred duty in both cases. In *Mein Kampf* Hitler refers to the national genotype as 'the Holy Grail of pure blood'. When Dredd ceremonially cremates the bodies of Judge clones in the Cursed Earth, he says: 'dog vultures will not devour such precious flesh'.

- The Long Walk is also of interest from a fascist standpoint. This seems to owe much to altruistic suicide rituals in primitive societies. For example, when an Eskimo reaches an age when he becomes a burden to his community, he puts on his finest clothes and walks out alone onto the ice, never to be seen again. In MC1, when a Judge becomes 'faulty' – too old or perhaps excessively zealous – he has a similar option. This entails a self-imposed exile in the radio-active hell of the Cursed Earth, there to bring law to the lawless until death. Dredd is always quick to respect Judges who commit altruistic suicide – even Judge Lopez, a man he despises: 'When his time came, Lopez was not found wanting. He will be remembered.' Emile Durkheim, who coined the term altruistic suicide, suggested that while it was once commonplace, it only exists today in primitive, hierarchical institutions like the army. It also exists in fascist states and organisations, notably the Imperial Japanese army and the SS. For example, in the SS suicide exonerated a wrongdoer of any transgression against the organisation (see Hohne 2000: 150).

However, the key difference is that in a fascist State such genetic purity/corporatism/altruism incorporates *all* its members. Extensive indoctrination from an early age abridges the individual's psychic autonomy in favour of an altruistic national consciousness. Mass citizen-suicides by the Japanese in World War II would be a good example. In MC1 only the elite are subject to such rigorous expectations. Fargo, the first Chief Judge vetoes Morton Judd when he proposes breeding docile, crime-free citizens. True fascist measures (or their futuristic equivalents) are consciously rejected by the Judicial system. Although the difference is a fine one, it is still present. The dominant political tone of MC1 is *not* fascism.

### The Rule of Law

Experts have advanced monogamy, writing, social hierarchy and law as core factors essential for urban civilisation. In MC1 only the Law remains intact – social/domestic chaos reigns in all other areas. Hence when Dredd says 'I am the Law' it means he is the embodiment of all that resists social disintegration. Law is the last remaining pillar of civilisation in MC1. Law is what defines the city - not obeisance to the State, imperial conquest or other fascist themes.

Under normal circumstances, MC law is not arbitrary as in autocracy or fascism but comparatively fixed and immobile, as in contemporary Western democracies. For fascists there is no higher principle than the State/nation (or, in real terms, the whims of the leadership).

The highest regulatory authority in MC1 are the SJS or Special Judicial Squad. The SJS judge the Judges. The SJS is thus somehow *outside* the law. When an internal threat to the existing social order comes, it comes, not surprisingly, from the Cal-led SJS. Call's reign was quite close to authentic fascism –

even down to the Hitler-esque self-immolation. When ruled by Cal, a man uniquely exempt from legal processes, MC1 moves closer to crude autocracy/fascism. That is clearly not its natural state, however. MC1 is governed by an impersonal higher principle even Judges must obey. Hence Dredd says, 'a bent judge is the worst kind of criminal' when sentencing Judge Gibson for his crimes. It is also notable that the harshest of all punishments – 20 years on Titan – is reserved for Judges.

The Judges act within a broad moral consensus. Necessities such as geronticide take place in a low-key, clandestine fashion. In a true autocracy or fascist state public sensibilities are eroded or completely ignored. In MC1 they remain relatively sacrosanct.

This fidelity to Law explains *Judge Dredd*'s remarkable (and unlikely) success as a character. If he were truly a fascist, the intense reader-identification with him would simply vanish in democratic countries. This emerged in the early days of 2000 A.D., when a reader wrote in to complain about Dredd being a 'trigger happy mam' dispensing 'harsh judgements'. This drew a range of invective down on him, mainly pointing out this harshness was but a by-product of Dredd's absolute fidelity to the Law.

### Paternalist Paradise?

If MC1 is not fascist, what is it? The political system in MC1 is overwhelmingly paternalistic. The citizens are protected from 'the chaos alternative' by the Judges in return for docile compliance. As long as they do not ask too many questions, they enjoy a blissful, work-free existence. The general tone of MC1 is 'middle class'. Manual work is done by robots. It is not surprising that although Dredd is American, he is a *British* creation. Britain, with its extensive Welfare system and limited social mobility, is probably the most paternalistic country in the West.

In one of his most interesting stories, Dredd undergoes a crisis of identity in his rôle as Judge. A psychiatrist notes this down as 'just the normal reaction to prolonged contact with the citizenry, I'm afraid. No matter how hard we try to control it, sooner or later the human being behind the mask always starts to come out, even in a street-wise Judge like Dredd.'

Dredd's crisis clearly denotes a schism between élite values (the Law) and the broad masses of the MC population. They care for nothing but their own strange lifestyles and hobbies. (Sounds all too familiar, does it not?) In an authentically fascist State the citizens are ideally welded to society with the same kind of zeal as the élite.

Though many Judges are cloned, the élite in Mega City 1 is still permeable. In fact, Dredd uses this fact against the democratic campaigner Gort Hyman, forcing him to surrender his two sons to induction in the Academy of Law. While the élite is largely a genetic meritocracy (perhaps a meritocratic aristocracy would be the best way to describe it), ordinary citizens can still forward their children to the Academy for inclusion in the Judicial élite. To be accepted is a great honour, to graduate as a Judge greater still. However, the higher echelons of society are permeable to anyone with ability and determination. MC1 is certainly *not* autocratic or fascist.

### The Causes of Crime

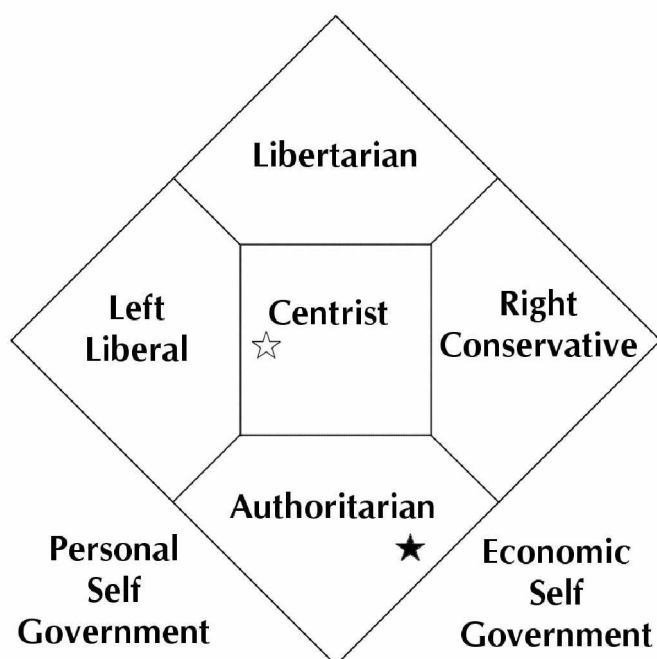
In the controversial Dredd story 'Shanty Town', refugees receive genetic scans to determine whether they have criminal tendencies. Two rather shifty characters are produced who look like stereotypical criminals – with eyes too close together,

crooked grins and uneven features. While liberals might view this as clear proof that the story is clearly fascist for attributing criminal tendencies to heredity rather than the environment, the latest criminological research suggests that such a view may merely be factual.

The geneticist Steve Jones has noted that some serial killers carry the gene Dopamine D2 receptor A1, a 'criminal gene'. Carriers find it difficult to exercise self-control or curb their pleasure-seeking instincts. Similarly, the defect to the gene responsible for the enzyme monoamine oxidase-A has been shown by researchers in Holland and the USA to increase physical aggression. It may well be possible to instantly quarantine criminals in the manner described in *Shanty Town* at some time in the future. Because the preponderance of scientific evidence seems to support 'fascist' (i.e. strongly genetic determinist) views on crime or anti-social behaviour does not mean that expressing these views in a story represents a commitment to fascist ideology. It might just be a sign of excellent, well-researched and objectively truthful science fiction writing. If fascist claims are consistently supported by science, creative works incorporating such claims might just be scientifically valid rather than 'fascist' in any meaningful sense. One has to exercise great caution when ideologically labelling creative works.

Snobbery undoubtedly plays a part here – comics tend to be critiqued with a broad brush compared to 'serious' science fiction (i.e. novels by practising scientists). For example, in 2001: *A Space Odyssey* (1968) Arthur C. Clarke suggests that someone with an IQ in the low 130s is incapable of making a major contribution to knowledge. As well as being wrong (Richard Feynman had an IQ of only 125, yet is one of history's finest scientists), such an opinion is rooted in the assumption that general intelligence both exists and can be concisely measured. All these assertions are extremely controversial, yet Sir Arthur has never been criticised over any of them. If a comic strip, however, gives some nod of recognition to the burgeoning evidence for the inheritance of criminal tendencies, the 'fascist' label quickly comes out.

### The Political position of Mega City 1's Judicial System



☆ Actual ideological position of MC1

★ Historical Fascism

In the above scheme of political affiliation, MC1 probably belongs not in the fascist quadrant, but somewhere between fascism and liberalism – perhaps the natural position for any paternalistic society.

Although in crude terms Dredd might be a fascist satire, this cannot wholly be the case as his world is not a fascist one, strictly speaking. Other differences include:

- The MC citizens are predominantly welfare veterans. Only the rich or the lucky have work. In fact, the rôle of the Judges is to punish those who refuse a life of bored affluence. This is quite distinct from fascism, with its cult of dynamic labour for the social good. Allowing most of the population to watch TV all day would be anathema to any *true* fascist.
- MC1 is economically liberal. Private companies tender competitively for public contracts. The vast majority of the citizens live on welfare handouts. The economic system is certainly *not* right wing conservatism, with minimal taxation and a small Welfare State. It is probably best described as left-liberal capitalism of the type prevailing in the UK, where the economic elite accept heavy tax burdens in order to pacify the broad mass of unemployables. It also closely resembles the projections of futurologist Alvin Toffler.
- Where is the military in MC1? For fascists the military is all-important. Military glory is the highest achievement to which the individual can aspire, war is the ideal condition for the Fascist State. However, MC1 is not particularly bellicose. In the Apocalypse War it merely defends itself against East-Meg 1 after untold damage is inflicted by Sov missiles, troops and espionage. Such a defensive military posture is most definitely *not* fascist, since fascism glories in aggressive conquest. Unlike fascist States, MC1

exercises a purely internal policy of banishment for mutants and other malcontents. This is not a matter of imperialistic imposition.

There is no other source of social inspiration than the present or the historical. Although *Judge Dredd* is about the future, the future has no direct input into the story. This goes for *all* science fiction. The projections of futurologists like Toffler derive from the past or the present. They are not hotlines to the future and are thus usually inaccurate. This view, derived from social complexity theory, assumes that the social totality is unknowable and inflects all its cultural products in ways unknown to their creative agents. Contemporary themes often creep into *Judge Dredd*, albeit in veiled form. This is inevitable, as the social totality must inevitably inflect all works produced within its bourn – even those set in the far future.

### Post Industrial Commentary?

The foregoing conclusions lead to the conclusion that MC1's political structure reflects British social change in the late Seventies. This is the alternative take on *Judge Dredd*, that it is not so much a fascist satire as a post-industrial commentary. At the time of its creation, Britain was undergoing dramatic social transformation. The old order based on deference was breaking down: the British working class were refusing patrician false consciousness for the first time, seeking cultural forms that expressed their unique experience. The legendary comic *Action* in many ways answered these demands. *Action* eschewed the misrepresentation of British youth epitomised by then-prevailing Public School phantasms like *Billy Bunter*. A good example would be *Kids Rule OK!* – which dissected the nightmare reality of working class Comprehensives without any concession to upper middle class experience.

This was also true of *Battle*, which boldly expressed the proletarian experience of war (*Charlie's War*) without reference to the same patrician 'filter' that had hitherto diluted boys' war fiction. In this it was a remarkably ahead of its time, as Niall Ferguson's *The Pity of War*, a scholarly work on the Great War published in the late nineties covered many of the same issues. For example, Ferguson argued that ordinary British soldiers 'enjoyed killing' and that the War lasted so long because it became impossible to surrender without risking death. This echoes the attitude of Pop in *Charlie's War*. Pop is an old soldier whose sons were gassed at Ypres and who enjoys killing Germans in recompense. Like *Battle*, Ferguson stressed the experience of ordinary soldiers, not Public Schoolboys. He subsequently produced a wildly original description of the War.

2000 A.D. was created in the aftermath of *Action*, as it was felt that a comic with a similar iconoclastic tone to *Action* would be more acceptable if couched in a science fiction format. *Judge Dredd* appeared in issue 2, becoming popular during his first full-length adventure, 'The Robot Rebellion'. As he developed, Dredd seemed to take on a character uniquely his own. His popularity shows the story struck deep chords in the popular psyche.

Let us explore the alternative view of Dredd as a kind of post-industrial social commentary.

MC1 clearly owes much to futurologists like Toffler – the alienation, mass unemployment, motiveless crime and economic Brazilification are very characteristic of concepts developed in his writing. For example, the *Futsie* or victim of

Future Shock comes direct from Toffler (one of his books is actually called *Future Shock* (1970)). The world of MC1 also resembles early twenty-first century Britain, with its burgeoning underclass of unemployables, widening technical divide and exploding crime rate. Since the story touches on themes pertinent only to the post-industrial world, referring to it as merely a fascist satire is demeaning. Indeed, it has frequently pre-empted social trends (urban riots; eating disorders; mass unemployment).

Toffler's book *The Third Wave* (1980) opined that the advent of microprocessors would revolutionise society in the way the first agricultural and industrial revolutions had. One result would be mass unemployment. Toffler claimed that most people have no skills that microprocessors do not possess. The major task of the future will therefore be the management of unemployment. In MC1, the vast majority of its four hundred million citizens are unemployed, a major factor in the city's endemic crime rate. As Dredd says, 'they were bored so they decided to pull a job. Now I've heard everything.'

To suggest the Judge system is fascist fails to incorporate the fact that a completely new type of society has emerged in MC1, requiring new methods of policing/management outside the Western liberal tradition. Charles Murray's writings about the emergence of an unemployable, criminal underclass (*The Bell Curve*) are chillingly pre-empted by this futurological aspect of the story. No real solutions exist for the social problems raised by Toffler and explored in *Judge Dredd*. The present government seem to see surveillance technology and draconian punishments as the sole solutions (witness electronic ID cards and a burgeoning national DNA database), both mainstays of MC1's Judge system.

### *Dredd as the Sacred Executioner*

Expanding the theme of Dredd having greater significance than a mere figure of ironic mockery, in many ways he represents an archetypal figure, the Sacred Executioner. In *The Sacred Executioner* the scholar Hyam Maccoby considers a variety of sacred murders. All of these are enormously beneficial for society. A city will be founded, an enemy defeated or a nation inaugurated. The slayer is cursed, but not put to death. He bears the guilt of the community for the primordial act of sacrifice that permits civilised society. Famous Sacred Executioners would include Cain and Romulus. Both were founders of civilisations, both committed a primal crime of sacrifice.

Dredd frequently flees the city for the Cursed Earth, a post-atomic wilderness. This ostracism from the community is typical of the Sacred Executioner (the Wandering Jew, Cain). While there, he has to struggle to find or retain his identity and save MC1. Many readers of *2000 A.D.* complain that the *Dredd* epics, ('Cursed Earth', 'Apocalypse War', 'Dead Man', 'Necropolis') tend to be formulaic. When Dredd's status as the Sacred Executioner is understood, however, this consistency becomes more explicable.

Like most Sacred Executioners, Dredd is guilty of fratricide (fratricide being the most usual form of the Sacred Sacrifice). When his brother Rico commits murder, Dredd sentences him to 20 years on Titan. When Rico returns to exact revenge,

Dredd kills him. He clearly bears a great deal of guilt for this act, typically transferred to his niece, Vienna (Rico's daughter). Nonetheless, he asserts his attachment to Rico 'did not stop me doing my duty' (i.e. killing him). This feature of Dredd's life associates him most closely with the rôle of Sacred Executioner. The fact that his helmet is seldom if ever removed literally makes him resemble an Executioner. It also acts as a screen from the intrinsic shame of his primal rôle.

This primordial undercurrent is partly what explains Dredd's eternal popularity. Every epic invites the readership to witness the primordial moment when he saves civilisation. No wonder he is so popular! No other character in the *2000 A.D.* universe has this chthonic level of significance and consequently no other character approaches his appeal.

Dredd stories have declined in recent years in terms of popularity and profundity. In my view the Golden Age of *2000 A.D.* (and Dredd) was rather short-lived. By common consent the comic had declined markedly by 1990 – paradoxically the era of its greatest syndicated success.

Dredd received the slack label of 'fascist satire' around this time. Such a view has informed subsequent handling of the character, to the story's detriment (in the present writer's view). Such a lame working description denies the character's chthonic roots as the Sacred Executioner archetype, the very core of his enduring appeal. It also denies the fact that the story derives from and acts as a commentary on British society, often pre-empting actual social phenomena.

This is not to say that the story does not satirise authoritarian politics and frequently its own early (and illustrious) history. However, this is but part of the whole Dredd experience. When a conscious satirical spirit inflects all creative input, the more diluted a comics character becomes. Recent epics ('Second Robot War', 'Blind Justice', 'Aliens') lack the wit, invention and social relevance of Golden Age epics for this reason.

### *Further Reading*

Heinz Hohne, *The Order of the Death's Head: The Story of Hitler's SS* (London: Penguin, 2000).

Hyam Maccoby, *The Sacred Executioner: Human Sacrifice and the Legacy of Guilt* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1982).

Hyam Maccoby, *The Mythmaker: Paul and the Invention of Christianity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986).

Louis L. Snyder, *Encyclopaedia of the Third Reich* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1998).

Tom Segev, *Soldiers of Evil: The Commandants of the Nazi Concentration Camps* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1988).

Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave* (London: Collins, 1981).

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# *The Nelson Mandala*



THE ATTEMPT TO DELIVER AN ACADEMIC PAPER AT THE SCIENCE-FICTION CONFERENCE ON JUNE 12 199-, FIRST ASSUMED TO BE THE ACT OF A DELUSIONAL PSYCHOPATH, LATER LED TO ENQUIRIES OF A VERY DIFFERENT CHARACTER. PARTICIPANTS WILL RECALL THAT THE LITTLE EVIDENCE COLLECTED SEEMED TO POINT TO THE STRANGE AND CONFUSING FIGURE OF AN UNIDENTIFIED LECTURER AT THE INSTITUTE. OTHER TRACES OF HIS ACTIVITIES WERE FOUND IN A NUMBER OF UNEXPECTED PLACES: IN A FOOTNOTE TO A PAPER ON SOME UNUSUAL ASPECTS OF BEHAVIOUR OF DEPILATED CAPUCHIN MONKEYS, PUBLISHED IN AN OBSCURE JOURNAL SOME YEARS EARLIER; IN THE FINE PRINT OF THE CREDITS OF A GRAPHIC NOVEL, LONG SINCE PULPED; AND IN THE BACKGROUND OF A RECORD SLEEVE OF THE POP GROUP TORTOISE HEAD, TO INSTANCE ONLY A FEW. WHETHER IN FACT THIS MAN WAS AN ACADEMIC SUFFERING FROM DELUSIONS OF GRANDEUR, THE FIGMENT OF AN ILL-ORGANISED HOAX, OR, AS SOME SUGGESTED, AN AVATAR OF THE MYTHIC FIGURE OF SHAKY MO COLLIER, IS ANYONE'S GUESS. WHAT LITTLE EVIDENCE WE HAVE HAS BEEN ASSEMBLED BELOW.

**Apocalypse Kit.** Dr Baker studied the documents laid out on the demonstration table. These were: (1) a map of the London Underground; (2) fragments of a paper entitled 'The Nelson Mandala'; (3) photograph of V-2 rocket bomb; (4) Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations for Wilde's *Salome*; (5) J.G. Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* and Iain Sinclair's *Crash*; (6) Max Ernst's 'Garden Airplane Traps'.

He turned to the audience. 'You say these constitute an apocalypse kit?'

**Ballard, J(ames) G(raham).** Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition*, which collected his production of 'concentrated novels' of the late 1960s, and was published in 1969, is described by the novelist Iain Sinclair as 'as much like storyboards for unmakeable films as auditions for future books'. Sinclair also suggests that *The Atrocity Exhibition* rehearses many of the concerns of Ballard's later novels (Sinclair, *Crash* 8). He argues that

Nobody could be expected to act on these instructions, they were magical and potentially threatening to the fabric of the received world (Sinclair, *Crash* 9).

Sinclair suggests, then, that Ballard's fiction of the time, offering as it does narratives of 'transgressive' sexuality, catastrophe, and the collision of the human body with technologies of transport, communication and suburban environment, is a type of 'spoiled prophecy', an invocation and in some sense celebration of the new individual, sexual and social possibilities of the contemporary world. Sinclair also writes:

Ballard's poetic is anti-populist, anti-city. It's a demented meltdown of Thatcher and Aleister Crowley: do what you will is all of the law, repression is death. No interference from the state, no nannying. Canary Wharf triumphalism and the inalienable right to kill yourself on an orbital motorway as you fight your way to work. What is astonishing is the courage, the recklessness of Ballard's argument; the unashamed trust in his own psychopathology (Sinclair, *Crash* 110).

Sinclair's *London Orbital* is an anti-Ballardian text, although it appropriates the Ballardian imaginary, and vampirises Ballard's future. Sinclair (re)visits and appropriates Ballard's territory, the 'non-places' of 'storage units, hangars, satellite

hotels, car hire companies, apologetic farmland as a mop-up apron for Concorde disasters' (177), in order to exorcise its anticipatory power.

**Concentration City.** Ballard's fiction interrogates the landscapes of London's marginal spaces: the Westway and M4 in *Concrete Island*, Heathrow Airport and environs in *Crash*, the banlieues of *High-Rise*, the suburb of Shepperton in *The Unlimited Dream Company*. Each becomes the site of transfiguration.

**Departure Lounge.** The non-places of 'supermodernity', where time, history and memory are erased, are, the French anthropologist Marc Augé suggests, particularly located in 'airports and railway stations, hotel chains, leisure parks, large retail outlets' (79). They are also signally the topography of J.G. Ballard's fiction. Ballard is a spectral presence in Iain Sinclair's *London Orbital*, a text that narrates a series of walks around London's orbital motorway, the M25. Ballard's fiction is understood by Sinclair as prophetic: 'how does [Ballard] feel,' asks Sinclair, 'about predicting, and thereby confirming, the psychogeography of Heathrow's retail/ recreation fallout?' (*London Orbital*, 218). Ballard's symbolic landscape – overlit highways, airport service roads, corporate campuses – is deployed in *London Orbital* as London's Other, London's future.

**Entropy.** In a closed system, according to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, there is a universal tendency to the degradation of mechanical energy. Entropy will, conversely, tend towards the maximum. This means that the universe will eventually 'run down', all energy being the same at every point, a state of maximum disorder and undifferentiated 'heat death'.

**Flâneur.** 'It is to him, aimlessly strolling through the crowds in the big cities in studied contrast to their hurried, purposeful activity, that things reveal themselves in their secret meaning'. (Hannah Arendt, 'Introduction' to Benjamin's *Illuminations*, 12).

**Gospel of Philip.** 'He who has knowledge of the truth is a free man.' (Codex II, 3; 77, 14, *Nag Hammadi Library* codices).

**Holland Park.** 'The myth of the golden past gave way to the myth of the golden future but, for a short time in the [18]90s and then the 1960s, we enjoyed the myth of the golden present'. (M. Lescoq, *Leavetaking*, quoted in *The Condition of Muzak, The Cornelius Quartet*, 801).

**International Times.** Mal Dean, Moorcock, M. John Harrison and R. Glyn Jones collaborated on a Jerry Cornelius comic strip which was published in the underground paper *International Times*. The Cornelius strips drew upon (and satirised) the Swinging and, latterly, psychedelic London which formed *International Times*'s cultural production and reception. Moorcock, in interview with Colin Greenland, suggested that 'when Mal Dean was delivering the last of those strips [*The Adventures of Jerry Cornelius, The English Assassin*], he heard someone, Mick Farren or someone,

complaining that we were sending up everything their paper stood for' (*Death Is No Obstacle*, 54). Jerry appears as a *fum-de-siècle* dandy in black suit and white frilled shirt throughout the strip until his regression back to 'reality', where he, Frank and Catherine are children enduring one of his mother's Christmas dinners.

**Jerry Cornelius.** Jerry Cornelius, the English Assassin, Messiah of the Age of Science, traveller in time and space, was, according to his creator, Michael Moorcock, 'a conscious effort to look at the late 20th century in terms of its specific mythologies and apocrypha' ('Introduction' to *The New Nature of the Catastrophe*, vii). Bastard child of James Bond, William Burroughs, P.J. Proby and Swinging London, Jerry – like Catherine and Frank Cornelius, Mrs Cornelius, Shaky Mo Collier, Bishop Beesley, Captain Maxwell, Una Persson and the rest – is at first a cartoonish figure, a protagonist without dimensionality who is delivered into various scenarios, adventures and capers. These portray Cold War conflicts in terms of sexual desire, revolutions in terms of end-of-the-world parties, and social change as the manipulations of continually resurrected egomaniacs.

The London of the Cornelius stories is depicted in terms of a carnivalized apocalypse, and fragmented narratives through which grotesque, typical or symbolic figures perform their functions. Moorcock has written: 'My vision of London, since my first unpublished novel in 1957 and the first Jerry Cornelius novel, "The Final Programme", in 1965, has tended to be somewhat on the apocalyptic and fanciful side, rather than the realistic' ('Building the New Jerusalem', *Casablanca*, 155). In the Cornelius stories, London is continually bombed into ruins and (like Cornelius) resurrected. In *The Condition of Muzak*, the last in the Cornelius tetralogy, Jerry approaches London in his trusty Phantom:

In the evening light the city was phosphorescent, like a neon wound; it glowed beneath a great scarlet sun turning the clouds orange and purple. And Jerry was filled with a sudden deep love for his noble birthplace, the City of the Apocalypse, this Earthly paradise, the oldest and greatest city of its Age, virgin and whore, mother, sister, mistress, sustainer of life, creator of nightmare, destroyer of dreams, harbourer of twenty million chosen souls. Abruptly he left the Middle Ages and entered the future, the great grey road, a mile wide at this point, gradually narrowing to its apex at Piccadilly Circus. Now, as night drenched the tall buildings and their lights burst into shivering life, he could again relax in his natural environment. (*The Cornelius Quartet*, 641).

Moorcock, resident in Notting Hill, creates an alternative London which exposes the ideological structures (and myths) of twentieth century Britain: fading Imperial dreams and Wellsian utopianism, the Cold War (and Vietnam superimposed on Europe), music hall and trips to the seaside, and bureaucratic order against the possibilities of new technologies, rock and roll, and sexual experimentation.

Jerry Cornelius is a character impossible to imagine except in terms of late 1960s youth culture. He embodies the sexual, moral and political possibilities of the counter-culture. In 'The Entropy Circuit', the epigraph to section 5 ('God') reads: "'There is no figure in modern developed societies to compare with that of the shaman'" (*New Nature of the Catastrophe*, 317). Jerry Cornelius, however, is such a figure. The apocalypse of love at the end of *A Cure for Cancer* is a 'spell' and a 'ritual' created by Jerry through his black entropy box and Jimi Hendrix's *Third Stone from the Sun* (*The Cornelius*

*Quartet*, 362). In 'The Swastika Set-Up', Jerry procures a young woman for the vampiric symbol of order, Miss Brunner:

His mouth was full of blood. He popped the last of the liver down his throat and sucked his lower lip, appraising Helen, who stood shivering in the centre of the pentagram. Then he took the speakers and placed one on each of the star's five points, turned to the console on the wall and switched on.

Sparks leapt from point to point and settled into a blue-green flow. Helen hugged her naked breasts.

[...] His eyes stopped blinking. His face was bathed in the blue-green glow as he watched Miss Brunner move in on the girl. (*New Nature of the Catastrophe*, 289).

Jerry, not averse to a bit of vampirism himself to keep his identity together, elsewhere discovers Miss Brunner burying a goat for magical purposes. Science, in the Cornelius stories, is a form of superstition, the line between it and magic blurred. Jerry Cornelius also embodies the failure of the counter-cultural movement, and ultimately his adventures are compromised, perhaps only existing as the daydreams of a rather hopeless youth.

**Karen Novotny's Last Dance.** 'Looking back, one can see Swinging London as a mass delusion, a world of endlessly self-aggrandising mythologies. If there was novelty, it was not in the much-acclaimed but barely supportable "classlessness", but in the creation of a massively successful media myth, a mix of pop sociology and the propagandist's chestnut: the big lie'. (Jonathon Green, 'The Swinging Sixties? As If', *The Guardian*, 17 April 1999).

**LSD-25.** 'The kaleidoscope's view of the eye'. J.G. Ballard, 'Project for a Glossary of the Twentieth Century', *A Usur's Guide to the Millennium*, 277.

**Mother London.** About his 1988 novel, Moorcock has written:

I started *Mother London* with a wish to write about my own experience of the world in my own city, and I wanted it to be a celebration of that city. I wanted to write about the mythology of London, because that had been my first impulse when writing the Cornelius stories too, and I never thought I'd done it successfully there. I invented a mythology more than I examined one' (*Death Is No Obstacle*, 101).

*Mother London* has a tripartite focus and concentric structure. Three people, the writer David Mummery, theatrical Josef Kiss and former coma sufferer Mary Gasalee are all to some extent telepathic. The narrative moves from 1980s London back in time to the Blitz of 1940, and thence back to 'present' time again. These narrative foci channel the voices and experience of Londoners throughout the post-war (and post-imperial) period, and the narrative is interspersed with fragmentary 'stream of consciousness' paragraphs which signify the Babel that is London's linguistic multiverse.

**New Worlds.** Michael Moorcock has written about *New Worlds*:

Style and technique was merely a means to an end – frequently a very moral means to some very moral ends. We were looking at the Vietnam War, Kennedy's assassination, the computer revolution, the armaments industry, the manipulations of the media, the profound hypocrisies of the liberal bourgeoisie, the appalling condition of the majority of human beings on the planet, the useless currency of outmoded or inappropriate political language. But our response was scarcely a puritan one and neither did we recoil from experiencing our subject matter. We relished and embraced change, we celebrated the advent of new technologies and theories which opened up the multiverse

for further exploration, which helped us understand our own behaviour and which provided us with some profound and spectacular metaphors! If the world was going to hell, we were determined to see how, but we were also determined to enjoy it while it was happening. Our curiosity was considerably greater than our uncertainty (Moorcock, 'Introduction' to *The New Nature offi the Catastrophe*, viii-ix).

**Operation Rewrite.** "The only things not prerecorded in a prerecorded universe are the prerecordings themselves", William S. Burroughs, *Cities offi the Red Night*, 194.

**Persistence of Memory.** 'Dali's work, according to Ballard, constituted "a body of prophecy unequalled in accuracy since Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*"' (Sinclair, *Crash* 61).

#### Queer Street.

Jerry Cornelius, bored, shifted at the back of the lecture hall. Fragments, psychedelia, necromancy – wasn't it all a bit old hat? This trip hadn't paid off.

He tipped the catalogue into his bag and slipped out quietly.

Miss Brunner was waiting outside the lecture hall by the Phantom VII. She looked him over, appraising his black narrow-waisted jacket, black flared trousers and black Chelsea boots with high Cuban heels.

'I've had it,' said Jerry. 'Drive me to the docks, will you?'

'It's a all question of willpower,' smiled Miss Brunner. 'You're running out of time, Mr Cornelius.'

Jerry climbed into the back seat of the Phantom and drew his jacket around himself. He always felt a chill north off Ladbrooke Grove.

**Retinal Landscapes.** In *Crash*, the narrator Ballard meets Vaughan for the last time in 'the mezzanine lounge of the Oceanic Terminal [...] this house of glass, of flight and possibility' (21: 193). They then both take LSD, and embark on a drive through London which will end in the consummation of their desire. The city is transformed into a tableau of light, and this vision is accompanied by both physical intimacy and images of transcendence:

Taking my eyes off the road, I clasped Vaughan's hand in my own, trying to close my eyes to the fountain of light that poured through the windshield off the car from the vehicles approaching us.

An armada of angelic creatures, each surrounded by an immense corona of light, was landing on the motorway either side of us (21: 199).

Vaughan becomes a psychedelic messiah, one who sacrifices himself in order to transform London.

**Soma Holiday.** The word 'psychedelic' was coined by Dr Humphrey Osmond. History notes the use of 'psychedelic' or hallucinogenic drugs in shamanistic rituals, mystery religions, and other religious rites as an access to a state more nearly approaching the 'divine'. Aldous Huxley, literary precursor of the nexus between hallucinogenic drugs and literary production died on the day John F. Kennedy was assassinated. He wrote: 'To go beyond the insulated self is such a liberation that, even when self-transcendence is through nausea into frenzy, through cramps into hallucinations and coma, the drug-induced experience has been regarded by primitives and even by the highly civilized as intrinsically divine'.

(Quoted by Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain, *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History off LSD, The CIA, The Sixties and Beyond* (New York: Grove Press, 1985); <http://www.levity.com/aciddreams/samples/history.html>).

**The Trajectory of Fate.** 'My belief', writes Iain Sinclair in his BFI Classic text on Cronenberg's *Crash*, 'is that Ballard, drawing on Burroughs and Ray Bradbury, identified a trajectory of fate, derived from his own sense of "deep time", the crystalline images that decorate the borders off his fiction. He 'treated' episodes from the corporate sensorium, the parallel world of news headlines, advertisements, pornography and art. *The Atrocity Exhibition* was both a summary of everything Ballard had worked on in the 60s (texts, exhibitions, scripts) and a template for what was to come' (Sinclair, *Crash*, 106).

**Universe.** In Pamela Zoline's 'Heat Death of the Universe' (1966), Sarah Boyle's 'obsessions' with entropy and death are both a product of her entrapment and a way of ordering the seeming randomness and emptiness of her life. Sarah lives in California, where the blue of the sky matches the blue of the 'fake sponge' used for washing the dishes, which also matches the 'most unbelievable azure off the tiled and mossless interiors off California swimming pools' that 'hisses, bubbles, burns in Sarah's eyes.' California is, in the fiction of Philip K. Dick as well as Pynchon's *The Crying off Lot 49* (1966), the land of 'heat death': a warm equilibrium, 'all topographical imperfections sanded away with the sweet-smelling burr off the cosmetic surgeon's cosmetic polisher'. It is, like Ballard's suburbs, a 'non-space', a place off terminal entropy.

**Vestigial Traces.** V-1 and V-2. Alan Moore's *W for Vendetta*. Pynchon's *W* (1963), Benny Profane chasing alligators in the sewers. The V-2 suspended over the London cinema at the end of Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. The 1966 V & A Aubrey Beardsley exhibition which injected the aesthetic off *fim-de-siècle* London into swinging and psychedelic London. V for Victory. Vietnam.

**Waste Land.** T.S. Eliot's vision off the end off the world, the Fisher King hoarding his fragments against the destruction off meaning.

Unreal City.

Under the brown fog off a winter dawn,

A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,

I had not thought death had undone so many. (60-3)

Falling towers

Jerusalem Athens Alexandria

Vienna London

Unreal

(374-7)

London is a vast necropolis, a city at the end off time, a broken world awaiting apocalypse. The brown fog echoes *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, a world signified by veils, strata off hidden subjects. The crowd flows over London Bridge like the river beneath, an endless flow off the dead. The city and the unreal city, the underground city, merge in the brown fog in a moment off anamnesis and revelation ('apocalypse').

**XX, XY.** (a) Salvador Dali to J.G. Ballard. Ballard to Pamela Zoline. Ballard to Will Self. (b) William S. Burroughs to Michael Moorcock. Moorcock to Angela Carter. Moorcock to Iain Sinclair. (c) SF to *New Worlds*. *New Worlds* to London and SF.

**You and Me and the Continuum.** J.G. Ballard's short story, collected in *The Atrocity Exhibition*. A story off condensed

fragments, ordered on alphanumeric principles, in 26 parts.

**Zenith and Ralph Nader.** Top and bottom, beginning and end, *ouroboros* eating its tail.

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# First Impressions

## Book Reviews edited by Paul Billinger

### **Sarah Ash – *Prisoner of Ironsea Tower* ?**

Bantam, London, 2004, 469pp, £10.99, t/p, ISBN 0-593-044984-5

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

The high standard of writing set by *Lord of Snow and Shadows*, the first book of *The Tears of Artamon*, is continued in this, the second volume in a superior fantasy series.

At the end of the previous book, Gavril Nagation, Lord Drakhaoun, hereditary ruler of the land of Azhkendir, was able to rid himself of the Drakhaoul, the demon that had possessed him on his becoming Drakhaoun. Gavril's relief is short-lived, however, for while he is no longer in thrall to the terrible demands of a demonic nature, he has also lost the use of the demon's powers to destroy Azhkendir's enemies, leaving his people defenceless against the invading armies of Eugene of Tielen, Emperor of New Rossiya. Without the Drakhaoul's aid, Gavril knows that the crossbows and sabres of Ashkendir will prove useless against the Tielen muskets, carbines and mortars, and he is forced to surrender to the invaders. He is imprisoned by Eugene in an asylum for the insane and subjected to the barbaric medical experiments. While Gavril languishes in the Ironsea Tower, Astasia, daughter of the Grand Duke of Muscobar, reluctantly married to Eugene after his armies quashed a revolt against her family, discovers that it was the

actions of Eugene that caused her brother to be lost at sea when his ship sank.

Astasia, increasingly uneasy in her position at the Tielen court, finds an ally in the Francian singer Celestine, who has her own reasons for coming to Tielen. Eugene, meanwhile, is far from secure, for in Smarna, where Gavril was brought up, there is a revolt against Tielen rule. Despite Gavril's warnings about the horrors of demonic possession, Eugene determines to acquire the power of the Drakhaoul for himself. The researches of Linnaius, as well as Gavril's own discoveries at Kastel Drakhaoun before his imprisonment, seem to indicate that the source of the Drakhaoul's power might be found on the legendary island of Ty Nagar – and at night Eugene's crippled daughter Karila's sleep is disturbed by nightmares of an island where children are sacrificed to a terrible god.

Unusually for a second volume in a series, the various plots and sub-plots advance considerably, and in unexpected ways, making this book a real page-turner right up to the last page – I trust that author and publisher will not keep us waiting long for the next volume in the series.

### **Gregory Benford – *Beyond Infinity***

Orbit, London, 2004, 451pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 1-84149-188-8

Reviewed by Niall Harrison

*Beyond Infinity* is part of a moderately complex family tree. It is an expansion with ~~the serial numbers filled off~~ of Benford's 1990 novella 'Beyond the Fall of Night', which was itself a sequel to Arthur C. Clarke's 1948 novella 'Against the Fall of Night' (which Clarke, in a satisfying symmetry, had in 1956 expanded to novel-length as *The City and the Stars*). In addition, a much-reduced version of the early chapters of *Beyond Infinity* was published in Interzone last year as the story 'Naturals'.

All of which, if you are familiar with any of the above works, should give you a flavour of what to expect. The book's blurb says that *Beyond Infinity* is an 'epic far future thriller'; Benford himself, in an afterword explaining the novel's genesis, prefers the term 'transcendental adventure'. Myself, I'd go for 'epic far future adventure', since I didn't find it pacy enough to be described as a thriller, and I didn't think it awe-inspiring enough to merit 'transcendental'.

Perhaps that's unfair, though. The novel explicitly sets itself in what seems to be a post-everything time: post-singularity, post-transcendence, almost, in some ways, post-civilisation. In fact, it plays on this explicitly, and seems to be deeply concerned with drawing meaning from history, and in fact from stories in general. 'To live,' says one character, 'is to select. To edit from the past' (p.84). Or another example: the novel's protagonist is soon the last Original human left on the earth, and she becomes vital to a vast struggle beyond her

comprehension. Her name, therefore, is Cley – a double pun, since it is homonymic in English with 'clay' and in French with 'clef', the word for 'key' – and the age of her lineage is central to the plot that unfolds.

Cley's travels take her first to the vast Library of Life, then up into higher dimensions (including the obligatory namecheck of *Flatland*), then out into a rearranged solar system in which the orbits and natures of planets have been casually altered to better support life. In each case, she experiences a different perspective on humanity's place in the universe. She also coexists with or learns about a wide range of other human types, from the arrogant Supras to the inevitable Staple Dons. Her guide is an uplifted post-raccoon called Seeker After Patterns who, as with all such companions, knows more than he lets on, and lends an air of ponderous Meaning to the proceedings.

The problem I have with this sort of novel is that right from the start, Olaf Stapledon and H. G. Wells set the bar very, very high. It seems that most hard sf authors have an instinctive urge to try their hand at a vision of cosmic futurity, but in recent years, at novel length, perhaps only Stephen Baxter's *The Time Ships* has approached that gold standard. *Beyond Infinity* doesn't really come close; the ideas may be the true characters here but they fumble their lines and, as a result, by and large a story that should dazzle becomes no more than a glimmer.

#### A VECTOR RECOMMENDED READ

##### Jonathan Carroll – *White Apples*

Tor UK, London, 2004, 338pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-330-49274-8  
Reviewed by Mark Greener

Vincent Ettrich, advertising executive and womaniser, picks up Coco Hallis, who works in a lingerie store. While at dinner, Vincent meets one of his colleagues, Bruno Mann, whom he introduces to Coco. They don't show any sign of recognising each other. He leaves Coco and Bruno together to answer a mobile call. Vincent's ex-wife tells him that Bruno has just died. When he returns, Bruno is gone. However, Vincent soon discovers that Coco has Bruno's name tattooed on the back of her neck.

Bruno isn't the only person who is supposed to be dead. His ex-lover, Isabelle, brought Vincent back to life to help raise their son. If brought up correctly, and if Vincent passes on the knowledge he gained while dead, the boy could help prevent the forces of chaos from overrunning the universe. However, Vincent can recall only fragments from his deathtime...

*White Apples* is amazing. Early on, it's almost a mystery novel, reminiscent for me of John Franklin Bardin's classic 1947 novel *The Last of Philip Banter*. This also involves an advertising executive trying to untangle events that blur temporal boundaries and that act as a metaphor for his mental state. *White Apples* soon evolves into a quest narrative; by searching for the insights and knowledge death brought, Vincent concurrently seeks redemption and, perhaps, psychological closure.

On the foundation offered by a compelling plot, Carroll builds a remarkable magical realist edifice. There's some unobtrusive metaphysical speculation, which provides a conceptual framework that allows the plot to unfold. Carroll's

idea of the universe is always there in the background, which gives the book a unity of vision missing in lesser novels of the fantastic. Indeed, much of the fantastic element is muted, understated. That makes it all the more potent, all the more compelling.

There are some beautifully written vignettes; a talking rat, for example, or a barbershop where they refashion Bruno's body. Carroll gradually introduces the weirder, more magical elements. It's remarkable that when a rat talks or the barber exchanges bodies, it seems logical and rational within the parameters and vision he established early in the book. The nature of reality becomes increasingly uncertain, fragmented and hallucinogenic, until we're a long way from 'consensual' reality.

As this may suggest, Carroll's story alludes to the Celtic otherworld. The 'real' mortal world – our 'consensual' reality – seamlessly blurs into the magical otherworld. The 'magical' elements are simply there as facts; ripples in the disquieting ocean of reality Carroll creates. Once you accept the premise, the rest flows logically. In many ways, Carroll manages to merge the world of *The Mabinogion*, magical realism and literary fiction into a coherent, unified and consistent whole. This seamless fusion of style, content and intent would suffice to make *White Apples* an excellent novel.

However, the characters elevate *White Apples* from 'just' an excellent novel to, perhaps, a classic. Carroll draws each character – even the minor members of the cast – with consummate care and expertise. Each finely judged character



comes alive, psychologically and emotionally. The characters are flawed, in most case not fatally but subtly. In general, they act with the best of intentions, from love, with hope. However, the flaws mean that the character's plans go array. They want to start over. Yet the new situation soon becomes tarnished with the fears, lies and deceptions they wanted to escape. These flaws doom us; condemn our ability to be masters of our destiny. "You can't change the past, but the past is always coming back to change you; both your present and your future," one character comments. The past is "dead, but it

keeps coming back and stops us from moving forward. It gets in the way of our present ... and our future".

Nevertheless, this isn't a nihilist vision. *White Apples* is ultimately optimistic. Vincent can potentially find redemption through the love that he desires and thought that he had lost. He has the opportunity to escape the tyranny of his personal history. These personal changes help Order retain its universal pre-eminence. *White Apples* is a marvellous novel; compelling; thought provoking; intelligent. What more could you want from fantastic literature?

#### **Mark Chadbourn – *The Queen of Sinister* ?**

Gollancz, London, 2004, 349pp, £10.99, t/p, ISBN 0-575-07276-8

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

When I first picked up this second volume of *The Dark Age* sequence, I was hoping for a continuation of the first volume, *The Devil in Green*, and to begin with I was disappointed that the story told here is completely different. The background is the same, and the events apparently take place soon after those of the first volume, but the characters are new. Presumably the different threads will link up further down the line; it will be interesting to see how this develops.

Readers of Chadbourn's earlier trilogy, *The Age of Misrule*, will be familiar with his basic premise: the old Celtic gods have returned to this world, causing the loss of modern technology and a breakdown in society. Life for the majority of people has become incomprehensible and terrifying. At the opening of *The Queen of Sinister* an inexplicable plague is sweeping through England, and normal medicine has no power to combat it. Caitlin Shepherd, an ordinary GP, does her best to fight the plague but is unable to save lives until she is given the chance to cross into the Otherworld in search of a cure. Yet her own bereavement has caused her personality to fragment in ways which give her unexpected strengths and weaknesses. It wasn't long before I forgot to be disappointed in following this new storyline and set of characters.

My overall feelings about the book are mixed. Chadbourn has created an exciting story; it's easy to become caught up in the dangers and difficulties that Caitlin and her companions have to surmount. The plot has some genuine surprises, and the descriptions of the Otherworld and its inhabitants are powerful and convincing. The characters, too, are portrayed with greater depth and psychological realism than often found in fantasy. However, I still feel, as I said in my review of the previous book, that the scenario is becoming too familiar; I'd love to see Chadbourn tackling something new. There are also occasional minor glitches which suggest to me that some elements may have been edited out without regard to what follows.

Throughout the book there are intriguing hints of a new character who is to appear – almost a King Arthur analogue who is to save the world and take humanity on to a new level of being. I found this one of the most interesting elements. Although the question of who this character is and what he or she will do is not resolved here, it's a powerful hook into further volumes of the series. I'm interested to see where Chadbourn will take his readers next, and what the final resolution will be.

#### **Simon Clark – *The Dalek Factor* ?**

Telos, Tolworth, 2003, 139pp, £25.00, deluxe h/b, ISBN 1-903889-31-6 (£10, standard h/b, ISBN 1-903889-30-8)

#### **Iain McLaughlin – *Blood and Hope* ?**

Telos, Tolworth, 2004, 89pp, £25.00, deluxe h/b, ISBN 1-903889-29-4 (£10, standard h/b, ISBN 1-903889-28-6)

Reviewed by Matthew Hoskins

I was a long-time follower of *Dr Who* when it was on television and watched all but one of the incarnations, finding it some of the best Science Fiction on television. I have occasionally been seduced into reading tie-in fiction; some has been quite good – the James Blish *Star Trek* stories and the Alan Dean Foster *Alien* and *Aliens* novels – but most has been cringe-worthy! This is annoying: why is it so hard to write new stories for film and TV characters? When I was offered these two short novels to review, I therefore admit to being sceptical but these stories appeared interesting enough to be worth a chance. The two stories are different but both are trying to recreate the feel of the TV experience to varying effect.

*Blood and Hope* by Iain McLaughlin features the fifth Doctor with Peri and Erimem and is the shorter of the two at 88 pages and puts the Doctor in the thick of the action during the American Civil War. The story presents an introduction to the causes of the war and tries to create atmosphere by placing the story in flashback as written in the letters and diaries of some of the participants. It is heavily laden with an instructional

voice and this is particularly heavy handed as the key voice is that of Peri, whilst Erimem, who is taken as being a slave from her looks as an Egyptian is never given a voice of her own but only filtered through Peri's observations. The story leaves the Doctor as a cipher and indeed there is little sign of the out-of-context devices used in *Dr Who* stories. The letter-based style is not a bad way to try to evoke period, but the modern language used by characters of the time seems incongruous. I think that the novella is aimed at a 'young adult' audience, part history lesson and part moral instruction. At no point did I feel a need to 'hide behind the sofa'.

*The Dalek Factor* by Simon Clark is a better shot at the task. I was impressed by the structure of the story, which works as a sequence of episodes that are emulating the episodic nature of the TV series. Each episode is constructed to end with new mysteries and perils for the characters and there are some genuine scares that resurrected my childhood nightmares of the Daleks. The forward does spoil the fun a little and I would recommend not reading it until after finishing the story. At 139

pages it manages to emulate *Dr Who* at its best and I was genuinely spooked by this story's dark and humorous take on *The Kypton Factor*. An interesting spin on the *Dr Who* canon, the book features an unknown incarnation of the Doctor and does not depend on knowing any of the portrayals from the series, which I found to be an effective device to make the Doctor both alien and familiar.

These two stories have both surprised and disappointed me, *Blood and Hope* is pedantic and is without traces of the typical *Dr Who* devices and I must confess that my original dislike of the character of Peri didn't help my appreciation. But *The Dalek Factor* reminded me very favourably of what I loved about watching from behind the sofa as a child – not bad as that was three decades ago!

These novellas, however, have revived my difficulty with spin-off stories. The way that plots work on screen and on the page

is different, and portrayals of characters from film and television on the page seem flat. The creation of spin-off stories from TV and film franchises always seem to operate with the owner of the franchise's stern requirement that the writer not change the cannon and hence they often feel calculated and rather flat, as exemplified by *Blood and Hope*. In contrast I have read some really exceptional fan fictions online that have produced really vivid stories: try 'Donna the Vampire Slayer' as a taste (a *Buffy/West Wing* cross-over at [www.cybamall.com/nomadsrealm/dtvs.htm](http://www.cybamall.com/nomadsrealm/dtvs.htm)). When spin-off fiction is done well it is unusual and often based on a move away from the point-of-view used on screen as is illustrated by *The Dalek Factor*, which is a fine addition to the legend of the Doctor and is good enough for me to be tempted to read others in the Telos *Dr Who* series.

[Available from [www.telos.co.uk](http://www.telos.co.uk)]

## A VECTOR RECOMMENDED READ

### Cory Doctorow – *Eastern Standard Tribe*

Tor, New York, 2004, 223pp, \$23.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-30759-6  
Reviewed by Gary Wilkinson

I've found it kind of rare to stumble over a book that really speaks to me, that resonates, clicks in with a core aspect of my life. *Eastern Standard Tribe* is one of them.

Nowadays I find myself spending more and more of my time on-line. In fact in the last few years I have made good friends via the net, friends that have been made not by the usual method of chance encounters in the real world because we happened to share the same geographical place of work or school or whatever, but by sharing the same interests and hanging out in the same parts of the net that cater for them. We do each other favours, look out for each other. We are a tribe. *Eastern Standard Tribe* is all about this phenomenon and a whole lot more.

In the very near future, The Eastern Standard Tribe of the title is a group of like-minded individuals who live along the East coast of America. Powerful, they are engaged in a cold war with the Greenwich Mean Tribe. Time means a lot because you want a set of pals who are online when you are, before work, in the evening not in the middle of the night. If you want to hang out with them, but live in the wrong place, expect some late nights/early mornings.

Art, the book's main protagonist is a cold warrior for the cause of Eastern Standard. He's a user interaction specialist and works in London making deliberately very bad transportation systems. Anyone who has used public transport recently can believe this could be all too true. Trying to keep in contact with 'home' has totally fried Art's circadian rhythms.

### Jennifer Fallon – *Medalon* ?

Orbit, London, 2004, 615pp, £7.99, p/b, ISBN 1-84149-326-0  
Reviewed by Andrew A. Adams

There seems to have been a rash of first novels by Australian fantasy authors published in the UK lately, of which *Medalon* is the latest. The blurb promises intrigue and treachery. Treachery there is aplenty, although the intrigue is rather simple.

The two main characters are brother and sister Tarja and R'shiel, children of an ambitious woman, Joyhinia. She is the member of a ruling feminist, atheist elite in a small country

One day he sleepily runs into a woman – literally, in his car – but it proves to be the start of a relationship. Then he gets an idea for a new more positive project – kind of a mobile Napster. Can this get him back to Eastern Standard?

But things don't go according to plan. The book opens with Art trapped on the roof of an asylum wondering whether to slam a pencil up his nose to give himself an amateur lobotomy. Is it better to be happy than smart? We flashback to how he got there and what he does about it.

This book is just so funny: we have deadpan portrayals of physical disaster (fellow bad back sufferers will be wincing along with me at Art's disk problems), and broad satirical sweeps at, among many things, internet trolls, corporate life, mental health professionals, English policemen, interfering mothers and mock-Dickensean villains. *Eastern Standard Tribe* may be short but it is very sweet – a great rush; like slam dunking a can of Jolt.

Rather appropriately I first encountered Doctorow via his rather splendid blog Boing Boing but this is the first fiction of his I've read and I'll definitely be back for more.

Obviously if you're an internet junkie you'll get most out of it but even if you're not a total tech-head I'd recommend you give it a go, and you easily can because it's also available, free to read, on the net [legitimately at <http://craphound.com/est/download.php> direct from the author, but it would be very nice if you like the book to buy a copy].

caught between monotheistic Karien and polytheistic Fardohnya and Hythria. The irony is that the gods do exist as do the supposedly destroyed Harshini: driven out centuries earlier by the founders of the ruling sisterhood. The first portion of the book follows Joyhinia's simplistic intrigue leading her to the position of ruler of Medalon. This intrigue is probably the weakest part of the book, it's just too simple really to be called intrigue: a simpleton overcoming an idiot in a

battle for power.

R'shiel's and Tarja's personal stories are much more interesting. At times they (and particularly R'shiel) seem to move from danger to escape and back into worse danger immediately, all too often. However, this apparently author-contrived 'Perils of Penelope' sequence is revealed to be mostly the contrivance of the aforementioned gods, whose combined interferences – making things more dangerous than intended on occasion – causes the sequence. Even so, the plotting is a little too trite for my tastes. Things work out with too little cost for the danger that is present, even allowing for the occasional appearances of the gods.

These gods are somewhat reminiscent of David Eddings'

### **Cornelia Funke – *Inkheart***

The Chicken House, Frome, 2003, 543pp, £12.99, h/b, ISBN 1-904442-09-0

Reviewed by Elizabeth A. Billinger

On one level this is a fantasy about books and what might happen if their characters could escape into our own world. On another level it is a funny and thought-provoking examination of what books are and what they mean to us.

*Inkheart* opens on a rainy night with a sinister stranger lurking outside Meggie's house. Her father seems to know the stranger, Dustfinger, but explains nothing, only telling Meggie that they must leave immediately. The opening couple of chapters are genuinely frightening, drawing on fairy tales and childhood fears in a way that is familiar but irresistible. The only comfort is in the description of books: Meggie's father Mo is a bookbinder and restorer of books, Meggie's life is full of books as if, in the absence of a mother, her nurturing has been divided between her father and her books. She loves his workshop, describes him as a book doctor, strokes the spines of beautiful books for comfort and has a box painted with the words *Meggie's Treasure Chest* which is filled with books and always accompanies her on their travels.

The travels now take them to Mo's sister Elinor, an unfriendly woman who has far more regard for her book collection than she does for her family (or anyone else for that matter). Elinor's obsessive collecting of rare books has led to some questionable deals, but for her the possessing of a book overrides all issues of morality and ethics. Her involvement in the story is supposed to be limited to looking after Meggie whilst Mo sorts out his problem with Dustfinger. Unfortunately things do not go according to plan.

Elinor and Meggie are drawn, with Mo, into a desperate struggle against the villains of the piece, they are kidnapped,

### **David Gemmell – *White Wolf***

Corgi, London, 2004, 589pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-522-14677-3

### **David Gemmell – *The Swords of Night and Day* ?**

Bantam, London, 2004, £17.99, h/b, ISBN 0-593-04447-9

Reviewed by Martin Potts

These two books feature a new hero in Gemmell's Drenai world, Skillgannon the Damned, a swordsman of tremendous skills haunted by a terrible past. I am sure he will become a firm favourite amongst Gemmell fans and could attract new ones as these tales are amongst Gemmell's most accessible to date.

Skillgannon is introduced to us in *White Wolf* in the guise of Brother Lantern, an apprentice at a monastery and, like many other novices, searching for some kind of sanctuary from

work, but the tone is altogether darker. Murder, mass murder, rape, and other brutalities occur, although very rarely 'onscreen', mostly being revealed later to other characters.

Fallon's writing is reasonable. She has a good sense of place, and her descriptions build a good impression of the backdrop and most of the characters are believable, once we find out who and what they are. The plotting is her weakest point and there is a distinct feeling of a lack of flow within the story. We jerk from one crisis to the next, without always feeling that there has been sufficient explanation from the characters for the actions that drive the plot forward. This is just the start of a trilogy and is simply the setup (all 600 pages of it). OK for a first novel, but nothing special.

ill-treated and escape repeatedly as each side attempts to locate and secure (or destroy) all extant copies of a particular book.

As is revealed on the dustjacket and hinted at from the beginning of the book, Mo has a special gift. Or maybe a curse. He can, by reading a book aloud, bring characters from fictional worlds into his own and this is the reason Meggie has never heard him read aloud. The monsters and evildoers he is now fighting are ones he himself has inadvertently inflicted on the world.

The book makes much of the responsibility of authors who are of course the creators of these evil beings. Lets pause for a moment and reflect on the fact that Funke has created the worst monsters she can think of, presenting them as the work of a fictional author, one she condemns (through her other characters) for his dangerous lack of care. The text also sets up a reverence for the written word and for the book as object, at the same time as it mocks those who feel that way. This is a book full of jokes for those of us with a serious book habit

Some readers and reviewers have failed to appreciate this aspect of the book, judging it to be an adventure story that is bogged down by its descriptive passages, especially the endless descriptions of books, but I think that is to do the novel a disservice and to miss its central joke. It is true to say that the adventure element of the book is flawed, as though its author had some difficulties bringing her plot to a conclusion (as with her earlier novel, *The Thief Lord*) but the skilled description and thoughtful commentary on the nature of books and fictions more than compensate.

his demons. But circumstances soon conspire to force the young man into action when the monastery is threatened and so begins a chain of events which move Skillgannon inexorably into a position where he can affect the lives of all in the Drenai World.

For those familiar with this Drenai world there is an added bonus in that his first and (probably) most popular character, Druss the Legend, has a strong role in the unfolding events. This is Druss before the events of Gemmell's first novel

*Legend* (an essential read for any lover of fantasy) and the relationship which develops between Druss and Skillgannon is a major factor in this book's success. Whether they are fighting side by side, talking tactics, extolling mutual respect or debating each other's all too human frailties, their exchanges are the high points in the novel.

Skillgannon's background is deliberately revealed through a series of flashbacks, explaining why the tale began in the monastery. Needless to say that along the way there are many battle sequences which Gemmell maintains at a pace which proves exhilarating and up to his usual high descriptive standard of capturing the speed and grace of the finest swordsmanship.

On reflection an awful lot happens in this book but Gemmell's strength as a storyteller disguises the many twists and turns which befall Skillgannon on his journey. The pages turn effortlessly to reach a satisfying conclusion and I put the book down with a sigh....

... And picked up the sequel *The Swords of Night and Day* with relish!

Remarkably, this is set a thousand years after the events of *White Wolf* and I will not spoil the novel's premise by revealing how the character of Skillgannon reappears after the events of the first. But return he does, to bring his skills to the aid of the people in a very different Drenai world from the one into which he was born. Now, in addition to his original demons, the manner of his return brings further moral dilemma for him. The Drenai are about to become annexed into a Kingdom ruled by a despot called The Eternal and we discover

#### A VECTOR RECOMMENDED READ

##### Mary Gentle – *Cartomancy*

Gollancz, London, 2004, 313pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07532-5

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

*Cartomancy* would appear to be Gentle's only collection of shorter fiction since *Scholars and Soldiers* (Orbit, 1989), and despite the fact that it's probably not her most prolific form (thirteen stories, six overlapping from the earlier collection, one previously uncollected) it's most definitely overdue.

A word about introductions: *Scholars and Soldiers* was graced by one of the best and funniest introductions (by Neil Gaiman) I've come across. "*Cartomancy*" Parts 1 and 2 (first published in the anthology *Villains* (1991)), which here – as in the earlier anthology – bracket the collection and serve as both Foreword and Afterword, are equally tricky, although the joke isn't fully sprung until the end. The initial effect is disconcerting: a confrontation between a generously proportioned (if just over three foot high) redheaded halfling barbarian, her dim orc companion, and a tall silver-haired aristocratic elf, pretty much faithfully recreated as a pastiche of the gaudy and overwrought style of a *Forgotten Realms* tale. It's not until you get to the end of 'Cartomancy Part 2', at the end of the collection (hopefully having read the stories in there, and not skipped to the end) that you realise things are not what they seem and you have been cleverly set up.

The main bulk of the stories have a mixed pedigree, between 1985 and 2004, and from places as diverse as *Asimov's*, *Peter Davidson's Book of Alien Planets*, *Despatches from the Frontier of the Female Mind*, *Interzone*, *Odyssey* and the 'Midnight Rose' anthologies *The Weerde* and *Villains*.

The lead story, and probably flagship of the collection, is

that the use of magic and a (hinted at) ancient technology has created a new race – Joinings – which are the result of a melding between man and beast and are used ruthlessly by the Eternal in the ruler's armies of conquest. Clearly, Skillgannon's challenge is to somehow resist the Eternal's plans.

This reads as a much darker novel than *White Wolf*, dealing with issues such as prejudice, the arrogance of power and the selfishness of pride. There is also more development of the supporting characters, done particularly well with Stavut, a roving merchant who eventually becomes integral to the story, with his sequences stealing the show, being often humorous and ultimately poignant. There is even a re-appearance by Druss – which always gives the reader a feeling of anticipation – which neatly ties up a few storylines left over from *White Wolf* and even events from the classic *Legend*.

Some may be critical of this type of 'high' or 'heroic' fantasy by saying that it is predictable. With David Gemmell despite certain characters and situations feeling familiar, he is always able to weave an original storyline, which is never predictable. Of course now that Gemmell has this incredible bank of Drenai history to draw upon, the depth of the narrative is enhanced by the cross references to previous tales but is never a barrier to new readers and would, I hope, whet their appetite to explore the sagas further. These two books are both thoroughly enjoyable reads, which I can wholeheartedly recommend. David Gemmell is a wonderful teller of tales – can there be any higher praise?

the novella length 'The Logistics of Carthage', a not-quite-sequel (Gentle describes it rather as "a piece of flotsam") to *Ash: A Secret History*. It's set some twenty years before the events of the novel (you can draw your own conclusions about the identity of the pale-haired infant foundling who appears briefly at the end of the story), and centres on a violent confrontation between a mercenary company and a band of monks over the proper burial of a soldier, 'Guido Rosso', a.k.a Margaret Hammond. The balance of power shifts back and forth, neither side giving way, while the body rots in the church and the Turks approach. Against this part tragic and part farcical background Hammond's friend and fellow soldier, Yolande Vaudin, encounters the slave, Ric, who seems to have the ability to transmit visions of the future.

The moral dilemma between duty on the one hand and a personal sense of honour on the other runs through a number of the stories, perhaps no more so than 'The Road to Jerusalem', in which a modern Knight Templar, on trial for her part in a bloodbath, is forced into the impossible choice of disobeying an order from the Pope and her superior and betraying her Order. It was a powerful and affecting piece when it first appeared in *Interzone* in 1991 and reads just as strongly now. Here too, in the background to Lt. Tadmartin's tale, is the germ of the puzzle of 'Lost Burgundy' that a decade later would turn into the 500,000 words of *Ash*.

A different kind of moral dilemma, about the nature of knowledge and the scientific process, is evidenced in 'A Sun in

The Attic', which originally appeared in the *Women's Press* anthology *Despatches From the Frontiers of the Female Mind*. Gentle, in her Afterword to this story, betrays an ambiguity about the resolution and the conflict between those who seek knowledge at any price and those who think that if something can be misused it should not be used at all.

'Orc's Drift' shows another side to Gentle's mischievous sense of humour, where the grim battlefield humour of *Ash* turns into the slapstick farce of *Grunts!* (although 'The Logistics of Carthage', contains a splendid and hilarious toilet joke). It's largely a one-liner, which turns on a very hoary (but still funny) punchline, and is best summed up by fellow-perpetrator Dean Wrayland's observation, "we get *paid* for this?".

In contrast are the more esoteric 'The Tarot Dice' and 'What God Abandoned' which evidence Gentle's fascination with the "vast playground" of the Renaissance Hermetic mind-set. I'm not sure I've fully figured out what 'The Tarot Dice' is about, but it forms a link to the *White Crow* novels where the

laws of physics are both different and malleable. (The world of 'The Tarot Dice', like that of another celebrated fantasy creation, has an Edge, and dice sometimes fall in impossible patterns). The setting, and some of the characters, of 'What God Abandoned' overlap our own seventeenth century. As well as embodying a rather fine conceit about the way Descartes would influence the change from a magical to a scientific/rational world-view, it also counts as probably the best transsexual, werewolf, counterfactual, slash romance in the history of the genre.

'Human Waste', one of those controversial *Interzone* stories of the mid-1990s, is dark and disturbing. Not least because parts of it are very funny, until the next sentence reminds you that this is a story about cruelty and child abuse, albeit of a genetically engineered doll.

Altogether a fine, if overdue, collection from one of our finest writers, especially for those who missed these stories the first time around.

### Jon George – *Faces of Mist and Flame* ?

Tor UK, London, 2004, 390pp, £10.99, t/p (reviewed in proof), ISBN 1-4050-3397-5

Reviewed by Paul Bateman

I have to state from the outset that I keep forgetting what this book is called. It's misleading too. It sounds like it should be a part of Robert Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* cycle, but isn't. Essentially, the book could do with a better title, but it wouldn't be the first book to suffer from Crap Title Syndrome, not that the title should detract from the content.

Jon George's debut novel is constructed from three strands. The first concerns Serena Freeman, a modern day 24-year-old professor at Cambridge University who unravels the mathematics of time and devises a machine (called 'Odysseus') to transfer her thoughts to others in the past. The second strand concerns Pheonix Lafayette, a combat correspondent entrenched in the American advance on the Pacific island of Guam during the Second World War. The third strand is an irreverent and enjoyable retelling of the 'Labours of Hercules'. The last strand links the first two as Serena Freeman casts her consciousness over fifty years back into Pheonix Lafayette's. Freeman is obsessed with tales of heroes and tells 'Nix' about Hercules. Thus in his ancestral homeland Nix attempts to emulate Hercules' tasks in the hope of surviving the advance.

This is quite an interesting idea and works well enough. The author has gone to great lengths in making the carnage in the Pacific believable, particularly the camaraderie between the soldiers and their game of 'Dead Pool Poker' where the higher hands mean less chance of death. However, the action in the war overshadows what's happening to Serena, which is a weak plotline at the best of times. Serena is not truly fleshed out as a believable woman, possibly because her tale is told in the third person, which often distances the characters emotionally from the reader, while Nix's tale is told in the first person, making it

more intimate to the reader. Serena is apparently a genius, but we are only told this. I'd much rather be shown the character's genius than have it thrust upon me as fact, so I can make up my own mind. This heavy-handedness is just plain bad storytelling and should have been better illustrated. The author also writes the Serena plotline with a slightly 'girlie', jokey style, which undermines the seriousness of her situation, particularly as she's under surveillance by the government who want Odysseus for themselves, another strand of the novel not particularly expanded upon and taken to the limits. Furthermore, I was not convinced by the logic of Odysseus's workings. Essentially, the modern-day part of the novel could have been a hundred pages longer to give it more depth and justification for inclusion in the first place.

My own feeling is that the events that concern Nix could have stood up on their own, as if he had been following the guidance of the spirit or angel he thought the voice was, particularly as it was evident from the opening acknowledgements that the author wanted to explore the horror of war and not the realms of science fiction. Therefore this is not the enthralling blend of sf and violent action the book cover claims. And I'm not sure if it will appeal to the readers of Neal Asher and Richard Morgan. This is no *Altered Carbon*, the concepts and writing simply aren't inventive enough. It's a shame really as without the Serena plotline this debut could have been a *Platoon* or *Apocalypse Now*. I'm not saying that authors should stay within strictly defined genres, but great care, cunning and daring need to be taken to satisfy fans either side of the borders being broken, particularly if the end product suffers from CTS.

### Gary Gibson – *Angel Stations* ?

Tor UK, London, 2004, 392pp, £10.99, t/p (reviewed in proof), ISBN 1-4050-3445-9,

Reviewed by Chris Hill

The human race has extended out into deep space due to the discovery of Angel Stations – a system of jump gates throughout the galaxy. Little is known about the creators of the gates except that the technology they have left behind is useful

and, occasionally, dangerous.

One Angel station orbits Kaspar, the only other planet so far discovered that has intelligent life, and the relatively primitive inhabitants are being left to develop without human

intervention. But Kaspar also has interesting Angel technology of its own, particularly in the mysterious Citadel, a structure hidden in an area of the world inaccessible to its inhabitants.

The discovery of a life-threatening burst of gamma radiation puts the inhabitants of Kaspar in immediate danger, while at the same time fitting in with the insane plans of a man genetically engineered before birth, using Angel technology, to semi-godhood.

There is much to like about *Angel Stations*, Gary Gibson's debut novel. The story moves at a good pace, generally helped by having small sections from the differing viewpoints of a fairly large cast. Among these is Kim, an ex-archaeologist, who has never got over the death of her lover in an expedition on Kaspar that Kim was in charge of. Also interesting is Elias, whose life has been blighted by military genetic experiments performed upon him, which have given him the power to heal but isolated him from human society.

One of the most interesting ideas Gibson plays with leads, paradoxically, to one of the novel's weaknesses. There are three men who were genetically engineered before birth, using Angel technology, who can see into the future to some extent. Part of the reason why two of them oppose the third (and this

drives much of the plot) is that by seeing the course of future events they are, in effect, taking away the free will of those around them. Unfortunately when all of the casts' actions are pre-determined by these prescient men then the characters' own choices become devalued. Of course, this is partly the point, but it does mean that there is a danger of reducing the characters to ciphers acting out someone else's drama.

The structure of the book could be tightened up here and there; there are a few scenes from viewpoint characters that don't really add a great deal (and one very clumsy expository lump early in the book). My review copy is an uncorrected proof so maybe some of these will be dealt with in the published edition.

The only other criticism I would make is that the native inhabitants of Kaspar do not look like humans but never act in any obviously non-human way. I would have liked them to be a little more alien.

*Angel Stations* makes no pretensions to be Art, but is an enjoyable, fast moving adventure story with an interesting philosophical problem at its heart. There are also some strong hooks left in place for a sequel and I, for one, would be happy to find out where Gibson is going next.

#### **Sara Gran – *Come Closer* ?**

Atlantic Books, London, 2004, 168pp, £10.99, p/b, ISBN 1-84354-289-7

Reviewed by Dave M. Roberts

With *Come Closer*, Sara Gran is tackling a subject and plot that has been practically done to death (so to speak) within the Horror Genre. Amanda is a fairly successful architect, who has a good stable relationship with her partner, Edward. Strange things start to happen around them, tapping in the walls that only happens when Amanda is around, she has blackouts during which she may or may not have committed some violent crime and so on. It transpires that she is possessed by an entity which is intent on making her destroy her life and relationship. Is she really possessed, or is she descending into insanity? Apologies to anyone who might want to read this, but that does pretty much sum up the plot in its entirety.

Given that this is such a straight-forward and oft-visited premise, does Sara Gran do anything new or interesting with it? Well, quite frankly, no she doesn't. The book makes the assumption that the reader is not familiar with the standard tropes of horror fiction. As a result, the steady stream of revelations seem almost superfluous as they come as much more of a surprise to Amanda than they do to the reader.

#### **Jon Courtenay Grimwood – *Lucifer's Dragon***

Pocket Books, London, 2004, 377pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-7434-7827-4

Reviewed by Paul N. Billinger

The world has changed dramatically since *Lucifer's Dragon* was first published in 1998, with its preposterous fictional events – crashing airliners into skyscrapers for example – manifesting as reality. And nothing dates 'cyberpunk' novels more than the intrusion of an actual future more peculiar than its fictional world (more on this later). So how is Grimwood's second novel viewed in 2004?

Using what has now become a familiar Grimwood structure, *Lucifer's Dragon* has two main narratives. The first, the flashback narrative, describes the creation of the artificial city state of newVenice, in the middle of the Pacific ocean, by Passion di Orchi, the dropout daughter of a mafia boss. The

The first person perspective means that we never leave Amanda's mind. This does allow an ambiguity about her state of mind to be inherent in the story. We can expect no answers as to whether she is insane or possessed, as we never get to see how her behaviour appears to those around her. We get only hints based on the way she views their behaviour. This should bring an emotional complexity to the novel. Unfortunately, as none of the characters are particularly fleshed out, this complexity fails to emerge. Even Amanda herself doesn't have any real depth. This is a pity, as the author does so little with the concept that without the depth of personality of the protagonist, any empathy with her is lost, and consequently her struggles with the possessing entity do not have the disturbing impact that is clearly intended. What should be shocking simply becomes tedious.

Given that this book is packaged as a mainstream rather than a horror novel, I strongly suspect that this is a classic case of a writer not familiar with a genre tackling one of its basic conceits, and not doing it at all well.

other, the contemporary narrative, shows the consequences a century later of the apparent assassination of the Doge, the symbolic child ruler of newVenice, and examines the conflicting motives of Karo, another dropout daughter of a domineering father, and brutal NVPD Officer Angeli, a strange sort of hero, as they uncover the meaning behind the murder.

The linkage between the two narratives clearly shows Grimwood's progress as a writer: here the two are directly connected with the flashback presented as an illegal sim being accessed by Angeli during his investigation. No such device is needed in the *Arabesk* books, with all strands appearing to



occur contemporaneously, a much more powerful effect. The balance between the strands and the characters is also less assured here with little natural flow between the narratives and some rather under-developed characters.

The books strengths, however, easily overcome these problems. The main characters, all damaged to some extent, are always real despite being involved in outrageous situations, especially Passion who lingers in the mind long after the rest of the book (although sometimes you wish the images would fade rather more quickly). For all the harsh, brutal depictions of sex – usually concerning Passion – there are moments of real tenderness, even in the most unlikely places (such as the developing relationship between Kwai and Sasumi). As with the *Arabesque* books the sense of place is especially well conveyed, not only with the palazzos and rusting ships of new Venice but in the depiction of the back-streets of Bangkok and the squares of St Petersburg, even down to the details of a hotel room in Zurich. Although less obvious than in Grimwood's later works the political landscape is vital, appearing today to be an even more pertinent comment on global instability.

*Lucifer's Dragon*, long out of print, is re-published with a striking (eye-straining) orange/green cover in a similar style to those of *redRobe* and *reMix*. This change of cover is the only

#### **Charlaine Harris – *Living Dead in Dallas* ?**

Orbit, London, 2004, 279pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 1-84149-300-7

#### **Charlaine Harris – *Club Dead* ?**

Orbit, London, 2004, 288pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 1-84149-301-5

Reviewed by Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc

Well there's no abating the tide of the FFFFFFFF's (the Ferocious Faux-Feminist Female Fantôme Fighting Fictions)™. Plucky Sookie is back in action to eye up the fit chaps, feign outrage that men should have indecent thoughts about her (despite, and we have it on good authority from Ms Stackhouse herself, her breasts being a gift from God apparently) but stay monogamous to her beau, hot-lovin' southern vampire smoothy Bill. Thing is, due to a deal brokered in Book One (*Dead Until Dark*, reviewed last issue), Bill occasionally has to sub-contract his new squeeze to the dangerous but oh-so-macho Eric (add The Vampire at your own risk) for her highly prized powers of telepathy. So Sookie goes to Dallas for a touch of mind reading. A vampire nest is searching for one of their number, missing in a bizarre gay vampire bar incident. It's down to Sookie to follow the trail, which unfortunately leads to a rather unpleasant bunch of religious reactionaries, The Fellowship, who like nothing better than a dawn barbeque, where the vampire meat provides its own flames. Some people, it seems are not keen on the vampires' status as legal citizens of the US of A – and this is something other creatures, such as the shape-shifters and the super-scary poisonous messenger of doom the Maenad are keen to void. Dangerous times for our waitress-cum-psychic detective.

Some books need to be read in absolute silence. Some you can handle with a bit of light music or on a train. The beauty of Sookie is that you could read her adventures in a war zone while being hosed with paint and shouted at by scary people in latex William Shatner masks. Not that that is recommended, but it goes some ways to explain the ease of read we have here. This is no bad thing and the book's heroine goes to some great pains (and often) to redress the perceived balances of prejudice

difference from the New English Library original: the text is unchanged with no amendments or updating (even the blurb is the same although the quotes are now from 'literary' sources, not genre ones). This new edition is also significant in that it further removes the book, and the author, from its original "cybershock sensation" label, which was a clear attempt to position the book as part of the cyberpunk movement, long after the movement – if movement it was – had effectively ended. Despite some trappings of cyberpunk, notably the use of virtual reality environments plus the casual designer violence and designer labels, Andrew M. Butler's description of the author's work (in *Cyberpunk*, PocketEssentials, 2000) as 'cyberpunk-flavoured', is a more accurate designation.

*Lucifer's Dragon* can now be viewed both as an essential prelude to Grimwood's later work and as an enjoyable novel in its own right. This is a welcome return to print and for anyone who has only read the *Arabesque* books this is an opportunity to view their development with a new perspective. For anyone unfamiliar with the author's work this could be an excellent introduction, just be prepared for a difficult, and sometimes unpleasant, journey. And for the rest of us it will just have to do until *Stamping Butterflies* is published by Gollancz in November.

in a so-called classless society. This ultimately makes the book easy to criticise (and in doing so the reader falls foul of precisely what it seeks to debunk) but hard to dislike – the *Sookie Stackhouse* books are undoubtedly enjoyable to read, just at times hilariously misguided. The main joy lies with Sookie's inability to grasp the hypocrisy about her attitudes to sex. It's very much a 'have your cake and eat it' affair with faux disgust at anyone else's sexual practices and a howling moment when she chastises her libido-drenched brother about his homophobia when her own attitudes are hardly sound. Moreover the whole of southern America comes across as a hot-bed of sex that is only held back by the moral fortitude of our heroine, suffering the Mills and Boon perils of masochism and near rape experiences to remain 'pure' for her man. In this context the book holds its own as contemporary melodrama with a supernatural twist, a pot-boiler of sensationalism with a conservatively moral heroine trying to hold onto values in her own deranged and rather entertaining way.

The F7™ adventures continue in *Club Dead* as telepathic would-be-trailer (if her granny hadn't left her the house) would-be-trash (if she wasn't so goddamned intelligent) would-be-waitress (if she didn't keep running around the southern states solving supernatural shenanigans) Sookie Stackhouse hits the road for more hard-hitting, hard-loving jinks. This time brooding, brawny Bill has left in mysterious circumstances and got himself kidnapped in Mississippi. This is especially worrying as he's been visiting an old vampire flame – something vampires never, ever, do and horny-but-faithful(ish, sort of, in a kinda broad definition of the term way) Sookie is mightily miffed. Still, shapely shape-shifter Alcide is here to help her investigations, as is dreamy Eric and a bevy of other buff blokes that she really should keep her hands off.

Sookie's waitressing is taking even more of a back seat these days but frankly income is the least of her worries. At least her adventures have resisted the urge to shoot off into the stratospheric page-counts that typify modern series, but this time round the emphasis on looking great and being masochistic reaches new heights. Sookie's incredible moralistic see-sawing comes back with a vengeance as does the ever endearing character Bubba (yes, Elvis is a vampire, but the drugs in his system meant the change process didn't go too well so he's a few pounds of bacon short of a fool's gold sandwich), one of a series of supernatural bodyguards there to help her on her quest. This time she's off to Club Dead, a spellbound and dangerous establishment with a fire-dealing goblin as a goon. Life away from Bill has driven Sookie into a nigh-on nymphomaniacal state, not aided by an assortment of revealing dresses, a greatly improved sexy look and a pedicure from Alcide's beautician sister. Somewhere in the midst of this she

**Marvin Kaye (ed) – *The Dragon Quintet***

Tor, New York, 2004, 302pp, \$24.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-31035-X  
Reviewed by Lesley Hatch

Take five authors, give them a remit to write a story which includes a "true, as opposed to a metaphorical, dragon" and what do you get? The answer is an intriguing mix of stories and ideas which (with one exception) work very well.

Orson Scott Card's 'In the Dragon's House' is basically the story of a house with some fantastic architecture, including a gargoyle in the form of a dragon's head, and the various people who live there over the years. These include a young boy, the main protagonist, who discovers a room with no windows, which contains a model railway in constant use, and a tiny living dragon, which inhabits the room. There is a neat, if unnerving, twist at the end of the story, which makes you think of dragons in a different way.

Elizabeth Moon's 'Judgement' is a fantasy tale which takes place in and around a village steeped in tradition. It begins with the discovery by two villagers of some strange rocks on a path: one of these rocks is taken back to the village, with dire consequences for all concerned, and the judgement of the title is delivered by a dragon. I enjoyed this tale, as much for the customs of the village, which provided an excellent background, as for the story.

Tanith Lee's 'Love in a Time of Dragons' is, for me, the least satisfying story, but it is hard to say why. The basic premise of a dragon that needs slaying and someone coming to

has time to dance provocatively (although it seemed innocent the first time), drink champagne cocktails and improve her vocabulary with a word of the day calendar. And then there's the masochism. This has now escalated to near biblical levels as she takes a near fatal stake but is saved by the vamps.

Maybe if Sookie became televised (as an HBO job – no chance anywhere else due to the content) her adventures would warm to the medium, but on paper things range from sordid to coy to ridiculous. There are plenty of details that flesh out Sookie's world but these are offset by some fortune-cookie reject philosophy and some achingly unfettered libidinal observations (word of the day is, in fact, 'libido'...). Never short of readable but far from recommended and strays further into "enjoyable... but for the wrong reasons" than even its predecessors. Lovers of top cheese will find six pounds well spent on the cover alone, but if it's anything other than a quick read you're after you'd best leave it be.

do it works, with a twist in the tale, but the characters and the setting are stereotypes. In addition, it is difficult to sympathise with the main female protagonist, and these two elements rather spoil the story.

In 'Joust', Mercedes Lackey has created a story which begins with one of her common themes: a young serf, ill-treated by his master. He is given a new life by a Joustier and his dragon, warriors used as the ultimate weapon in wartime, and he aspires to get a dragon for himself. How he does it, and what happens in the end, makes this the best story in the collection. Without exception, the characters are skilfully created and you can feel a great deal of sympathy for them.

Michael Swanwick's 'King Dragon' deals with artificial dragons, piloted by half-elves (a little like wartime bombers) and what happens when one of them gets 'shot' down and comes to a village that is not all it seems, especially when it comes to its inhabitants. The story is subtly written, with an unexpected ending, and is the second most effective tale in the collection.

To conclude, I enjoyed these tales with the editor having done a great job in getting these five authors to create thought-provoking stories. I have not encountered this particular format before, but I think there is a niche for anthologies like these.

**Rachel Klein – *The Moth Diaries* ?**

Faber and Faber, London, 2004, 250pp, £9.99, h/b, ISBN 0-571-21970-5  
Reviewed by Elizabeth A. Billinger

In her first novel Klein gives the twilight world of teenage angst the gothic setting it demands, using the first person to give it the power of immediacy.

The 16 year old diarist is a boarder at an exclusive girls school, finding it less painful to be apart from her grieving mother after the death of her father, a poet. The day girls at the school shun physical contact and do not mix the boarders; the boarders cling to each other emotionally and physically, creating an isolated world with its own rules and own dangers. They exist in a state of extreme emotions, perpetually seeking out risk: friendships have an erotic intensity; drugs are commonplace (the setting is the late 60s/early 70s); the girls

crawl along the wide copper guttering of their ancient school building – several storeys above ground – to visit each other illicitly; they sneak out of school to smoke, drink coffee and have sex (with boys); their pasts hold tales of suicide attempts and parental abandonment.

Into this highly charged but relatively stable community comes a new girl, Ernessa. Ernessa is mysterious and moody, she has pale skin and always wears long skirts and long sleeves. She is allocated a room opposite our nameless narrator, and seemingly without effort woos away the narrator's best friend, Lucy. Before long Lucy seems to develop a mysterious wasting disease. Other disturbing

incidents occur: girls are banished from school, people die, relationships shift and are undone. Fighting to deal with the loss of Lucy, the narrator becomes convinced the Ernessa is actually a vampire. She sees things that lend credence to her theory, but no-one else at the school will take her claims seriously and she is shunned for her seeming madness.

And how should the reader understand this melodrama?

The diary is prefaced by a piece written by the narrator 30 years later, when she has a 16 year old daughter of her own. In this preface the diarist is described as 'suffering from borderline personality disorder complicated by depression and psychosis' and the diaries themselves as a way of preserving her sixteen year-old self, part of her struggle to survive adolescence. We have a classically unreliable narrator: is anything in the book true?

The references within the book to gothic texts are numerous – the girls take a class in the supernatural, reading 'Carmilla' by Sheridan Le Fanu, 'The Great God Pan' by Arthur Machen and Hawthorne's 'Rappaccini's Daughter', amongst others, all of which have themes pertinent to *The Moth Diaries* – the linking of vampirism and lesbianism, the terror of seeing the demonic, the horrors of both the demonic

and rationalism. Mention is, inevitably, made of Dracula and it begins to seem inevitable that Lucy will fall prey to vampiric seductions. The shade of Miss Jean Brodie also hovers (and one of the teachers is called Miss Brody), and there is a flavour of the film *Heavenly Creatures*.

The pleasure of the book exists in the ambiguity of the gothic, the numerous possible interpretations of events: the diary could be a fabulation, a fantasy life lived only on paper; Ernessa may truly have been a vampire, the diarist sadly misdiagnosed as being mentally ill by those unwilling to accept the existence of the supernatural; Ernessa may not exist at all; Ernessa may be the diarist's alter ego, a gothic doubling; the awful events of the book may not have happened at all, may have been perpetrated by Ernessa, may have been carried out by the psychotic narrator. Is there really a dead father? Was he a poet? Has she survived not only adolescence but madness?

To appreciate this book the reader needs to be able to simultaneously read a number of different books, in an experience akin to the double-take of watching *The Sixth Sense* or *Fight Club*. It is a book that will yield more on rereading, and could easily be used as a reading list for a longer gothic journey.

### Stan Nicholls – *Quicksilver Rising*

Voyager, London, 2004, 410pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-00-714150-5

Reviewed by Estelle Roberts

Welcome, again, to the traditional world of fantasy. Our guide this time is Stan Nicholls, author of the internationally acclaimed *Orcs: First Blood* series. *Quicksilver Rising* is the first novel in the *Quicksilver* trilogy.

In this world we have two extremely powerful empires currently in a state of fragile and mistrustful peace, nations where magic is a commodity and charitable people do 'magic runs', giving glamours to those who cannot afford them. Then there are the Qaloch, a proud and noble tribe, the victims of genocidially inspired attacks, who existed outside the main social and political structure, and of whom very few remain. Add to this a growing resistance movement and a demented prince, who travels unceasingly across his land in a mighty laputian castle in order to avoid Death, and the scene is set for the novel's three main strands initially to be told separately and then, of course, brought together.

Serrah's story begins the book. She is an officer in military service to one of the political powers. During a raid to clear out an illegal drug den, one of her team, behaving very recklessly, gets himself killed. The fact that he is a member of a very high ranking family means that she becomes a scapegoat, and is imprisoned. Following both physical and psychological torture, she is given help to escape, and, having settled a few scores, gives her rescuers the slip. This is followed by the entrance of a mysterious loner hero, searching for a wizard to lift a curse

placed upon him, causing him to rant, rave and strike out at anyone coming near him. He finds instead a young wizard's apprentice, who tries to help him, and insists on accompanying him to find answers in the city, along with an enigmatic high-ranking man that they save from attack. Finally attention turns to Tanalvah, a prostitute in the city, who is forced to go on the run having killed her friend's client upon finding her dead in the next room. She and the dead woman's two young children also find help from strangers, and it is here that the threads come together as these individuals are all taken to safe houses and inducted into the resistance, where they become involved in the planning and execution of a mission to destroy the city's main records office.

This novel does have much to commend it. It is highly entertaining, well paced, and most of the characters rise above the generic stereotypes to become well fleshed out individuals. Serrah's grief for her daughter, killed by drugs before the start of the story, and Tanalvah's for her friend are poignant and moving, and Kutch, the young apprentice's, initial lack of confidence in his abilities rings very true. The prince, in thrall to his comatose father and convinced that Death is hiding among the general population, just waiting to take him, is also a fascinating character. However, on balance, there is actually little to differentiate it from many other highly readable fantasies.

### John Marco – *The Devil's Armour*

Gollancz, London, 2004, 560pp, £10.99, t/p, ISBN 0-575-07451-5

Reviewed by Alan Fraser

This new 'classic fantasy' novel from John Marco is a sequel to his 2002 book *The Eyes Off God*. I wasn't wholly convinced by the first book's plot, as I felt that Marco created some apparently irreconcilable plot difficulties which he resolved unconvincingly. That is left behind here, and I don't even think you have to have read the previous volume to enjoy this one.

However, it's fair to warn you before you start that the story is uncompleted at the end, so a third book in this series is obviously planned.

The first book concerned the quest for the Eyes of God, two magic amulets that prolong life, by the Bronze Knight Lukien, champion of King Akeela of Liiria. Both Akeela and his

beautiful wife Cassandra, beloved by Lukien, are now dead, and Lukien is living in the isolated fortress of Grimhold, kept alive by one of the amulets. Grimhold is populated by the 'Inhumans', people with disabilities who are rejected in their harsh world. Also living in the stronghold is Baron Glass of Liiria, former lover of the Diamond Queen Jazana Carr, who has already conquered several kingdoms. Because the now rulerless Liiria is threatened by Jazana Carr, Baron Glass steals the greatest treasure of Grimhold, the Devil's Armour, knowing it will make him invincible in his fight against her. Unfortunately this impenetrable armour is possessed by the spirit of a long-dead member of the race who built Grimhold, and this spirit has its own agenda for evil which Baron Glass cannot resist. Lukien, still grieving for Cassandra, is forced to leave Grimhold to follow Glass and take the armour from him. There is a way to defeat a man wearing the Devil's Armour, which Lukien must find in order to save Glass from himself. At

the same time, Jazana Carr poses a greater threat than ever...

Along with the corruption of a man who was once good, another theme of this book is the redemption of a man who was once bad. King Lorn the Wicked of Norvor is overthrown by Jazana Carr, and forced to flee with his blind and deaf baby daughter Poppy – his three adult sons have all been killed in the war. Lorn finds living incognito as an ordinary man extremely hard, and deals ruthlessly with those who cross him, but his devotion to his daughter and his determination to take her to a place where she will be accepted helps him find the humanity he lacked as a king.

Like *The Eyes Off God*, this book has an engrossing plot that's hard to predict, a couple of really nasty villains, and a muscular page-turning writing style. All in all, a much better book than the first, and recommended – provided you realise you'll have to buy the next book to find out how it all ends!

### **Stephen Palmer – *Hallucinating***

Cosmos Books, Holicong, 2004, 302pp, \$17.95, t/p, ISBN 1-59224-101-8  
Reviewed by Dave M. Roberts

*Hallucinating* is an alien-invasion/post-apocalypse novel in which both the means of the invasion and the post-apocalyptic world that it portrays are built firmly around the personality of the lead characters. Nulight is an underground record company owner, and he and his friends are Pagans. The story takes as its leaping off point the idea that much contemporary music is no longer organically created, and as such, it becomes less and less human. This, taken to its logical extreme, means that the music we listen to is essentially alien in nature, and it is this that gives the aliens the hook they need to be able to invade. This is reinforced by the way that an attempt to create the alien music organically is doomed to failure, and could even be said to have triggered the invasion it was set to halt.

The backdrop for this novel is the underground music and free festival scene. This is a world that Stephen Palmer knows well and obviously loves. The projection of a music scene into the future is not something I have often seen carried off effectively. The music in this book has a believable feel to it, and is extrapolated effectively from the music that we are used to hearing now. It is more like a genuine development than the application of giving it a funny label. It could be that it is just a minor extrapolation of the present free festival scene to give a glimpse fifty years into the future, but if so, it still works. The artificially created music of the aliens certainly rings very true. The down side of this is that the opening section is so heavily laden with name checks of real bands that for someone not too familiar with the music it can become tedious. Fortunately this soon settles down

Whilst the music forms the backbone of the book, and it

takes on an almost religious significance, it is the pagan beliefs of Nulight and his companions that drives the quest. A curious element of this world is that all the settlements encountered are pagan in nature. It is music that the main characters' lives revolve around and it is music that must save them from the alien oppression, but it is music with a religious purpose. The quest to rid Britain (and by implication the rest of the world) of the aliens requires a magick bullet in the form of a song cycle. With the quest taking place over the course of the year, each of the songs comes to represent a significant point of the yearly cycle. The music must return not only to the natural and organic, it must tie in with the seasons, emphasising the pagan nature of the narrative.

It is important to remember the title of this book. As none of the characters spend much time actually hallucinating (apart from a few mushrooms), it calls into question the reality of what is being told. What, if anything, is real, and if it isn't real, then whose hallucination is it? The lack of, say, christian or secular communities would seem to suggest that there could be some mild form of hallucination that does not allow the protagonists to see those that are not of them. There is certainly an element of the characters attempting to reconstruct the world in their own image. It is this element of questionable reality that raises the book above simply being a fairly entertaining read. This is an intriguing book with a novel take on the alien invasion theme that raises a number of questions about what we actually mean by alien.

[Available from [www.wildesidepress.com](http://www.wildesidepress.com)]

### **A VECTOR RECOMMENDED READ**

### **Kim Stanley Robinson – *Forty Signs of Rain* ?**

HarperCollins, London, 2004, 360pp, £17.99, h/b, ISBN 0-00-714886-0  
Reviewed by Stuart Carter

When friends ask me "What have you been up to lately?" I so often find myself at a loss for words. Not because I've been doing nothing, but because what I *have* been doing, though interesting to me, is mostly not interesting to other people. Thus I was struck by the fact that Kim Stanley Robinson's new

novel, *Forty Signs of Rain*, is mostly about people going about their daily lives: if you asked them, "What have you been up to lately?" I suspect they'd dismiss the question with an "Oh, not much really". And yet Robinson has managed to concoct a fascinating and very beautiful short novel (short for him, that

is) almost solely about 'not much'. There are a few tiny bits and pieces of science fiction hidden deep, deep down in *Forty Signs off Rain*, but mostly this is a quiet book, a gentle admonition laced with a humour, warmth and humanity that most mainstream writers would give their right arm to have written, let alone most science fiction writers.

So what *does* happen? Charlie Quibler is a househusband with two young sons (Nick and Joe), but he juggles his role in the home with one in the government as an environmental policy advisor to the US Senate. His wife, Anna, is the highly respected director of bioinformatics at the National Science Foundation. Her colleague, Frank Vanderwal, is the textbook ideal of a scientist, on loan to the NSF but increasingly cynical of its role as his sabbatical year there comes to an end. Frank and Anna's newest neighbours in the building the NSF occupies are a group of monks, ambassadors from the slowly drowning island nation of Khembalung, there to lobby the Senate to take action – any action – on climate change. Leo Mulhouse vaguely knows Frank Vanderwal as he works at a biotech company that Frank helped set up a few years back.

All these people perambulate through *Forty Signs off Rain*; some of them meet, most of them learn a little, some learn a lot, but mostly they just get on with living. Robinson's writing infuses us with a simple fascination and joy at their everyday existence and the *familiar-but-different* minutiae of their lives, whether they are raising toddlers, rating scientific funding proposals or practising science. All of these stories and more run through the novel like eye-catching threads in a vast tapestry of humanity, such that the backdrop and message, of encroaching man-made climate change, is simply a single coarse stitch in that tapestry, albeit one that eventually does intersect all the others.

#### **E. Rose Sabin – *A Perilous Power***

Tor, New York, 2004, 286pp, \$19.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-30859-2

Reviewed by Elizabeth A. Billinger

Sometimes a straightforward fantasy can be an uncomplicated pleasure, like an action movie: park your brain by the door, settle down and enjoy the ride. Sadly this is the other sort of straightforward fantasy, the sort that comes with turgid writing style and nary a spark of originality.

Trevor lives in a small farming community wherein the practice of magic is not only looked upon with disgust and hostility, but is banned. Naturally Trevor suppresses his abilities in that field. Equally predictably, he has to run away from home to find a place where he can be himself. He takes with him his friend Les, also a teenager. Les shows no sign of being gifted, so of course we are forced to conclude that he has phenomenal talent of an unusual type that will only manifest under extreme circumstances, when he reaches a certain age, or

#### **Charles Stross – *Singularity Sky* ?**

Orbit, London, 2004, 389pp, £12.99, h/b (reviewed in proof), ISBN 1-84149-333-3

Reviewed by Pete Young

With recent attention directed towards the speculative concept of a 'singularity event', *Singularity Sky* – not Charlie Stross's original title – is most certainly a direct descendant of the original proposition which, when brought to our attention by Vernor Vinge, Stross has since graphically described as being like 'a huge steaming turd dropped into the punchbowl of

*Forty Signs off Rain* is being pushed as a book about climate change, but despite the heavy weather in it it's more a book about humanity's place in the bigger world picture (for good or ill), and our stunning ability to resist change no matter how important and necessary it may be. And speaking of which, we're left in no doubt who the bad guys are in this story: it's the president's science adviser ("a pompous ex-academic hauled out the depths of a second-rate conservative think tank when the administration's first science adviser had been sent packing for saying that global warming might be real." p.140) and an economic system beginning with 'c' (hint: it's not communism). But there are no 'evil' people, only misguided and stupid ones, and thus (again, as in real life) there is no titanic Biblical struggle between Good and Evil that occupies our every waking moment, there is merely the business of living, in its largest and smallest details.

And there are no heroes in the traditional sense in Robinson's books either, no Heinleinian supermen with all the answers, but only men and women, usually scientists, all doing their best to understand genuine, complex problems and find solutions for them. Doing, then, what people in the real world do every day. It's this quality above all in Robinson's books that I find so magical, his delight in the everyday – the everyday joy of discovery, of human company and of simply *being*. The fact that at the end of *Forty Signs off Rain*, despite it being in some ways quite a demoralising tale, I had a profound sense of hope for the world seems to me to speak volumes about Robinson's worldview.

*Forty Signs off Rain*'s relative shortness renders it far less intimidating and more accessible than, say, the *Mars* trilogy, and it is a very very highly recommended introduction to Kim Stanley Robinson's work.

when he falls in love.

In the big city, they seek out a community of the gifted, but it turns out that there are opposing factions. How will they choose whom to believe and will they end up on the side of all that is Good and Right? Misadventure, bad choices, disloyalties ensue. The boys are both tested psychically and physically.

Les falls in love and under extreme circumstances he discovers his one-off gift, the rarest of all gifts. The reader fakes surprise at this revelation.

With so many enjoyable and challenging books being published for the children and young adult markets (see, for example, the reviews of *Inkheart* and *The Moth Diaries* in this issue) it would be a shame for anyone to waste money and time on this particular offering.

'futurology'. To have heard him utter that before reading this novel would have given an added clue as to the precise starting point from which Stross writes, which he admits is primarily to indulge his own warped sense of humour. Written some years ago in the mid- to late-1990s, as we head deeper into the growing meme that is 'information's struggle for liberation'



*Singularity Sky* shows us very clearly which side of this battle Stross has always been on, and it is probably useful to learn a little about the agenda Stross's is working to here before throwing oneself at the mercy of his much-awaited first novel.

In the near future, Earth has had its Singularity experience in the form of the Eschaton, an artificial intelligence which has independently achieved sentience. Several hundred years later on Rochard's World, the future-shocked colony worlds of the New Republic has turned its collective back on the resulting technological and cultural gains and is rooted in an all-controlling Tsarist Russian past, completely unready for the unexpected house call from a mysterious post-Singularity event in physical form known as the Festival. Ringing mobile telephones rain down on the capital Novy Petrograd, and when picked up voices at the other end declare, "Entertain us and we will give you anything you want." What will this state of affairs do to Rochard's World? Is the Festival a threat or a blessing, and can this depend on your cultural standpoint? When a rescue mission to Rochard's World is dispatched from the New Republic planet New Muscovy, along for the ride are Martin Springfield and Rachel Mansour, two agents from Earth working independently, both with secrets and a growing attraction to each other. They each have their own overriding interest in a positive outcome in this encounter with the Festival, an irresistible force about to engage with the immovable object that is human stupidity.

Stross is notably good at delivering the reader into the different mindsets of the characters which can differ greatly depending on their cultural background, and this is often where Stross's best humour comes into play. Looking at the wider picture of what *Singularity Sky* is addressing, to see this novel

as a thinly-camouflaged vehicle for commentary on the continuation of ideologies that are now past their sell-by date would be to ignore the considerable attention to detail Stross has invested in this universe; ideas spark everywhere. His use of the Edinburgh Festival and Fringe as allegory is possibly rather too clever, and will be lost on people who don't know what strange kind of culture shock descends on Edinburgh every summer. But *that* particular Festival is probably a close enough simile in the real world to a clash between something akin to a free information society and our current, more information-restricted existence; when viewed through that lens the book will possibly make several degrees more sense. It also helps to simultaneously read and think about *Singularity Sky*'s events in a variety of other ways: cargo cult story, a clash of civilisations, and the strangeness and the self-organising logic of the Festival – with accompanying Fringe, Mimes, Critics and Bouncers – hinting at the need for the same kind of suspension of disbelief one requires when reading magical realism. Whereas occasionally it is difficult to see how this collision of science fictional tropes will coalesce into a meaningful whole, a clearer picture does ultimately emerge that does justice to all that Stross has put into it. This is a difficult trick to pull off and demands some patience from the reader, so it is certainly worth paying as much attention to the telling of this ornate story as to the story itself because he does make it an entertaining (if occasionally perplexing) journey. Stross also has the wisdom to remind us that while a singularity event may begin with circuses it still ends with bread. Though a more definitive resolution is hopefully saved for the sequel *Iron Sunrise*, in the meantime this is certainly an impressive, though not always easy, first novel.

#### A VECTOR RECOMMENDED READ

##### Steph Swainston – *The Year of Our War?*

Gollancz, London, 2004, 290pp, £9.99, h/b, ISBN 0-575-07005-6  
Reviewed by Farah Mendlesohn

By the time *Vector* readers see this review, many will have read other reviews, will have read the book, will have seen Steph Swainston in action. Most readers won't need me to tell them to buy the book. Its glowing blue and gold cover, its seductive price (how did we get to the point where a hardback costs only £3 more than a paperback?) will have done the trick. After that, word of mouth should do the rest. But I can consider here what it is that Swainston has done that is so impressive.

Just when we were all settling complacently into a sense that we knew what was happening in British sf and fantasy, Steph Swainston arrived to knock us off our perch. Swainston offers something very different to what we thought British fantasy was doing: while the whole of our critical world seems to be discussing the merging of genres, access to the mainstream, playing with the borders of fantasy, along comes *The Year of Our War*, a book which is about as solidly grounded in genre as it is possible to get, and which, far from being hackneyed is *breathhtaking*.

The book opens in the middle of the world, and the middle of the war. Swainston has blithely skipped over the traditional first book in which the invader looms, the armies mobilise, the hero grows to manhood. We arrive when the war is two thousand years old. Humans are marginal figures, those of real interest are the winged, but non-flying Awians. There is an Emperor on the throne who has lived the entire period and who

maintains the balance of power by drawing a line between the 'religious' – the war against the insects – over which he has complete control, and the 'secular' – the rule of the domains – in which he takes little part. Supporting the Emperor is a circle of honest-to-god superheroes, known as the Castle, who win their place by beating one of the fifty incumbents and are rewarded with immortality-until-challenge. Only one of the original circle of heroes is left, and he – Lightning – remains burdened both by what he has achieved and perhaps by the *bildungsroman* narrative that as an immortal he can never quite complete.

The novel begins with the report of a battle. The Fourlands is involved in a never ending war against invading insects who are the ultimate enemy, impossible to share land with, impossible to communicate with. Their invasion of the land scorches the earth. They deal death with razor claws and eat their way through vast armies. The natives of the Fourlands, humans, humanoid winged Awians and Rhydanne, can hold them back only as long as they stand and fight together in a war of attrition gloomily like the First World War. United the prospects look gloomy, divided the inhabitants of the Fourlands don't stand a chance.

In this context, the death of a strong local King and the ascension of his weak brother is the worst of catastrophes. As a chink in the Empire's defences opens, each of the kingdoms



turns to secure its own and the Empire, held by its own code of non-interference in local politics, is powerless.

The stage is set for court intrigues, missing heirs, and maybe a prophecy or two. Instead Swainston takes a long and very hard look at the tensions of a society with four species (maybe more), mortals and immortals living side by side, and an economy which has been subverted both by the needs of the war effort and the political machinations of the emperor for two thousand years.

The immediate story is of Jant (known as Comet), Awian-Rhydanne mixed breed messenger of the King, ex-street kid, present junkie, riven with insecurities and profoundly in awe and in love (in a non-sexual sense I think) with the oldest of the circle Lightening, as well as in deepest thrall to Genya, a full blood Rhydanne, and yet still in love with his Awian wife. In a search for escape, Jant has found the Shift.

The New Weird, with which Swainston has been associated, if it is identified by any one element, is linked by a fondness for the baroque. While the Frameworld of the Fourlands is described with intense mimesis, in which Swainston uses Jant's wings and her own experience as a hang glider to describe a vivid cartography of the land which puts

the average mapped fantasy to shame, the Shift is a baroque fantasy world in which Whorses offer rides for free, fibre-toothed tigers stalk the street stroked by small children and the Tine nurse their gardens of living flesh. Jant's story is his desire to be one of the Gods. Having got there, he is consumed with the feeling he is a fraud. Yet it is Jant who controls the Homeric narrative: with his wings he can sail above the war, creating for us the landscape, seeing the battles, understanding the way the world works.

What Jant sees is the intensely political nature of the Castle. His telling of the tale demonstrates the link between the failure of an immortal marriage and the prosecution of the war. This is a very political novel, but in the manner of *Olympus*, rather than the street politics of London; as such, much of what is at stake comes back to honour, rather than survival.

Steph Swainston has taken the possibilities of full otherworld fantasy, of the quest, of the grand battles and made of them something intense, complexly moral, and vibrantly characterised and she has done this in the oldest possible way; by creating an entire world in breadth and depth, and then offering us just one sliver of that history and geography.

#### Particles for *Vector* 236

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*.

##### Kevin J. Anderson – *A Forest of Stars*

Pocket Books, London, 2004, 727pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-7434-3066-2

Second volume in a massive sf series, *The Saga of the Seven Suns*, this is classic panoramic space opera. Reviewed by Peter Young in *Vector* 231 he was impressed by some snappy storytelling and unexpected plot direction. Despite this he had the feeling that this was a 700-page preamble for a resurgence of the thread that ended *Hidden Empire* (the first volume in the series) and that the growing theme of 'thwarted destinies' needed to be stronger still to give the series the depth it deserves. Other review journals have, however, been more enthusiastic. And this series will need to be good if the 'seven' in the title is a clue to the number of volumes. This could weigh in at nearly 5,000 pages!

##### Poul Anderson – *Three Hearts & Three Lions*

Gollancz, London, 2003, 177pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07498-1

*Fantasy Masterwork* number 40 is a high fantasy novel first published in 1953 and containing all the elements you may expect: legendary knight with various companions attempting to stop the forces of the Dark Powers threatening the world of man. Despite this sounding (now) very traditional, almost anything published in this series (or the companion *SF Masterworks* series) is likely to be well worth reading (and unlike much modern fantasy this is short, at only 177 pages).

##### Jennifer Fallon – *Medalon*

Tor, New York, 2004, 400pp, \$24.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-30986-6

US hardcover edition of the first in the *Hythrun Chronicles* series, originally published in Australia in 2000. A UK edition has just been published by Orbit and is reviewed in the main column of this issue. The main difference between the two

(other than the hardback/ paperback one) is that the UK edition has an enigmatic female face on the cover and the US edition a standard generic fantasy image (dragon, woman in robe with candle). The first looks intriguing, the second positively screams 'avoid'.

##### Jude Fisher – *Wild Magic*

Pocket Books, London, 2004, 565pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-7434-4041-2

Second in the *Fool's Gold* trilogy by an author more commonly known as Jane Johnson, the Publishing Director of HarperCollins sf imprint, Voyager. This was reviewed in *Vector* 232 by Lynne Bispham who was pleasantly surprised to find that this was a middle volume of a fantasy trilogy in which the plot actually progresses.

##### Robert Holdstock – *The Iron Grail*

Tor, New York, 2004, 299pp, \$24.99, h/b, ISBN 0-765-30726-X

American hardback of the second volume in Holdstock's *The Merlin Codex*, the first volume being *Celtika*. Most of Holdstock's work has been well received and this is no exception. When the UK edition was reviewed in *Vector* 231 Jan A. Malique was very impressed, describing it as a "monumental work" which demands multiple readings.

##### Tom Holt – *In Your Dreams* ?

Orbit, London, 2004, 474pp, £12.99, h/b, ISBN 1-84149-159-4  
Sequel to *The Portable Door*, with our hero, Paul Carpenter, having been dumped by his one true love, who has run off to Hollywood. Humorous fantasy – which appears light on the fantasy – and compared to Douglas Adams (surprise). Packaged (rather effectively) to appeal to readers who avoid the slightest taint of genre fiction.

**Ian Irvine – *Tetrach***

Orbit, London, 2004, 692pp, £7.99, p/b, ISBN 1-84149-199-3

**Ian Irvine – *Alchymist* ?**

Orbit, London, 2004, 690pp, £12.99, t/p, ISBN 1-84149-233-7  
Second and third volumes in *The Well of Echoes* quartet, which will be concluded with *Chimaera*. The first volume, *Geomancer*, was reviewed by Vikki Lee in *Vector* 227 who found that although it was an engaging story it was far too similar to the author's first series *The View from the Mirror* quartet (which is not always an issue which affects the success of traditional fantasy series).

**Miller Lau – *Lore Bringer***

Pocket Books, London, 2004, 469pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-7434-4083-8

Third and concluding volume of the *Last Clansman* series, a split world fantasy of contemporary Edinburgh and the Otherworld of Sutra. The preceding volumes (*Talisker* and *Dark Thane*) have been reviewed by N. M. Browne (*Vector* 218 and 226 respectively) who found them great page-turners but felt that something was lacking in the relationship between the real and the fantasy world, partly as it was the Edinburgh setting which was stronger. This volume introduces a Navajo elder into the mix.

**Brian Lumley – *Necroscope: Deadspawn***

Tor, New York, 2004, 428pp, \$26.95, h/b, ISBN 0-312-86381-0

First hardback edition of this 1991 novel, the fifth volume in the *Necroscope* series which current stretches to thirteen novels plus associated shorter works. The series tells of the life and works of Harry Keogh and his battle with the vampires known as the Wamphyri (despite all the series having truly awful covers these sound – in a strange and warped way – great fun).

**Sean McMullen – *Glass Dragons***

Tor, New York, 2004, 512pp, \$27.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-30797-9

Sequel to *Voyage off the Shadowmoon*, part of the *Moonworlds* saga. This is likely to be more than the standard fantasy fare it appears (it's a 'Saga' with dragons on the cover) since the author's sf novels (such as *Souls in the Great Machine* or *Eyes off the Calculator*) are excellent (and he's another of the sf/martial arts collective).

**Laurie J. Marks – *Earth Logic***

Tor, New York, 2004, 400pp, \$25.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-30952-1

Second volume in the *Elemental Logic Saga*. Another traditional fantasy series but when the preceding volume, *Fire Logic*, was reviewed in *Vector* 224 Jan A. Malique found it a good read, with all the storytelling elements coming together to form something special.

**Frederik Pohl – *Chasing Science***

Tor, New York, 2003, 304pp, \$14.95, t/p, ISBN 0-765-30829-0  
Non-fiction work from Pohl, part autobiography, part travelogue described as "science as a spectator sport". This is basically a hook for Pohl to travel around visiting public science parks and other places where science happens (better than working for a living). Andy Sawyer reviewed the hardback edition in *Vector* 216 which he found well written and informative but definitely a personal account rather than

something which can be recommended as a serious guidebook for scientific hobbyists. Its deficiency is shown by the gaps in the coverage of the UK (for example there is no mention of the National Space Centre in Leicester, which I would recommend to anyone with even the most tangential interest in space exploration – and especially fun if you borrow a couple of bright, enthusiast children for the day).

**Alastair Reynolds – *Absolution Gap***

Gollancz, London, 2004, 662pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07557-0

Paperback edition of the concluding volume of Reynold's loosely linked *Inhibitors* series, the preceding volumes being *Revelation Space*, *Chasm City* and *Redemption Ark* (plus short stories). To me this felt curiously unlike a final volume, with much more still to come, and almost as though the ideas here had been forced to fit the series. Steve Jeffery reviewed the hardback in the last *Vector* describing it as having "all the elements you could wish for the New Wave of British Space Opera: a galaxy-spanning war for survival; spectacular set pieces, ships and weaponry, alliances and bitter rivalries, strange posthuman futures, and god-like intelligences" but he also had some doubts about it as a concluding volume. Whatever these slight reservations it is clear that Reynold's is now one of our major talents and it will be fascinating to see what he does in *Century Rain*, his next, stand-alone novel due from Gollancz in October 2004.

**Robertski Brothers – *The Mcatrix Derided* ?**

Gollancz, London, 2004, 300pp, £6.99, h/b, ISBN 0-575-07568-6

"Yes it's another parody". Do I need to say more? Well, apparently it's a parody of the *Matrix* films. Anyway, this is written by A. R. R. R. R. Roberts the best-selling author of *The Soddit* (sold 100,000 copies!) and the soon to be published *Sellamillion* (both, surprisingly, parodies of well known fantasy fiction). This book utilises a dvd structure, so we get deleted scenes and adverts for other books such as *Flash* by Merry Gentile, a 4,700 page re-telling of the *Flash Gordon* story (which at least makes it shorter than the similarly titled *Ash*). When will this trend stop? Not soon enough. And not soon if the sales and publishers catalogues are to be believed (another *Barry Trotter* is due in November). The many incarnations of this author have been remarkably busy as I note that the similar-sounding author Adam Roberts has a new novel, *The Snow*, published by Gollancz in August 2004. (PS: the cover of *The Mcatrix Derided* is hideous as well.)

**Kevin Ryan – *Van Helsing* ?**

HarperCollins Entertainment, London, 2004, 261pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-00-718185-X

Hot on the heels of Stephen Sommer's preposterous but strangely entertaining hokum *Van Helsing* comes the official 'novelization' of the film. Expectations are normally not high for the lucrative tie-in market but *Van Helsing* surprises by managing to precede expectations in almost every sense. Having trouble keeping your sentences down to a manageable length? The solution is obvious. When you think about it. Just chop them up. Into little ones. Or how about these great ideas for dramatic emphasis?

Floating four word paragraphs.

Inexplicable mid sentence multiple ellipses... to... break the flow. Or that popular last ditch hope, *italics*. Littered with

travelogue style city guides, meaningless phrases, poor-paced action and an appallingly snide streak of anti-French xenophobia this is a tired, limp, cash-in. Trees died for this. (Reviewed by Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc)

**Fred Saberhagen – *Berserker Prime***

Tor, New York, 2004, 396pp, \$25.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-30625-5

Continuation of the *Berserker* series, cataloguing humanities war with the exterminating machines (an idea which Alastair Reynold's has incorporated into his *Inhibitors* series). This volume appears to be number nine – so probably not the best place to start.

**Robert J. Sawyer – *Factoring Humanity***

Tor, New York, 2004, 336pp, \$14.95, t/b, ISBN 0-765-30903-3  
Paperback reprint for this 1998 novel from an award-winning Canadian author. Near future sf with a signal detected coming from Alpha Centuri holding the promise of technological breakthroughs, but that would be far too straight forward and the end of the human race may be near. Reviewed in detail in *Vector* 202, by Stephen Deas, and *Vector* 205, by Chris Amies. Both found it interesting and well worth reading but with some slight reservations, for example needing passion to match the craftsmanship.

**Mitchell Smith – *Moonrise***

Tor, New York, 2004, 480pp, \$25.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-30009-5

Another concluding volume of a trilogy, having been preceded by *Snowfall* and *Kingdom River*, but this is, ostensibly, sf with a post-apocalyptic, near-future setting (still sounds like fantasy).

**Whitley Strieber – *The Day After Tomorrow ?***

Gollancz, London, 2004, 249pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07603-8

Tie-in novelisation of the film of the same name, purporting to show the effect of global warming on Western civilisation (that's America and a bit of England).

**Tricia Sullivan – *Maul***

Orbit, London, 2004, 419pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 1-84149-108-X  
A *Vector* Recommended Read when reviewed in *Vector* 232 by Paul N. Billinger and one of the standout novels of 2003, short-listed for both the BSFA Award and the Arthur C. Clarke Award (but sadly not winning either; I would have very much liked it to have won the Clarke but then the chances of me predicting both winners was always unlikely and at least *Felaheen* won the BSFA). This is just the type of novel that I read sf for: complex related narratives, thought-provoking examination of serious issues, and some of the most amazing dialogue there is. Those easily shocked won't get beyond the first few pages but those who do will find a stunning novel. Her new book, *Cookie Starfish*, is due soon from Orbit.

**Harry Turtledove – *Jaws of Darkness***

Pocket Books, London, 2004, 576pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-7434-6852-X

Fifth volume in the *Darkness* series describing an alternate Second World War but with the artillery and bombers replaced by magical fire and dragons. No indication that this is the end of the series.

**Ehlie Ann Vare with Daniel Morris – *Andromeda: The Broken Places***

Tor, New York, 2003, 272pp, \$23.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-30484-8

An original hardback novel based on the TV series *Gene Roddenberry's Andromeda™*.

**Vernor Vinge – *The Peace War***

Tor, New York, 2003, 288pp, \$13.95, t/b, ISBN 0-765-30883-5  
Paperback re-print of a 1984 novel from Vinge, who wrote the excellent *A Fire Upon the Deep* (and its sequel *A Deepness in the Sky* but I'm trying to forget that). This is classic sf, centred around the invention of a spherical, impenetrable, force-field known as a 'bobble' and its use by the Peace Authority to control the global population. It's great stuff but this is only half of the story as the effects of the bobble technology continue in *Marooned in Realtime*. It would have been better to have combined these into a single volume (which Baen Books did in 1991 with *Across Realtime*, which also included the associated short story 'The Ungoverned'). Still, highly recommended.

**H. G. Wells – *Five Great Novels***

Gollancz, London, 2004, 593pp, £10.99, t/p, ISBN 0-575-07572-4

Omnibus edition of, surprisingly, five of the author's most well known novels: *The Time Machine* (1895), *The War of the Worlds* (1895), *The Invisible Man* (1897), *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1901) and *The First Men in the Moon* (1896). It is excellent that these remain in print but as this is such a physically large volume I can't help thinking that it would be easier to get individual paperback editions from a second-hand bookshop.

**Cherry Wilder and Katya Reimann – *The Wanderer***

Tor, New York, 2004, 398pp, \$27.95, h/b, ISBN 0-312-87405-7

Fourth and final volume in *The Rulers of Hylor* 'trilogy', with the original three books published some twenty years ago. This volume has been completed posthumously by Reimann, a longtime fan of Wilder's work and the author of her own fantasy series *The Tielmann Chronicles*. The book has a map, chronology and family trees.

**Chris Wooding – *The Weavers of Saramyr***

Gollancz, London, 2004, 440pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07542-2

Wooding's first novel for adults following a number of children's books and the very highly regarded YA novel *The Haunting of Alaiabel Cray*. This is the first volume of *The Braided Path* set in an apparently medieval Japan. Reviewed by Elizabeth A. Billinger in *Vector* 229 it was found not to reach the heights of *Alaiabel Cray* – not a bad novel, just not a great Chris Wooding novel – with the author trying to hard to position the book in the 'adult' market by including sometimes perverse and repugnant sex acts, described as "bad sex badly written". The second volume, *The Skin of Lament*, is out now and will be reviewed in a future issue of *Vector*.