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## Vector

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## Editorial

### The View from the Stool and Steps

There is an old joke asking how many *Star Trek* fans it takes to change a light bulb – the answer being any number above three, one doing the actual changing, and the others saying how much they prefer the original. Though, actually, I'm sure there are enough intelligent *Star Trek* fans out there that the one who is changing the light bulb would also be able to chip into the conversation without falling off his ladder or electrocuting herself. So the answer might be two; one to change it, and the other to hold a conversation with about how the original was better. There's another possibility – without casting any aspersions on the social skills of *Star Trek* fans, one person could change a bulb on their own and still prefer the original. Why have the conversation?

But I digress. There isn't the point.

Back in the early 1960s a bunch of young turks came along and shook science fiction to its very foundations – and many people tried to grasp hold of what was solid and real and reassuring and clung onto the old wave. A genre that was all about change and possibilities had a conservative rump, afraid of change. The same thing happened with cyberpunk, two decades later.

I guess I watched *Star Trek* whenever I could as a child. I started watching *Doctor Who* with the introduction of Leela – though not because of her – and watched it consistently until the McCoy incarnation meant I found better things to do. I missed the first season of *Blake's 7* but stayed through to the bloody end, and I even saw all the episodes of *Star Cops*. A-levels and college and Michael Grade intervened – though not necessarily in that order – and something called *The Next Generation* passed me by, though not sufficiently distantly that I didn't note the chief barman at the union looked rather familiar, disappeared every Wednesday at 6 and was called John (or Jean).... The beginning of *Deep Space Nine* passed me by, tv-less, and I never seemed to catch the allegedly decent episodes of *Babylon 5*. I enjoyed bits of the first series of *The X-Files*, but didn't have the stamina to keep scepticism suspended, and the pilot of *Voyager* didn't tickle my fancy.

For reasons which escape me, I did rather take to *Enterprise* and *Smallville*, enjoying perhaps the revisiting of old friends, seen from different angles. Would I be upset if the video didn't tape an episode? Not really. Would I be upset if Channel 4 dropped them for parties on a beach or racing? I doubt it. I missed half a season of both when reception got too bad, but feel back up to speed again. It wouldn't matter that much, but they are the most visible faces of genre, they define science fiction for people outside the science fiction community. These are as other people see us: bulbs that are changed, and shiny.

Other old friends have returned, revamped. *Doctor Who* has been brought back from the dead, with Christopher Eccleston clearly an actor unlikely to commit for more than a season, and various friends and colleagues assumed I would be glued to it. I've watched it, usually on video, and I have to say I have liked most of

the episodes not written by Russell T. Davis, which is a shame since I like his work on the whole. There have been two very effective episodes, one focusing on a father and a daughter, the other on a mother and a son. But I miss the cliff-hangers, the luxury of four or more episodes of screen time, and I wish that it took longer than forty-five minutes to put the Earth in peril and rescue it.

Meanwhile that seminal 1978 radio drama, *The Hitch-Hikers Guide to the Galaxy* returned for a third and fourth series, with the original cast... which must have been news for the estates of Peter Jones and Richard Vernon, who clearly had been operating under false pretences. Jones was recast, as was Vernon – another Richard, Griffiths this time – but the voices never quite sounded right. The Book was too knowing, Slartibartfast not weary enough. And then there was the movie – inexplicably fought for by Adams, expensively delayed by studios. Yet here it was at last, the first four episodes, or rather the first book, shoehorned into the length of a feature.

"You must be dying to see it," said my colleagues.

In fact I was rather worried about seeing it, although a plan to see it after a curry and a pint with a group of other sceptics seemed an attractive possibility even if we didn't get to the cinema. That never came to fruition, so I saw the last screening in Canterbury before it vanished. As Colin Odell more or less said to me, if there had never been a radio series, a play, a record, a book, a talking book, a television series and a towel this would have been a remarkable piece. As it was, the sense of what was cut, for me, overshadowed what was there; the lines about plans being on display in a locked filing cabinet in a basement without any lights or indeed stairs became something like "I had to go to the basement", and were consequently less funny. It has its moments, but, as with the radio version of *The Lord of the Rings*, the original voices are imprinted on me and are hard to shake. Ian Holm is Frodo not Bilbo (John Le Mesurier is Bilbo) and the incomparable Bill Nighy is Sam.

Then there's the biggie: *Star Wars Episode III*, and to some of my colleagues' surprise I was not camped out trying to buy tickets for the advance screening. I haven't enjoyed the previous three instalments (although *Jedi* is better than I gave it credit for), and so going to see a fourth seems rather like the triumph of optimism over experience. It ought to be really dark, and we ought to find out why Darth didn't spot the flaw in the Death Star plans, and why Kenobi ages about forty years in twenty, but I'm not convinced that this George Lucas can do that movie. In a sense, I'm presold to go, but preprogrammed to not like it. Some of my mates have told me how great it was, but they weren't even conceived when *Jedi* came out.

I should keep an open mind, of course, and I need to see it for my job, for its positioning in the greater science fiction field, and as an iconic cultural moment. I do resent this though. I much prefer the original light bulb.

Andrew M. Butler, Canterbury, summer 2005

AS A POSTSCRIPT TO THE ARTICLES ON *NEW WORLDS* AND *NEW WAVE* SCIENCE FICTION WE PUBLISHED LAST YEAR, ROB LATHAM TAKES A LOOK AT THE PHENOMENON FROM A FANZINE'S EYE VIEW...

# New Worlds and the New Wave in Fandom: Fan Culture and the Reshaping of Science Fiction in the Sixties

by Rob Latham

In the August 1970 issue of the *SFWA Forum*, a publication circulated to members of the Science Fiction Writers of America, Harlan Ellison remarked that the controversy over the New Wave, which had consumed the field during the late 1960s, seemed to have been "blissfully laid to rest." There never was, he claimed,

any real conflict among the writers. It was all a manufactured controversy, staged by fans to hype their own participation in the genre. Their total misunderstanding of what was happening (not unusual for fans, as history ... shows us) managed to stir up a great deal of pointless animosity and if it had any real effect I suspect it was in the unfortunate area of causing certain writers to feel they were unable to keep up and consequently they slowed their writing output.<sup>1</sup>

Leaving aside the fact that this analysis obscures Ellison's own prominent rôle – and that of other professional authors and editors such as Judith Merril, Michael Moorcock, Lester del Rey, Frederik Pohl, and Donald A. Wollheim – in fomenting the conflict, it does raise the interesting question of precisely how fan culture was implicated in the furious debates of the period, a question virtually ignored in most scholarly writing on the New Wave. If we cannot agree with Ellison's indictment of sf fans as clueless troublemakers avid for unearned egoboo,<sup>2</sup> the onus is on us to produce a more compelling narrative of contemporary fandom's participation in perhaps the most significant, and certainly the most rancorous, dispute in sf history. This is the task I have set myself here.<sup>3</sup>

A useful way to begin would be to determine how, where and when the New Wave conflict originated. Much has been written on the New Wave as a significant historical moment in the development of the genre, but the bulk of this coverage has tended to focus on the published fiction and to ignore the institutional matrix within which these writings emerged – the complex network of relationships linking writers with editors and fans, as well as with one another.<sup>4</sup> Science fiction is, or certainly was during the 1960s, a fairly small world, and the ongoing give-and-take among the scene's various players deserves more careful scrutiny, especially when one is dealing with a period of such upheaval, when the network sustaining the genre was tested severely. New Wave fiction, and the occasional expressions of opinion (pro and con) about the subject that appeared in professional publications, was merely the most publicly visible crystallization of a rhetorical and ideological struggle taking place in face-to-face encounters at conventions, in the letter columns of fanzines, and in various other sites of subcultural exchange.

Not everyone during this period was a partisan in the conflict

The recent research I have done into fanzines of the 1960s<sup>5</sup> shows that the New Wave debate had two main stages: from 1964 to 1966, it was principally a British phenomenon, focused on the value of J.G. Ballard's early fiction and the effects of the editorial changes Moorcock was wreaking on *New Worlds* magazine; it then migrated to the United States (with the 1965 *Worldcon*, held in London, being the main vector of transmission), where it burgeoned into a running series of disputes relating to the overall worth of genre sf and the editorial taboos constraining its production. In the process of this trans-Atlantic exchange, the generational commitments and interpersonal rivalries dividing the field's various factions hardened into ideological fault-lines, with longstanding differences recast in the form of a vast struggle between Old and New Waves. (For example, lingering anxieties regarding the influence of the so-called Milford Mafia – the graduates of the annual Writers Workshop founded by Merril, Damon Knight, and James Blish in 1956 – were readily folded into the gathering denunciations of New Wave élitism and pretentious "artiness".) The fires of controversy were fanned, in both Britain and the United States, by self-appointed spokespersons for, and unofficial ringleaders of, the separate blocs, with the fallout evident in the pages of fan and professional publications, in convention speeches and panel exchanges, in the adjudication of literary awards, and indeed in just about all the major business conducted within the genre during the remainder of the decade.

Not everyone during this period was a partisan in the conflict, obviously, and the debate itself did not quite encompass all the developments – the various institutional setbacks and renovations – that came to form 1960s sf. But so widespread and inescapable was the rhetorical gunfire that even those who did not feel strongly about the Old vs. New split were either forced to adopt defensive postures to avoid collateral damage or else to make desperate, placating gestures of the "can't we all just get along?" variety. The lack of neutral ground became an even more pointed problem as the conflict began to be mapped onto broader social divisions, such as the strife between the youth counterculture and the so-called Establishment, an extrapolation that accelerated as the decade advanced.<sup>6</sup> This essay cannot possibly tackle all of these developments, so I would like to focus here on the initial phase of the battle in Britain and the first glimmerings of its emergence in the US. Above all, I would like to show how an attention to fan writings about the conflict can contribute to a more thorough anatomy of this crucial episode in sf history.

In the professional sf magazines, the first glimmerings of



the New Wave are generally considered to be the guest editorials written for *New Worlds* by Ballard in May 1962 and Moorcock in April 1963. Starting with the November 1961 issue, editor John Carnell had invited prominent authors to give vent to their views about the current state of sf, and a number of them responded with boldness and sometimes outright pugnacity. Looking back from the vantage of the late 1960s, one can see Ballard's and Moorcock's pieces as the first volleys in the polemical offensive they would launch once the latter gained control of the magazine and installed the former as his resident visionary. Ballard's editorial, entitled 'Which Way to Inner Space?', is the better known of the two, staking out fresh terrain for the genre in the softer sciences of psychology and symbology, and thumbing its nose at the tradition of "space fiction", which is scorned as outmoded and "invariably juvenile".<sup>7</sup> The basic contours of later clashes between Old and New Waves are prefigured in this brief, elliptical essay.

Moorcock's editorial, 'Play with Feeling', was if anything even more harshly negative in its assessment of the contemporary field. A relentless attack on "lazy writers or bad writers or downright stupid writers who find it impossible to stimulate the mind and the emotions at the same time", the essay called for an infusion of "passion, subtlety, irony, original characterisation, original and good style, a sense of involvement in human affairs, colour, density, depth, and, on the whole, real feeling" in order to combat the dismal glut of "boys' stories got up to look like grown-ups' stories" that presently prevailed.<sup>8</sup> This stern verdict was not unfamiliar to British fans who had heard Moorcock's comments at conventions or read some of his many fanzine articles. The August 1961 issue of Eric Bentcliffe's *Bastion*, for example, had featured an essay by Moorcock that offered similar views, though he couched them not as the opinions of a single disillusioned reader but rather as the collective judgment of attendees at that year's Eastercon, where the dire state of most magazine sf was purportedly a topic of widespread discussion. Chastising the timidity of sf editors and the poverty of imagination of most of its authors, Moorcock demanded a more forthright, "speculative" engagement with the contemporary world: science fiction desperately needed "new approaches, new angles and fresh treatment, and the standard of writing ... must continue to aim higher."<sup>9</sup>

Once again, looking back at these comments, one can see a clear foreshadowing of the editorial programme Moorcock would follow when he came into power at *New Worlds*, an approach that would roil and divide the field. What becomes evident when researching the fan culture of the period, however, is that the views expressed in his *Bastion* article, while controversial, represented, if not the general consensus Moorcock implied, then certainly the attitude of a substantial fan faction. The way Moorcock framed his article indicates the cohort he saw himself addressing – serious fans who were more concerned with the literary quality of the genre than with the social pleasures of fandom itself. At the outset, when describing

the dissatisfaction allegedly voiced by conference members, he expresses mock astonishment at "this virtually unheard of phenomenum [sic] of fans discussing SF over almost an entire Con"<sup>10</sup> – sober conduct by contrast with the usual revelry of room parties, costume balls, and celebrity mixers. The essay closes with a plug for the British Science Fiction Association, "which may play an important part in helping to establish the new climate" required to stimulate serious engagement with sf and thus revitalise a moribund genre.<sup>11</sup>

The BSFA, founded at the 1958 Eastercon, initially had a two-pronged agenda: to promote the serious discussion of science fiction and to draw more readers into the ranks of fandom. As Rob Hansen has shown in his history-in-progress of British fan culture, these twin purposes were potentially in conflict, and by the early 1960s, the cracks in the BSFA membership had begun to show: those who wanted the organisation to follow a "sercon" path, raising the level of critical dialogue about the genre, disapproved of the cliquishness of the "fannish" faction, who saw the BSFA primarily as a recruitment tool, while the latter group

resented the former's intellectual snobbery and hostility to time-honoured subcultural rituals.<sup>12</sup> Moorcock himself for a time tried to straddle this divide, adopting a raffish and Rabelaisian persona at conventions, yet also campaigning for higher standards in the writing and criticism of sf. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, he not only edited fanzines (such as *Tarzan Adventures* and *Ergo Ego*) but also, briefly, the BSFA journal *Vector*. Yet when push came to shove in the later 1960s, Moorcock repudiated fannish

attitudes in favour of the avant-garde agitprop of the reborn *New Worlds*.

In part, the fannish/sercon schism marked a generation gap between Old Guard fans and a fresh cohort who, in the words of Jim Linwood, "didn't much care for [the] stodgy, middle class, middlebrow fandom of the time" and were as interested in "discovering and debating the merits of William Burroughs, Jim Ballard, and Phil Dick at the same time as those of the Stones, Beatles, and Dylan."<sup>13</sup> This younger cadre found its voice in zines such as Pete Weston's *Zenith* (later *Speculation*) and Charles Platt's *Point of View* (later *Beyond*), both of which debuted in November 1963, and whose policies were not only clearly sercon but militantly so – especially in the case of Platt, who seemed to take a perverse delight in goading and humiliating Old Guard fans. Despite obvious differences in editorial taste and temperament, these two zines were lumped together in Linwood's review column in the January 1964 issue of *Les Spinge*, where the term "New Wave" was invoked to describe their mutual aspiration to a more serious, quasi-professional posture.<sup>14</sup> The tone of the review was sarcastic, mocking the perceived elitism of the editors' intellectual stance; according to Weston in his recently published autobiography, "we were both convinced that the fannish 'Establishment' had just declared war. For Charles it confirmed his preconceived opinions, and he fired the opening shots in what became a battle against perceived fannish wisdom."<sup>15</sup>



Moorcock (and others) on a panel at the 1965 Brumcon

Hansen's history-in-progress and Weston's memoir do admirable jobs of tracking the resultant fallout, and I refer interested readers to those sources for a more thorough account. What is of interest to me here is that a split within early-1960s fandom lies at the root of the first usage of the term "New Wave" within sf circles. Moorcock's growing alignment with New Wave fandom was made clear in the editorial he wrote for the July-August 1964 *New Worlds*, the second under his editorship, which commented on that year's Eastercon, at which "younger BSFA members, many of whom had a Calvinistic zeal to 'reform' the SF scene and make sure it talked about SF and nothing but", terrorised the Old Guard. While Moorcock's sympathies were clearly with these earnest insurrectionists, he was still enough of a fan himself to mention with seeming approval the "off-programme card games, parties and impromptu activities of a somewhat unrestrained nature" that transpired during lapses in the stimulating debates.<sup>16</sup>

Given the provocative nature of the other editorials Moorcock was writing for the magazine – not to mention the polemical pieces he was commissioning from Ballard and the tart reviews he was penning under his "James Colvin" pseudonym, roasting Old Guard favourites like Robert Heinlein – it was soon clear that *New Worlds* was staking out positions far removed from the mainstream of fannish opinion, more in line with a sercon commitment, evangelical in its intensity, to renovate the field. Despite occasional efforts to patch up (or paper over) the differences between the two factions,<sup>17</sup> the split was growing bigger and more bitter by the day, stoked by persistent sniping in the New Wave zines, especially *Beyond*. When Platt shortly began to publish fiction in *New Worlds*, and especially when he became the magazine's designer in August 1965, the association of the journal with the New Wave faction in fandom was all but complete.

The emergence of Moorcock's magazine as a professional platform for the views of a fresh generation of fandom was acknowledged by Christopher Priest in an article in the March 1965 issue of *Zenith Speculation*, where *New Worlds* was identified as a "New Wave prozine" (the first reference to the journal, in print, as a "New Wave" publication). According to Priest, the magazine, under Moorcock's editorial hand, "has lost its retrograde potboiling", moving "consciously and deliberately" toward a more mature and sophisticated approach, featuring a number of talented young writers who seemed willing to experiment in their work – though he admitted to finding Ballard's serialised 'Equinox' (a.k.a. *The Crystal World*) "tedious and wearying".<sup>18</sup> This final judgment is significant since it was precisely by means of relative verdicts on the worth of Ballard's fiction that the Old vs. New Wave split gathered steam during the 1960s, precipitating the debate across the Atlantic in the wake of the 1965 Worldcon. By the end of 1965, Old Guard fans like Ian McAuley, in an article entitled 'The New Establishment' in *Zenith Speculation*, were blasting the "snug little coterie" ensconced at *New Worlds* in terms evocative of Ballard's 1962 manifesto: "plugging the 'inner-space' jazz for all its worth", Moorcock and company

seemed intent on valorising stories "obscure to the point of unreadability."<sup>19</sup>

This specific line of attack had begun in 1964, in response to the publication of Ballard's 'The Terminal Beach' in the March issue of *New Worlds*, one of the last under Camell's tenure. Camell was initially dubious about publishing this difficult and fragmentary tale, but eventually acquiesced,<sup>20</sup> and the story was immediately embraced by the New Wave fans. In an article in *Beyond* in April 1964, Peter White praised Ballard's ambitious adaptations of Surrealist techniques, in 'The Terminal Beach' and other stories, and his "carefully, and coolly, constructed" personal mythology.<sup>21</sup> This was like a thrown gauntlet to the Old Guard fans, who responded with scorn. Some, like Donald Malcolm, sought to distinguish between Ballard's intelligent and interesting early works – familiar to those who "read *New Worlds* before it fell from grace" – and 'The Terminal Beach', which "bored me stiff"; others, like Graham Hall, dismissed all of Ballard's fiction as the emanations of "the most obscure literary talent since Joyce (I don't count William Burroughs as talent)" – yet another crack at Ballard, who had saluted Burroughs in the first Moorcock-edited issue of *New Worlds*.<sup>22</sup>

In 1966, when Ballard began to publish his radical "condensed novels" in *New Worlds* and elsewhere, and Moorcock took to promoting him as the inspirational centre of an experimental movement destined to transform the field,<sup>23</sup> the anti-Ballard sentiment hit fever pitch. In an article entitled 'The Drowned Plot (of J.G. Ballard)', published in the January issue of *Zenith Speculation*, J.P. Patrizio lambasted the author as an incompetent stylist and second-rate philosopher who was fundamentally ignorant of science, while Waldemar Kummig's essay 'The Reign of Ballardry', in *Vector*, labelled him an "anti-SF" author who used the iconography of the genre "only as casual props... treated with carelessness and contempt." Kummig's opening made clear the literary-political stakes of the debate: Ballard's work,

we are told in no uncertain terms, is The New Wave. This is SF finally coming of age. This is the Discovery of Inner Space as opposed to old fashioned and reactionary outer; and if you admit to not liking the stuff overmuch, then it's obvious that your small mind is still trapped in the bogs of stone-age SF.<sup>24</sup>

Traditional fans made it clear that they were not going to take this sort of avant-garde posturing from their old nemeses Moorcock and Platt, who had mutinously managed to commandeer the flagship of British sf.

While Ballard himself remained serenely above the fray, issuing the occasional mandarin comment via intermediaries, the *New Worlds* editorial conclave was actively working within fandom to counteract the Old Guard assaults; their efforts were seldom geared towards smoothing ruffled feathers, however, and had the effect of exacerbating the conflict. In a letter to *Zenith Speculation* in December 1964, Moorcock, responding to a negative

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review of the first few issues of his *New Worlds* by Terry Jeeves (which had disparaged Ballard's 'Equinox' as "fascinating twaddle"), went so far as to threaten "fisticuffs" as "the only way of getting some sense" into one so "thick, thick, *thick*", someone who has been nursed on a "30-year diet" of pulp sf and who thus "can't be expected to recognise or appreciate caviar, even when it's presented to him in a porridge plate". What is particularly interesting about this letter, aside from its sheer truculence, is that Moorcock proceeded to draw a firm distinction between his own position and the "New Wave" view represented by *Zenith Speculation*, which he derided as "reactionary rather than radical in its approach to SF."<sup>25</sup> Clearly, despite the growing starkness of the Old vs. New contrast, there were still divisions within each faction, and Moorcock and Platt, from their professional vantage at *New Worlds*, were eager to claim the mantle of cutting-edge radicalism from Weston and his stable of amateurs, who had more mixed literary tastes and held less rigidly ideological views of the field.

Over the course of 1965 and 1966, this jockeying for position continued, with the *New Worlds* crowd subjecting *Zenith Speculation* to a merciless barrage of criticism and Weston's columnists returning the favour in the form of often harsh, but occasionally laudatory reviews of the magazine. The October 1965 issue, for example, contained a letter from Moorcock condemning what he took to be the zine's unwillingness to fully reject the pulp tradition ("the sort of thing you are enthusiastic about is sensational, juvenile, and ... repellent to any intelligent and literate adult who happens to pick up a book or magazine containing this sort of rubbish"<sup>26</sup>), and the April 1966 issue featured a long response to Patrizio's attack on Ballard, in which Moorcock defended the author's "symbolic dramas of ideas."<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, Weston continued to adopt an even-handed approach, which clearly infuriated the *New Worlds* group, who seemed to be itching for a fight (especially Platt, who persistently bearded Willis and other *Zenith* columnists in scathing letters, some of which Weston refused to publish<sup>28</sup>). The October 1966 issue of *Speculation* ("Zenith" now dropped from the title) contained generous praise of recent issues of *New Worlds*, written from "the Outer Darkness, from where *Zenith* the magazine and its attendant horde of editors & contributors ha[d] criticised 'New-style British SF' in the past, and the January 1967 lauded some of Moorcock's own *New Worlds* fiction, while remarking on his "bafflingly inconsistent" attitudes, since he campaigned so stridently for experimental sf yet was still able to write old-fashioned adventure stories.<sup>29</sup>

British zines like *Speculation* weren't the only ones subjected to Moorcock's broadsides during this period. Responding to a two-part study of his Elric stories that appeared in the American fanzine *Niekas* in 1963, Moorcock took the opportunity to talk up Ballard and William Burroughs and to disparage pulp stalwart Poul Anderson, whose talent had been "ruined" by a lifetime of writing hard sf.<sup>30</sup> (In a rather prophetic comment, a letter writer in the subsequent issue remarked that, given Moorcock's view of "what a dead end science fiction is", one could only look forward "with trepidation to his editing

of *New Worlds*."<sup>31</sup>) An even more blatant effort at rabble-raising occurred in the first issue of John Bangsund's *Australian SF Review* (June 1966), where Moorcock and *New Worlds*'s Assistant Editor Langdon Jones (another earnest youngster recruited from the realms of fandom) engaged in a dialogue whose purpose was clearly to seed the New Wave debate down under. Somewhat condescendingly "talking for the benefit of Australians", the pair anatomised the current controversy in Britain, which Moorcock claimed represented not a "destructive civil war" but rather "the birth pangs of a new and better kind of sf." For his part, Jones upped the polemical ante even further: "Make no mistake about it, there is a war going on... The law, simply put, is *Change or Die*."<sup>32</sup> Both praised Ballard as the intellectual spearhead of an emerging "renaissance" in sf, leading John Foyster to respond in subsequent issues with a savage two-part denunciation of this phoney "new Messiah".<sup>33</sup>

By this point, the fires of the Old vs. New dispute had jumped the Atlantic, thanks less to Moorcock's evangelising than to the influence of the 1965 Worldcon, held in London over the weekend of August 27-30. Until that time, because *New Worlds* lacked a stateside distributor, the majority of American fans had gotten little sense of the transformations the magazine had undergone since Camell's departure. But all this changed in January 1966, when Judith Merrill – who had attended the '65 Worldcon and who would soon move to London to join forces with the *New Worlds* group – reported glowingly on the British scene in her review column in *The*

*Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Remarking on a palpable "feeling of excitement, a ferment of interest and creative energy ... such as has not been felt on the American scene for almost fifteen years", Merrill proceeded to lionize Ballard for his ambitious deviations from sf convention and to salute Moorcock's editorial and social leadership at the helm of *New Worlds*.<sup>34</sup> Her August 1966 column was given over to a rather fulsome survey of Ballard's work to date, which Berkeley Books had been bringing out in the US over the past few years (thanks largely to the efforts of their sf editor Damon Knight, who would, like Merrill, soon find himself at the centre of the New Wave storm). It was Merrill's June column, however, where she raved about a young American writer's first novel, that sparked the first serious backlash from the American Old Guard.

Thomas M. Disch's *The Genocides* was a bleak tale of alien invasion clearly geared to infuriate the hard-sf crowd who, steeped in John Campbell's staunch species-centrism, could hardly be expected to abide humanity's systematic extermination by an implacable extraterrestrial race. While for Merrill the novel was a wise and compassionate tale, filled with deeply human characters facing terrible privations, to Algis Budrys, the review columnist for *Galaxy* magazine (writing in the December 1966 issue), it was, for the discerning reader who "takes hope in science and in Man", a work of "unrelieved trash, ineptly written, pretentious, inconsistent and sophomoric", filled with a horde of "dumb, resigned victims." Budrys preceded this scathing attack with a hymn of praise for Heinlein's latest

**"Make no mistake  
about it, there is  
a war going on....  
The law, simply  
put, is *Change or  
Die*"**

effort, *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, “a book about strong personalities doing things about their situation”, valiantly battling the one true enemy of the heroic soul, “inertia.” By way of transition to his discussion of *The Genocides*, he lambasted Ballard’s disaster stories, which he saw as the model for Disch’s novel in their unrelieved pessimism and fatalistic resignation; in Ballard’s tales, characters “have cut [themselves] off from the entire body of scientific education”, and rather than struggling against imminent catastrophe, they “sit and worship it.”<sup>35</sup>

In an implicit response to Merrill’s rave about the British scene in her January column, Budrys acknowledged “the science-fiction renaissance currently going on in England”, but the tone of his remarks made it clear that he viewed this development with some scepticism and no small degree of alarm. If the literary model for ambitious young writers such as Disch was Ballard, “the master of the inertial science-fiction novel”,<sup>36</sup> then the tradition of heroic achievement and dedication to scientific progress represented by Heinlein and his ilk was in danger of being eclipsed. And Budrys’s column was clearly designed as a counterattack on behalf of these beleaguered Golden Agers. Fredenik Pohl joined the crusade with his editor’s column in the July 1967 issue of *If*, where he bemoaned the “damned dull” experiments of the *New Worlds* crew and put in a word for good, solid adventure stories.<sup>37</sup> Merrill herself would return fire in her November 1967 column, a stout defence of “The New Thing” in sf against “the gadget-and-gimmick ideas of the golden age”,<sup>38</sup> which in her view had run their course. Thus, by the end of 1966, the battle lines over the New Wave in the US were starkly drawn, and like the positions staked out in Britain, the combatants were seen as a militant faction championing (or mimicking) Ballard on the one hand, and a silent majority favouring traditional hard sf on the other.<sup>39</sup>

While the rhetorical parries of Merrill, Pohl, and Budrys filled the pages of the professional magazines, American fanzines during 1966 and early 1967 began to pick up the scent from their British counterparts. In some cases the trans-Atlantic crossover was quite direct: the August 1966 issue of Bill Donaho’s *Habakkuk*, for example, contained an article by British fan George Locke entitled ‘Britannia Rules the (New) Waves’, which excoriated Moorcock’s *New Worlds* for its alleged lack of professional standards. “Ballard and the other writers following in his footsteps have been conning science fiction for years”, Locke asserted. Far from being serious artists trying to push sf in fresh directions, instead they were writing what amounted to “highly stylized, sometimes evocative fan fiction, but still fan fiction”, and “Mike Moorcock is publishing a fanzine for them.” Lacking substantial plots, characters, or themes, as for instance one might find in the work of a solid professional such as Keith Laumer, the stories in *New Worlds* were essentially “Bradbury-type mood pieces” written by pretentious neophytes.<sup>40</sup> It was a clever and cutting line of attack, with some degree of truth in that, as we have seen, many of the writers and editors who came to form the *New Worlds* stable had cut their teeth in New

Wave fandom; as Locke pointed out, Langdon Jones’s first professional sale to *New Worlds* – ‘Stormwater Tunnel’ in the July-August 1964 issue – had originally appeared in his own fanzine, *Tensor*, in 1963.

Unsurprisingly, the *New Worlds* cohort responded with outrage, with Platt attacking Locke personally in *Habakkuk*’s February 1967 issue as “dumb, reactionary”, of “poor mind” and “feeble and pitiful imagination”: “Here is the small-minded cry of the illiterate masses, yearning for simple entertainment, scared of anything that remotely tries to stretch the mental abilities of the audience. One can only view such protests with contempt.”<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile, Terry Jeeves, likely still smarting from Moorcock’s threat to punch his nose, wrote in to say that he had cancelled his subscription to *New Worlds* due to the “utter rubbish” currently being purveyed by “the Ballard/Jones/Moorcock axis.”<sup>42</sup> Indeed, this letter column offered a virtual recap of

the New Wave conflict as it had played out in Britain during the past few years, featuring many of the original participants (Platt, Jeeves, Aldiss) and a number of bystanders, some of whom complained about the caricatures and distortions on both sides. Two British fans, Charles E. Smith and Bob Parkinson, offered plaintive notes of common sense that could barely be heard above all the shouting, with the former claiming that there “should be room within the field for both [Ballard’s and Laumer’s works] and many

other stories as well” and the latter remarking that Ballard and Heinlein were not so dissimilar in that both were highly talented writers whose heads had been turned, to their detriment, by all their sycophants and epigones.<sup>43</sup>

Meanwhile, in the same letter column, prominent figures in US sf, such as Damon Knight, James Blish, and Donald A. Wollheim, began to line up on respective sides of the struggle in their responses to Locke’s essay and also to an article by Greg Benford (appearing in the August 1966 *Habakkuk*) that had similarly taken on “the British school”, along with putative stateside variants such as the artsy “Milford axis” and the mode of hyper-emotional allegory pioneered by Harlan Ellison.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, by the middle of 1967, American sf authors who had begun their careers in the 1950s – Knight, Blish, Budrys, Merrill, Pohl, Ellison, and others – were finding it increasingly difficult to avoid partisan alignments in the developing New Wave war, in part due to the goads of fanzine columnists and feature writers, but also because of their own abiding aesthetic commitments (which in many cases extended back to their apprenticeship as fans themselves). The point I wish to emphasise here is that it is impossible to determine who was leading and who being led when forces began to mobilize on both sides of the Old-New divide, since the relationship between pros and fans was not unidirectional but complementary, linked by various mechanisms of feedback and mediation, such as fanzines and convention meetings.

1967 was also the year the New Wave hit the US convention scene, with the Worldcon in New York featuring a panel on the topic, where Ellison defended the movement against Theodore Sturgeon’s demurrals. Ellison

## ...it is impossible to determine who was leading and who being led when forces began to mobilize on both sides of the Old-New divide



had already begun to align himself with the sf rebels in his Westercon Guest of Honour speech the previous year in San Diego. Entitled 'A Time for Daring', the speech was an indictment of the conservatism of magazine sf, which was "leaching the vitality out of our best writers", whose talents were being crushed by generic conventions and taboos. Speaking as "an emissary of the open mind" – and adapting some of Moorcock's polemical techniques – Ellison saluted William Burroughs and other "mainstream" talents (e.g., Kurt Vonnegut, Anthony Burgess) as serious artists who could be true to their visions because they avoided the editorial shibboleths of the genre's gate-keepers.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps in response to Ellison's talk, and certainly in response to his 1967 anthology *Dangerous Visions* (which sought to circumvent the magazines' stranglehold on sf by inviting writers to pursue their unfettered visions), Lester Del Rey, Guest of Honour at the '67 Worldcon, delivered a speech entitled 'Art or Artiness?' that stoutly defended genre sf against the encroaching avant-gardists. "The deepest fault I find with much of the new writing", he argued, is that

It is totally, completely lacking in even the slightest trace of originality, while it claims to be something new and revolutionary. It has borrowed almost every cheap trick from the mainstream as taught today, and has simply imported those tricks to science fiction. The characters, messages, plotless stories and attention to failure and ugliness are not new, but merely something old and borrowed.... They haven't even been reshaped enough to make them fit properly into science fiction, but have been tossed in by the lump.<sup>46</sup>

By this point, the battle was fully joined, with the American Old Guard roused to a defence of the homeland against the barbarians from across the pond massed outside the genre walls.

The irony is that *New Worlds* during this period was having serious problems, its publisher threatening to fold the magazine after its distributor went bankrupt in the summer of 1966. Thanks to the efforts of Brian Aldiss, the journal was kept alive by a grant from the British Arts Council, which provided a stipend to support printing costs.<sup>47</sup> This timely intervention not only affirmed that Moorcock's efforts to improve the standards of sf writing were being recognised by the literary establishment, it also allowed him to expand the scope of the magazine, transforming it into an impressive-looking slick with an editorial purview that included the contemporary arts, cutting-edge science, and (counter)cultural politics. With the July 1967 issue, the freshly reborn *New Worlds* appeared, and the New Wave seemed to have fully come into its own.<sup>48</sup> The traffic between Britain and the US also picked up, with young American writers like Disch and Norman Spinrad publishing their most ambitious work (*Camp Concentration* and *Bug Jack Barron*, respectively) in the large-format *New Worlds*, sparking further controversies on both sides of the Atlantic, and Merrill continuing to beat the drums for change in her well-intentioned but

abominably-titled anthology *England Swings SF*, published in the US in 1968.

But these are developments I have no room to canvas here. Instead, I would like to close by briefly discussing a talk Moorcock gave at the 1967 Eastercon in Bristol, where



Moorcock delivering a speech at the '65 Brumcon

he looked back on the New Wave struggle in fandom and forward to the future of the revamped *New Worlds* (a mock-up of which he reportedly brandished at the audience). Entitled 'The New Fiction', the speech marked, in essence, a total rejection of genre sf in favour of "speculative fiction", a mode of writing that was attuned to radical social transformations and that demanded "entirely fresh techniques ... in order to do justice to the subject matter." While sf had long harboured native "evolutionaries" whose goal was the reformation of the genre from

within (such as, presumably, the Milford Mafia in the US), Moorcock threw in his lot instead with the "revolutionaries", those who issued incendiary "proclamations and manifestos", who rejected piecemeal reform in favour of wholesale transformation, and who ruffled Old Guard feathers with "their insistence that their path is the only one, their wild dismissal of all that has gone before, and their wild claims for their own achievements."<sup>49</sup> In short, Moorcock was waving an airy goodbye to the field as the refurbished *New Worlds* hoisted sail for the sunnier climes of the 1960s avant-garde.

The irony – some might say bad faith – of this performance was that it was entirely fannish in execution, capitalising on Moorcock's longstanding rôle as fandom's court jester. Reading the speech in sober print can hardly give a sense of the original occasion, since, according to witnesses, Moorcock was either roaring drunk or brilliantly simulating drunkenness, gurgling scotch straight from the bottle as he comically pretended to misplace pages and misconstrue his own meanings (or those of his purported "ghost writer", whom at one point he threatened to fire for forcing him to recite such gibberish). As Weston remarks in his memoir, "The audience was probably far better entertained by this hamming than by a formal and reasoned talk about science fiction", although he acknowledged that Moorcock "became remarkably lucid for the questions about the future of *New Worlds* that followed."<sup>50</sup> According to most accounts, Moorcock was the life of the party at the convention, wittily parrying Old Guard claims that Ballard had stolen stream-of-consciousness from Joyce, purchasing and then tearing up an Ace paperback "[w]ith a devilish snarl of 'I hate this bloody awful book,'" and entertaining children at Judith Merrill's room party by uncannily imitating a Dalek from *Doctor Who*.<sup>51</sup> New Wave champion or not, the man clearly still knew how to make an ass of himself in the traditional fannish manner.

The reason why I emphasise the performative nature of Moorcock's speech is that it highlights the distance between all the stern New Wave rhetoric about transcending genre conventions and the time-honoured subcultural realities of fandom, which demanded a playful mockery of sercon pretension. Even delivering his most

arrogant speech at the moment of his greatest professional triumph, Moorcock couldn't help but obey this time-honoured code. And, indeed, as the large-format *New Worlds* blossomed and then struggled over the next few years, he continued to attend conventions and to write sometimes scathing, sometimes self-mocking pieces for fanzines, as did Ellison, Spinrad, and other New Wave champions in the US.<sup>52</sup> The point here being that the combatants in the Old vs. New Wave war, for all their differences, were united in their commitment to mutual engagement and provocation, which far from threatening to destroy the genre actually served to enrich it. Indeed, fan writing of the late 1960s and early 1970s attained an argumentative sophistication hitherto unseen, and convention panels became sites of lively disputation.<sup>53</sup>

Moorcock's rambunctious misbehaviour at conventions eventually climaxed at the 1970 Eastercon in London, where his drunken coterie disrupted a speech by an attending Member of Parliament and threw a glass during a

poetry session that cut John Brunner's shin. "Why," Weston plaintively wonders, "had Moorcock become the scourge of Fandom, when he used to be the life and soul of the party at conventions? Had the experience of editing *New Worlds* changed him in some profound way, his avowal of the new wave alienated him from his previous values?"<sup>54</sup> What I would suggest instead is that Moorcock was merely adapting his well-established fannish persona for the purposes of his new-found avant-garde posture, and that this sort of jockeying was nothing new in fandom, extending back to the Futurians in the 1940s (and forward to the cyberpunks in the 1980s).<sup>55</sup> In other words, while the New Wave was

unquestionably a radical disruption in the traditional forms of sf writing, it was also a reinvigoration of many of the conventional modes of fan discourse and interaction. The New Wave controversy was not, contra Ellison's self-serving claim, a mere fannish concoction, but it cannot be understood in its full dynamics without careful attention to the ways that fans, in fitful collaboration with sf authors and editors, helped to frame, articulate, and sustain it.

## ...fan writing of the late 1960s and early 1970s attained an argumentative sophistication hitherto unseen

### Notes

1. Harlan Ellison, Letter to the Editor, *SFWA Forum* 15 (August 1970): 27-28; the quotations are from p. 28.

2. Egoboo is a term of fannish provenance referring to the flattering acclaim – the ego boost – accruing from publicly visible fan activity (or "fanac"). For a guide to such jargon, see Donald Franson's *A Key to the Terminology of Science-Fiction Fandom*, originally published by the National Fantasy Fan Federation in 1962 and available online at [http://fannac.org/Fannish\\_Reference\\_Works/FandBook/FandBook.html](http://fannac.org/Fannish_Reference_Works/FandBook/FandBook.html).

3. This essay is also part of a larger study I am conducting on New Wave science fiction, portions of which are forthcoming in the following venues: 'The New Wave', in David Seed, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Science Fiction* (London: Blackwell, 2005); 'The Job of Dissevering Joy from Glop': John Clute's *New Worlds* Criticism', in Farah Mendlesohn, ed., *Portals: A Festschrift for John and Judith Clute* (Baltimore, MD: Old Earth, 2005); and 'A Young Man's Journey to Ladbroke Grove: M. John Harrison and the Evolution of the New Wave in Britain', in Mark Bould and Michelle Reid, eds., *Parietal Games: Critical Writings by and on M. John Harrison* (London: Science Fiction Foundation, 2005).

4. Colin Greenland's *The Entropy Exhibition: Michael Moorcock and the British 'New Wave' in Science Fiction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), for example, which remains the only book length study of the subject, is basically a work of literary criticism that focuses closely on the fiction of the *New Worlds* cohort rather than the editorial operations of the magazine or the debates within contemporary fandom about the transformations it was bringing to the field. Roger Luckhurst's fine discussion of the New Wave in his recent book, *Science Fiction* (London: Polity, 2005), does place the movement within an encompassing social milieu, seeing it as an expression of 1960s concerns and attitudes (see Chapter 7), but he is not particularly interested in local cultural trends within the genre itself.

5. This research was conducted during 2004-05 at the following sites: the Mike Horvat Collection at the University of

Iowa; the Science Fiction Foundation Collection at the University of Liverpool; and the J. Lloyd Eaton Collection at the University of California at Riverside, which houses the Terry Carr and Bruce Pelz fanzine collections. I am grateful to a number of persons for their assistance: Sid Huttner, Director of Special Collections at the University of Iowa library; Kathryn Hodson, Reader Services Liaison at the UI library; Andy Sawyer, curator of the Science Fiction Foundation Collection; George Slusser, curator of the Eaton Collection; Darian Daries, Department Coordinator of Special Collections in UC-Riverside's Rivera library; Sara Stillely, Reference Assistant and supervisor of the reading room at UC-Riverside; and Hal Hall, curator of the science fiction collection at the Cushing Library at Texas A&M University, who supplied me with xeroxes of some rare items. I would especially like to thank Mike Horvat for making his collection of fanzines available for scholarly use through his recent donation to the UI library. My research was conducted with the generous assistance of a Faculty Scholar Award from the University of Iowa, a travel grant from the Center for International Programs at UI, and an editorial stipend from the journal *Science Fiction Studies*. For a discussion of the methodological problems involved in researching fan writings and fan culture, see my 'Fanzine Research: Some Sercon Musings', in *Science Fiction Studies* 31:3 (November 2004): 487-97.

6. For example, the spectre of 'Chicago' – the ruthless suppression of dissent by police forces during the 1968 Democratic Presidential convention – was invoked by both sides in the debate as evidence of the intolerance and authoritarian tendencies of their opponents. In a letter published in *SF Review* in January 1969 (#29, pp. 44-45), John J. Pierce, probably the most visible – and voluble – polemicist against the New Wave in the United States, compared the "New Wavicles' call for unity" with Mayor Daley's mobilisation of truncheons, while M. John Harrison, the Books Editor of *New Worlds*, launched the following condemnation of Old Wave author Robert A. Heinlein in the September/October issue of *Speculation* (#24, p. 31):

One could forgive the rotten prose, forget the whole sordid bag of "professional" gimmicks, even regard his blatant crypto-Fascist militarism with a certain amount of amusement, if it were not for the tragic receptivity of his audience – their adolescent *need* for this sort of comfort.... [H]ow many little plastic models of himself has Heinlein created, and each one primed to zip out and implement the savage bipolar creed? The answer is Chicago.

7. J.G. Ballard, 'Which Way to Inner Space?' *New Worlds* 118 (May 1962): 2-3, 116-118; the quotations are from p. 3.

8. Michael Moorcock, 'Play with Feeling', *New Worlds* 129 (April 1963): 2-3, 123-27; the quotations are from pp. 3 and 123.

9. Mike Moorcock, 'Blast Off – 1960', *Bastion* 1 (August 1961): 13-18; the quotation is from p. 16.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 13. This is probably the place to acknowledge the fact that fanzines, being the amateur productions that they are, are often riddled with misspellings, typos, grammatical mistakes, and other solecisms. Rather than insert a welter of [sic]s in the quotations that follow, I will correct the more obvious errors to facilitate easier reading.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

12. Hansen's history-in-progress, entitled *Then*, is archived online at the following sites: Ansible's UK Science Fiction Fandom archive (<http://www.dcs.gla.ac.uk/SF-Archives/Then/Index.html>) and Fanac's Fan History Project ([http://fanac.org/Fan\\_Histories/Then/](http://fanac.org/Fan_Histories/Then/)). The term "sercon" (sometimes "sericon" in Britain) refers to a "serious and constructive" engagement with sf: see Franson, *op cit.*

13. Quoted in Hansen, *op cit.*, Chapter 6.

14. Jim Linwood, 'The Fanalytic Eye', *Les Spinge* 12 (January 1964). Linwood has acknowledged that he borrowed the term from contemporary cinema culture, where it referred to the trailblazing work of young directors like Goddard and Truffaut, who were breaking with an Old Guard of traditional narrative filmmakers: see Hansen, *op cit.*, Chapter 7.

15. Peter Weston, *With Stars in My Eyes: My Adventures in British Fandom* (Framingham, MA: NESFA, 2004), p. 49.

16. Michael Moorcock, 'British Science Fiction Convention – 1964', *New Worlds* 143 (July-August 1964): 79-81; the quotations are from p. 80. Moorcock's lingering fannishness was mocked by Platt in his own review of the 1964 Eastercon published in *Beyond*: "Michael Moorcock, assisted as always by his London group of hangers-on, spent the evening crooning and bellowing into a microphone, revising the Bible, climbing over the roofs and generally making a nuisance of himself" – a snide portrait that inspired a caustic riposte from Moorcock denying he was the centre of a clique and tweaking Platt for his puritanical dourness (see Weston, *op cit.*, p. 70, where Platt's article and Moorcock's letter in response are quoted). The irony here, of course, is that Platt would soon join Moorcock's coterie at *New Worlds*, becoming the in-house scourge of Old Wave conservatism.

17. Perhaps the most poignant and visible such effort was legendary Old Guard fan Walt Willis's move to revive his 'Fanorama' column from the 1950s prozine *Nebula* in Weston's *Zenith*, where his gestures of good will toward the New Wave faction were contemptuously rebuffed (see Weston, *op cit.*, pp. 80-81, 87-89, 97-98). Moorcock's own rare and sketchy efforts to patch things up with traditional fandom included an abortive plan to set up a London clubhouse (see Hansen, *op cit.*, Chapter 7).

18. Chris Priest, 'New Wave – Prozines', *Zenith Speculation* 8 (March 1965): 9-11; the quotations are from pp. 9 and 11.

19. Ian R. McAuley, 'The New Establishment', *Zenith Speculation* 10 (October 1965): 15-16; the quotations are from

p. 15. In a brief letter published in the subsequent issue (#11; January 1966, pp. 35-36), Moorcock attacked McAuley's "naive view" of the field and "sparse knowledge of literature."

20. Carnell's doubts about the experimental turn in Ballard's work – and about the New Wave generally – were expressed in a taped talk he sent to the Melbourne Eastercon in 1966, which was transcribed as 'The Science Fiction Market' and published in *The Australian SF Review* 2 (August 1966): 4-10.

21. Peter White, 'J.G. Ballard', *Beyond* 5 (April 1964): 25-28; the quotation is from p. 27.

22. Donald Malcolm, review of *The Terminal Beach*, *Vector* 28 (September 1964): 26-27; Graham Hall, Letter to the Editor, *Vector* 29 (November 1964): 44. See also Beryl Hehley's review of *The Terminal Beach* in the June-July issue of *Speculation*, which complains about Ballard's "inscrutable" symbolism "which few readers can understand" and which seems to call out for "a psycho-analytical interpreter" (p. 33). Ballard's profile of Burroughs was published as 'Myth-Maker of the 20th Century', *New Worlds* 142 (May-June 1964): 121-27.

23. Michael Moorcock, 'Ballard: The Voice', *New Worlds* 167 (October 1966): 2-3, 151. Ballard's 'Assassination Weapon' had appeared in the April 1966 issue, while the March *Impulse* (formerly *Science-Fantasy*) ran 'You and Me and the Continuum.'

24. J.P. Patrizio, 'The Drowned Plot (of J.G. Ballard)', *Zenith Speculation* 11 (January 1966): 10-17; Waldemar Kumming, 'The Reign of Ballardry', *Vector* 40 (1966): 3-7; the quotations are from pp. 7 and 4.

25. Michael Moorcock, letter to the Editor, *Zenith Speculation* 7 (December 1964): 12-15; the quotations are from pp. 13, 15, and 12. In the following issue (#8; March 1965), Brian Aldiss wrote in to ironically applaud "the thrilling spectacle of Moorcock and Jeeves bleeding and dying for their beliefs" (p. 24).

26. Michael Moorcock, letter to the Editor, *Zenith Speculation* 10 (October 1965): 29-30; the quotation is from p. 29.

27. Michael Moorcock, 'The Drowned Plot (of J.G. Ballard): A Reply', *Zenith Speculation* 12 (April 1966): 11-13; the quotation is from p. 11.

28. Forty years later, the wounds were still stinging, as Weston's comments in his memoir indicate: "Enough! I was fed up with all the nastiness, was sick of the very sound of Charles Platt's name. I was in fandom to make friends, not enemies" (*op cit.*, p. 119).

29. Pete Weston, untitled review column, *Speculation* 14 (October 1966): 40-42; the quotation is from p. 42; Weston; 'Paperback Preview', *Speculation* 15 (January 1967): 33.

30. Michael Moorcock, letter to the Editor, *Niekas* 8 (March 1964): 16-21.

31. Charles and Marsha Brown, letter to the Editor, *Niekas* 9 (September 1964): 56.

32. Michael Moorcock and Langdon Jones, 'Ballards and Impromptus', *Australian SF Review* 1 (June 1966): 9-13; the quotations are from pp. 12, 9, and 10.

33. John Foyster, 'A Note on J.G. Ballard: Some Recent Short Stories', *Australian SF Review* 8 (March 1967): 5-15 (the quotation is from p. 5), and 'A Note on J.G. Ballard: Three Novels', *Australian SF Review* 9 (April 1967): 3-11.

34. Merril, 'Books', *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* 30:1 (January 1966): 39-45; the quotation is from p. 39.

35. Algis Budrys, 'Galaxy Bookshelf', *Galaxy* 25:2 (December 1966): 125-33; the quotations are from pp. 130, 127, and 128.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

37. Frederik Pohl, 'Wiped Out', *If* 17:7 (July 1967): 4-5; the quotation is from p. 5.

38. Judith Merrill, 'Books', *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* 33:5 (November 1967): 28-36; the quotation is from p. 30.

39. These specific lines of struggle – New Wave vs. Golden Age – were developing in Australia as well, due in no small part to the exporting of British and American viewpoints. We have already seen Moorcock and Jones cheerleading for the New Wave faction in the June 1966 issue of *Australian SF Review*, a call to arms that summoned an angry response from Ted White in the January 1967 issue (#6), which proclaimed that the Golden Age wasn't dead but that Moorcock was "doing his damndest to kill it off with his encouragement of his young writers to abandon story content, credible characterization, and adherence to plot" (p. 30). In subsequent issues, Moorcock, Platt, Merrill, Blish, and others would continue the argument. For his part, White would become one of the most vigorous anti-New Wave partisans in the US, a campaign he would keep up through his voluminous fanzine writings (such as his 'Trenchant Bludgeon' column in Richard Geis's *Psychotic*) and in his editorial policies at the helm of the prozines *Amazing* and *Fantastic*, which he took over in 1969.

40. George Locke, 'Britannia Rules the (New) Waves', *Habakkuk* 2:2 (August 1966): 40-45; the quotations are from pp. 45, 41, and 42.

41. Charles Platt, letter to the Editor, *Habakkuk* 2:3 (February 1967): 45-46.

42. Terry Jeeves, letter to the Editor, *Habakkuk* 2:3 (February 1967): 50-51.

43. Charles E. Smith, letter to the Editor, *Habakkuk* 2:3 (February 1967): 57-58; Bob Parkinson, Letter to the Editor, *Habakkuk* 2:3 (February 1967): 60. Smith was a member of Group '65, a London cadre of fan filmmakers; Parkinson was one of the founders, with Jim Linwood, of the NotFans, a group based in Nottingham, and briefly co-editor of their zine, *Jetstream*. See Hansen, *op cit.*, Chapters 6 & 7.

44. Greg Benford, 'New Trends in SF and All That Jazz', *Habakkuk* 2:2 (August 1966): 32-39.

45. Ellison's speech was published as 'A Time for Daring' in *Algol* 12 (March 1967): 27-34; the quotations are from pp. 33 and 34. Ellison's alignment with the *New Worlds* crowd was not exactly tight, however, as proven when he generally concurred with Ted White's denunciation, during a panel at the '67 WesterCon, of the "experimental crud" Moorcock was then publishing (see Alex Eisenstein, 'Compost Heap', *Trumpet* 5 [April 1967]: 4-7; White's remark is quoted on p. 7). The *New Worlds* crew, for their part, were not big fans of Ellison either, as witness Moorcock's dismissal of *Dangerous Visions* as only "a slight development of the established forms" of the genre (see Robert E. Toomey, 'Michael Moorcock: An Interview', *SF Review* 34 [December 1969]: 7-15; the quotation is on p. 13). The basic contrast here is between Ellison's attempts to reform the field by expanding its range of content – overcoming taboos against the representation of sexuality, for example – and Moorcock's efforts to develop revolutionary new forms of expression; this is a contrast that, broadly speaking, marks a difference between the British and American New Waves.

46. Del Rey's speech was published as 'Art or Artiness?' in *Famous Science Fiction: Tales of Wonder* 8 (Fall 1968): 78-86; the quotation is from p. 82. When Old Guard fan Sam Moskowitz and John J. Pierce founded the 'Second Foundation' in 1968 to battle the New Wave incursion, del Rey was elected "First Speaker" – terms borrowed, with his consent, from Isaac Asimov's *The Foundation Trilogy* (the

notion being that the Second Foundation would preserve the treasures of Golden-Age SF during the period of New Wave darkness). For more details, see Pierce's editorial "prospectus" in the first issue of his fanzine *Renaissance: A Semi-Official Organ of the Second Foundation* 1:1 (Winter 1969): 1. I plan to write about the Second Foundation, and the militant anti-New Wave position staked out by Pierce, in a follow-up article.

47. For background on the crisis and its resolution, see Aldiss's 'Within the Reach of Storms', which was published in the UK in *Vector* 42 (1967; pp. 5-11) and reprinted in the August 1967 *SFWA Bulletin* (#3:4; pp. 9-11), and also Moorcock's Introduction to *New Worlds: An Anthology* (London: Flamingo, 1983): 9-26.

48. For a contemporary review of the large-format *New Worlds* as the apotheosis of New Wave experimentation, see Lee Harding's 'The New SF' in *Australian SF Review* 13 (December 1967): 11-13. "Moorcock shows us the way to a new SF", Harding argues, "cross-fertilized with twentieth-century fiction in a way few of us ever thought possible" (p. 11). This notion of regenerative cross-pollination offers a more positive spin on Del Rey's claim that the New Wave merely recycled avant-garde tricks from the literary mainstream.

49. Moorcock's speech was published as 'The New Fiction' in *Speculation* 16 (Autumn 1967): 7-11; the quotations are from pp. 10 and 8.

50. Weston, *With Stars in My Eyes*, pp. 159-60.

51. For reports on Moorcock's behaviour at the con, from which these details have been culled, see Pete Weston, 'The Speculator, at the Convention', *Speculation* 16 (Autumn 1967): 2-6 (the source for the "bloody awful book" quotation [p. 3]); Mervyn Barrett, 'A Bristol Non Report', *Australian SF Review* 10 (June 1967): 89-94; and Phyllis Eisenstein, 'Americans in Bristol: A Somewhat Report on the EasterCon, 1967', *Double: Bill* 17 (1967): 19-22.

52. Perhaps the most revealing piece Moorcock wrote for the zines during this period was the first instalment of his short-lived column for *Speculation*, entitled 'Now It Can Be Told' (#19; September 1968; pp. 57-64), which favoured fans with an insider's view of the fractious and exhausting business involved in keeping *New Worlds* afloat. (For an even more tongue-in-cheek peek behind the editorial curtain, see Charles Platt's 'An Editor's Day' in *Science Fiction Review* 39 [August 1970]: 17-18.)

53. See, for example, the transcript of a 1969 Eastercon panel – featuring Carnell, Platt, Brunner, Dan Morgan, George Hay, and Edward Lucie-Smith – published as 'There Ain't No Such Thing as the New Wave' in *Speculation* 23 (July-August 1969): 5-11. The concurrently-scheduled Minicon (in Minneapolis) also mounted a New Wave panel, which included the unlikely triumvirate of Clifford Simak, Gordon Dickson, and Charles De Vet.

54. Weston, *op cit.*, p. 215. See also pp. 189-90 for a report on the glass-throwing incident.

55. Indeed, it's entirely possible that longstanding social and personal divisions among the Futurians may help to explain the divergent positions the group took during the New Wave debates, with Merrill, Blish, and Knight lined up in favour and Pohl, Wollheim, and Asimov opposed.

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ROBERT SHECKLEY IS GUEST OF HONOUR AT THE 2005 WORLDCON. THIS ARTICLE OFFERS ONE SMALL ATTEMPT TO INVESTIGATE ONE OF THE GREAT COMIC WRITERS

# Robert Sheckley's Comic Labyrinths

## by Andrew M. Butler

There is a moment at the end of Robert Sheckley's short story 'Redfern's Labyrinth' when the narrative ends up reflecting on its own structure: in investigating a series of mysterious messages about a labyrinth he suspects he has been hoaxed, in fact has been the subject of a series of hoaxes: "The series had been, in fact, a part of the Labyrinth itself, a small loop, curving quickly back to its original point of departure. Or to a point *closely resembling the original*." This labyrinthine device of the never-quite completed circle is central to Sheckley's narrative structures, and indeed are central to comedy.

Robert Sheckley was born in 1928 – making him the same vintage as Philip K. Dick – and grew up in New Jersey. Shortly after leaving New York University he was already selling short stories and in 1952 he went freelance, placing over a hundred stories in a few years, many of these to *Galaxy* under the editorship of Horace Gold – with whom he played poker on Friday nights. The short stories built him an impressive reputation, and it is some of these that I have chosen to focus on here.<sup>2</sup> He does of course need to be considered in the same area of 'soft' and satiric science fiction as his contemporaries Frederik Pohl, C.M. Kornbluth, William Tenn and Alfred Bester, although, as Rob Latham noted in his review of the only book-length study of Sheckley,<sup>3</sup> "the decade of the 50s, caught between the Golden Age and the New Wave, remains a curious ellipsis in sf scholarship".<sup>4</sup> Amis's survey of the genre labelled Sheckley "science fiction's premier gadfly"<sup>5</sup> and as an author of "comic inferno" stories,<sup>6</sup> linking him with the satiric side of writers such as Dante. Brian Aldiss's rather fuller account of the genre noted that Sheckley "sparkled from the first"<sup>7</sup> and showed "inspiration and genuine insight".<sup>8</sup> But Sheckley could not maintain the output, and was frequently troubled by writer's block. In Britain, despite the success of Douglas Adams and Terry Pratchett as comic writers, and despite the co-option of Philip K. Dick as a philosophical writer – which Sheckley's material gravitates towards – Sheckley has been largely out of print and ignored by the critics. For what it's worth, though, he is about the only genre writer to be mentioned in Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic* (and the translation, at least, misspells his name).<sup>9</sup> But perhaps Sheckley's eclipse is sadly to be expected because he is a comic writer.

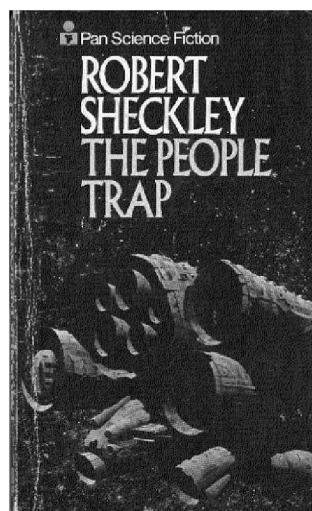
It has been said that there are three kinds of comedy – or perhaps more accurately of jokes – and pattern of

the labyrinth I am alluding to here can be observed at work in them all. Firstly there is the comedy of juxtaposition, absurdity and contradiction, where two dissimilar things become associated. Secondly there is the laughter of superiority, where the joker establishes their position at the expense of the butt of their joke, or uses the butt to buttress their own position. This is joking from a powerful place – or perhaps on the occasions of satire, joking from a weak place to establish a new more powerful position at the expense of those in control. Finally there is the release from built-up tension, the joke that cuts through the atmosphere and brings a sense of relief to all concerned.

The absurd form can be seen in the juxtaposition of the linear and the curved, the straight line that leads back to a starting point. This is there in the Homeric (and Hellenic) figure of Odysseus, but the Sheckleyan Odysseus has as his "goal simply to get home in one piece, or past whatever obstacles nature or society has placed in his path."<sup>10</sup> But home, when returned to, isn't home sweet home after all; Penelope has had the decorators in or your room has been rented out. It is both the same place and not the same place: each location being defined by how you have perceived it, those perceptions changing because you have been changed through your travels. The Hellenic circle (which is not a circle) is to be contrasted with (and in comic terms seen as identical with) the Hebraic line, a possibly infinite line found in the Mosaic forty years of wandering in the wilderness, leaving home to go home, a home always just out of reach, round the next corner.

The superiority comes in the form of our reactions to the protagonists and antagonists of the stories – heroes is hardly the word for Sheckley's characters – and the sense of greater ability we might sometimes feel we have in comparison. We would find our way through the labyrinth, we would cope with the situation. And yet his characters can hold their own; they might not know what universe they are in, but they can probably distinguish between half a dozen different metaphysical positions.

The tension lies in the difficulty and delay in returning to the starting point (of the circle which is not a circle). It's Odysseus with a laughter track. This is hardly unique to Sheckley – underlying virtually all narratives is the pattern of stability, chaos and restored stability. It is in the different kinds of responses to chaos, the different kinds of causes of chaos and the different degrees of confidence in the restoration that partly



defines genre. A narrative is the attempt to solve a problem, and is prolonged by the difficulties in solving that problem. Peter Brooks, writing in the context of Freud's ideas – particularly the death instinct<sup>11</sup> – argues that “The desire of the text (the desire of reading) is [...] desire for the end, but desire for the end reached only through the at least minimally complicated detour, the intentional deviance, in tension, which is the plot of narrative”.<sup>12</sup> We want to get through the labyrinth, but we want to take the scenic route – and the longer we travel, the greater the tension (and the pleasure) is of how to get where we wish to go. And then we find ourselves back where we started (which is not where we started). Henri Bergson, writing about laughter at the turn of the twentieth century, notes “A child is delighted when he sees the ball in a game of ninepins knocking down everything in its way and spreading havoc in all directions; he laughs louder than ever when the ball returns to its starting-point after twists and turns and waverings of every kind.”<sup>13</sup> But the starting point is not the starting point – we are wiser now, or at least we know how little we know.

Douglas Adams – clearly a reader of Shuekley<sup>14</sup> – surely knew the comic potential of the not-circle in the trajectory of Arthur Dent's escape from and stranding on Earth in the original *Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1978), further reinforced by returns in later books to Earths that were not Earth. It's there in the bowl of petunia's “Oh no, not again”, in the time warps that cause major intergalactic wars or statues to be erected. There can in fact be no end. Brooks claims “Any final authority claimed by narrative plots, whether of origin or end, is illusory”<sup>15</sup> – a circle, even a circle which is not a circle, has no origin or end: “the end is a time before the beginning”.<sup>16</sup> All we can hope for is a moment to catch our breaths.

Comedy, especially Shuekley's comedies, are straight lines which turn out to be circles (or vice versa). As I've written elsewhere,<sup>17</sup> *Dimension of Miracles*, *Options* (1975), *Mindswap* and *The Alchemical Marriage of Alistair Crompton* (1978) all involve attempts to return to the point of origin, a return that is delayed by the intervention of incident and elaborations of the chaos, and which finally cannot be achieved because either home or the traveller has changed. The various stories about hunts – ‘Seventh Victim’ (1953), ‘The Prize of Peril’ (1958), *The Tenth Victim* (1966), *Victim Prime* (1987) and *Hunter/Victim* (1988) are dependent on repeated iterations of capture and escape, of failure to catch and failure to escape, with the survival of the quarry determining the duration of the narrative. Whatever the universe throws at him, the protagonist must survive for there to be a story – although the story would also be ended by his achievement of his desires.

This pattern can be seen at work in five linked short stories which appeared in *Galaxy* over a period of less than a year in the mid-1950s. The first story in the sequence, ‘Ghost V’ (October 1954)<sup>18</sup> introduced us to Richard Gregor and Dr Frank Arnold, partners in the

wildly unsuccessful AAA Ace Planet Decontamination Service. Success, of course, is not funny – it might make us feel jealous rather than superior – but there has to be a chance for them to make progress. After a long period without business, they are engaged by Mr Femgraum to decontaminate the planet RUC-5, the eponymous ‘Ghost-V’. A party of farming colonists had leased it, but reported seeing various monsters, and all were mysteriously slaughtered. The next users, sun worshippers, also died in mysterious circumstances. In what is to become a familiar pattern, Gregor is sent to the planet, whilst Arnold stays behind to advise from a safe distance. On the first night Gregor is scared by what he first takes to be a man, but then sees to be “his own clothing, heaped on a chair, distorted by the starlight and his own imagination”;<sup>19</sup> except it does proceed to attack him. After a few more encounters with terrifying monsters, Arnold deduces that the visitations are the result of a hallucinogen which “releases your strongest subconscious fears, the childhood terrors you've been suppressing.”<sup>20</sup> Some of the monsters can be killed by saying the right word, others by water pistols, and the most terrifying of all by burying yourself under your bedclothes. These monsters from the closet are clearly monsters from the id – Freud's ideas were very much part of the popular imagination in the 1940s and 1950s, although *Forbidden Planet* (1956), which used these to make a science fiction narrative, was yet to be released.

Whilst Gregor dreams of the riches from the assignment – “Soon he would be able to hire a man to land on strange planets for him, while he sat home and gave instructions over the radio”<sup>21</sup> – there is little sign of this success by the time of ‘Milk Rum’. After a brief period of working as decontaminators, Arnold decides they should diversify into transporting livestock across the galaxy, and ship “five Snargs, five Firlgels and ten Queels to the Vermoine solar system.”<sup>22</sup> Arnold stays behind because he feels his job is research, and he's allergic to the sight of Queels, so Gregor is forced to take the trip alone, aside from the cargo.

The first problem comes when the air circulation vents become blocked by woollen threads from the Queel floating in zero gravity, and then they begin to starve as they require gravity to get food down their throats. Against Arnold's advice Gregor takes the Queel out of zero-g. This has unforeseen consequences: the Snargs shrink down to microscopic size under gravity. This can be stabilised by lowering the temperature of the ship. This has unforeseen consequences: the Queels begin to reproduce at an alarming rate. As the wool slowly fills up the ship, Gregor has no choice but to increase the moisture content and air pressure. This has unforeseen consequences: the dormant Firlgels wake up. The worst is yet to come, however, as when Gregor reaches the Vermoine system, the warehouse turns out to be the property of their competitors the Trigale Combine, who refuse him permission to land. Unless he can get the livestock to a warehouse, the contract is forfeit and AAA Ace will be bankrupted. The problem is solved by sleight

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of hand, and the company is at last rich enough to take on a secretary.

There is no sign of this employee at the start of 'The Laxian Key' (November 1954) when Arnold arrives with the news that "I have just made our fortunes."<sup>23</sup> Walking past Joe's Interstellar Junkyard he found a product of the "Old Science" of the planet Meldge, a Meldgen Free Producer. This absorbs energy from the universe and then produces Tangreese, the basic foodstuff of the people of Meldge. Gregor is cautious, having had cause to regret Arnold's schemes in the past, and he is keen to remind him that their business is decontaminating planets. However, Arnold will not listen, and before they know it they are knee deep in Tangreese. This has two unforeseen consequences: first there is so much Tangreese produced that it is only worth a few cents a ton, and secondly the Free Producer latches onto the nearest power supply and has landed them with a large utilities bill. Arnold and Gregor discover the ironies of their free lunch: on the one hand the material is so cheap and plentiful they cannot give it away, on the other it costs them to produce it. They discover that the Tangreese can be used as a concrete-like material, but again the price is too low, and meanwhile they have been threatened with prosecution for operating a factory without permission. Worse is to come – the machine can only be turned off with a Laxian Key, and no one knows what one of these is. Planet Meldge turns out to be half buried in Tangreese and wants to turn machines off rather than produce more food.

Galaxy then took a brief break from the AAA Ace stories, publishing the fourth, 'The Lifeboat Mutiny', in April 1955. At the start of the story, the Tangreese apparently forgotten about, Gregor is being asked to admire a lifeboat. Gregor is cautious: "you had to be careful about Joe's merchandise."<sup>24</sup> On the face of it the lifeboat is a sensible precaution, its "primary purpose is to preserve those within me from peril, and to maintain them in good health."<sup>25</sup> The lifeboat cares for its passengers; sometimes it can care too much. On the ocean world of Trident they discover that some of the wines of the boat have been cut, and they reattach them. Big mistake. It interprets their swimming as evidence that they have escaped a ship wreck – it is a lifeboat after all – but unfortunately misunderstands which planet they are on, and thinks they are in the middle of a war zone. The fact that the participants in the war went extinct a century ago does not cut any ice with it. In fact it is Gregor and Arnold who will need to do the cutting, since the ship knows that the species it thinks they are – Dromes – live at at least twenty below. They try reasoning with the boat, and they try tricking it, but it is too clever for them. It is only by playing dead that they can be freed from its protective clutches.

A similar dilemma faces Bentley in a non-AAA Ace story, 'Early Model' (Galaxy, August 1956). Professor Sliggert has invented a protective suit that will keep explorers safe from attack on alien planets, and Bentley is unlucky enough to test it: "He was invulnerable, of course. There was nothing they could do to him as long as he wore the Protec. Nothing!"<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately the

aliens' welcoming rituals – offering him a sacred spear – is misinterpreted as an attack by the suit, and it insists on protecting him. It continues to do so as its attempts to repel the aliens provokes attack after attack. Given the batteries have a lifetime of a century and there are scores of angry aliens, it is all too likely that he will suffocate or starve to death because of the suit rather than have his life preserved.

The final AAA Ace story appeared in Galaxy in June 1955, and somehow the two have got back to Earth and are ready for another mission. Gregor is checking his lists in their office whilst Arnold is supposedly buying the 2305 things they need for the next run. Rather than making them money, this time they will save money, with the purchase of a Configurator from Joe the Interstellar Junkman. As Gregor is all too aware: "Joe's gadgets worked; but when, and how often, and with what kind of an attitude was something else again."<sup>27</sup> At first sight it seems a good purchase: it perfectly creates a nut, and indeed a pound of shrimp. Now, if they want a spare part, the Configurator will manufacture it for them.

Unfortunately it will only make one of a kind. It will not make any more nuts. It will not make any more shrimps. This is a problem when they crash land in the fog on Dennett IV and need quite a lot of replacement parts. Arnold figures that the machine operates on the pleasure principle, once more alluding to Freud. The Configurator "derives a quasi-humano-form pleasure from producing a new thing. But a thing is only new once."<sup>28</sup> When they ask for lobster, it refuses, having already made something that belongs to the category of seafood. Not only can they not recreate the last few remaining damaged parts, they seem likely to starve to death as they work through the other categories of food.

A bit of lateral thinking allows Arnold to suggest that they try to persuade the Configurator that it may derive pleasure from make the same thing more than once, if not repeatedly.<sup>29</sup> The Configurator can eventually be persuaded, but only the once. The machine will not repeat – and as Bergson notes in his writings on laughter, humans progress, are unique and distinct from other humans, machines may reverse, can repeat and are replaceable. Just as in Bergson's words "The attitudes, gestures and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine",<sup>30</sup> so a machine behaving like a human is potentially comic.<sup>31</sup> As Gregor notes mournfully, "A machine that doesn't like repetition! [...] It's inhuman."<sup>32</sup> "On the contrary," Arnold replies, "It's all too human."

At first it seems that Gregor saves the day: "I told it to reproduce!"<sup>33</sup> The new Configurator, having not produced anything already, can reproduce everything for the first time, and when they run out of categories to manufacture, they can ask it to reproduce in turn. It looks like another free lunch. In what turns out to be an ironic echo of Arnold's usual phrase, Gregor says "I've made our fortunes." Sadly, he has spoken too soon. It is not that the market will inevitably be depressed by their ability to create diamonds, or precious metals, but that the Configurator can learn from experience and is indeed

**"A machine  
that doesn't  
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inhuman."**

driven by the pleasure principle. Rather than produce a diamond on request, the Configurators would rather produce more Configurators. "Repetition! These damned machines are sex mad", says Gregor.<sup>34</sup> Just as they faced being neck deep if not deeper in Tangreese, so the machines will fill their ship.

In each of the stories the desire of the characters is either not fulfilled, or not fulfilled in the way that they expect it. The repetition – itself amusing, as it makes the characters seem like machines – leads us to expect further failure, and we as readers are intrigued to see how Sheckley as author can orchestrate the inevitable. In 'Milk Run' there were a series of minor failures, with each solution causing a further problem; unusually that story did end with the characters rich rather than impoverished, but, rather, as in the game-over infinite reproductions they face in 'The Laxian Key' and presumably 'The Necessary Thing', they return to the starting point in time for the next story. They do not

learn, or if they do learn, they do not learn enough. After a series of twists and turns, some of them out of sight, the ball returns to the starting point. If it is the same ball.

Whilst there are apparently only five stories in the AAA Ace sequence, there could be an infinite number of them, as Sheckley located more ways for the characters to fail at their desires. And as we have seen with 'Milk Run', success is no guarantee that failure is not around the corner. Success may only be temporary. The end may lead you back to where you started. In his other stories and novels Sheckley also entices his readers into labyrinths, into following logic which is not logical or absurd structures which are actually logical. Sometimes black is white, or vice versa. Or, in the words of the subtitle of *The People Trap*, he leads us (willingly) into pitfalls, snares, devices and delusions, as well as two sniggles and a contrivance.

## Notes

1. Robert Sheckley, 'Redfern's Labyrinth'. In *The People Trap and other pitfalls, snares, devices and delusions, as well as two sniggles and a contrivance* (London: Pan, 1972): 119-124. The quotation is on p. 123.

2. Partly because I have written briefly about these for the Interaction programme book.

3. Gregory Stephenson, *Comic Inferno: The Satirical Work of Robert Sheckley* (San Bernardino, CA: Borgo Press: 1997).

4. Rob Latham, review of Gregory Stephenson, *Comic Inferno: The Satirical World of Robert Sheckley*. *Science Fiction Studies* 24 (3) (November 1997): 520-523. The quotation is on p. 520.

5. Kingsley Amis, *New Maps of Hell* (London: Gollancz, 1961), p. 99.

6. Amis, *op cit* p. 101.

7. Brian Aldiss with David Wingrove, *Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction* (London: Grafton, 1988), p. 291.

8. Aldiss with Wingrove, *op. cit.*, p. 292.

9. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, translated by Richard Howard (Cleveland and London: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973).

10. Thomas P. Dunn, 'Existential Pilgrims and Comic Catastrophe in the Fiction of Robert Sheckley'. *Extrapolation* 26 (Spring 1985): 56-65. The quotation is on p. 57.

11. For more on this see Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, Vol. 18. (London: Hogarth Press, 1955): 7-64 or in *On Metapsychology* (London: Penguin, 1991): 275-338.

12. Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984): 104.

13. Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (London: Macmillan and Co, Limited, 1921): 83

14. The planet builders of Magrathea must owe something to those of *Dimensions of Miracles* (1968), Marvin the Paranoid Android perhaps takes his name from Marvin Flynn of *Mindswap* (1976).

15. Brooks, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

16. Brooks, *op. cit.*, p.108.

17. In my piece for the Worldcon programme book.

18. William Contento's 'Index to Science Fiction Anthologies and Collections' [<http://contento.best.vwh.net/>] lists 'Milk Run' as being published in September 1954 and 'Ghost V' as October 1954 [<http://users.com1.net/~homeville/isfac/fil.htm#A3>] but 'Milk Run' refers back to the latter. There are several possibilities that further research could unearth: the stories were published in reverse order, Contento nodded or 'Milk Run' was rewritten.

19. Robert Sheckley, 'Ghost V'. In *The People Trap*: 205-222. The quotation is on p. 211.

20. Sheckley, 'Ghost V'. The quotation is on p. 215.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Robert Sheckley, 'Milk Run'. In *Pilgrimage to Earth* (New York: Ace, 1978): 106-225. The quotation is on p. 209.

23. Robert Sheckley, 'The Laxian Key'. In *The People Trap*: 134-145. The quotation is on p. 134.

24. Robert Sheckley, 'The Lifeboat Mutiny'. In *Pilgrimage to Earth*: 226-244. The quotation is on p. 226.

25. Sheckley, 'The Lifeboat Mutiny', pp. 227 and 228.

26. Robert Sheckley, 'Early Model'. In *Pilgrimage to Earth*: 52-77. The quotation is on p. 55.

27. Robert Sheckley, 'The Necessary Thing'. In *The People Trap*: 106-118. The quotation is on p. 108.

28. Sheckley, 'The Necessary Thing', p. 112.

29. Incidentally, the compulsion to repeat is part of Freud's explanation for the operation of the death instinct, although he is speculating about "displeasure" rather than pleasure. In his exploration of the death instinct he is trying to explore why we repeat, recreate or re-experience events which may traumatise us.

30. Bergson, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

31. It can, in the various forms of the uncanny, also be a cause for horror, but then comedy and horror are closely related.

32. Sheckley, 'The Necessary Thing', p. 115.

33. Sheckley, 'The Necessary Thing', p. 117.

34. Sheckley, 'The Necessary Thing', p. 118.

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# First Impressions

## Book Reviews edited by Paul Billinger

☐ = eligible for the 2005 BSFA Award for Best Novel

✍ = contains stories eligible for the 2005 BSFA Award for Best Short Fiction

### Len Bailey – *Clabbernappers*

Starscape (Tor), New York, 2005, 224pp, \$17.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-30981-5

Reviewed by Penny Hill

This adventure story is fun and exciting but perhaps a little naïve. Reading it, I experienced a feeling similar to that of watching TV series made in the 1970's – it all feels curiously thin. On TV it is pace that is lacking, here it is complexity and depth. We have come to expect more in the way of plot twists and shaded loyalties than this novel delivers.

The story is reminiscent of Andre Maurois' *Fattipuffs and Thinnifers* in that an ordinary child is dropped into a magical world and has to prevent a war. However, Danny Ray is far more self-confident than these earlier protagonists. Danny's age is not mentioned and I found it hard to guess from context. He is described as about five feet tall and has just about started to be interested in girls so he could be anything from a precocious 11 year old to a somewhat under-developed teenager.

This is a curiously old-fashioned children's novel with a resolutely straightforward plot and characterisation, making the intended audience unclear: 8 to 9 year olds would enjoy it, but might need to have it read to them, as the complexity of the language indicates a book aimed at 11 year olds and older. Thinking back to my own early reading experiences, I would have enjoyed it as a 10 to 11

year old but I suspect today's 10 to 11s might find it a little childish, having already discovered the more complex narratives styles of Lemony Snicket, J. K. Rowling and even Philip Pullman.

The main structure is based on the game of chess. Disputes between countries are traditionally settled by chess games to avoid wars. The centre of the magical world is the Checkered Sea, a giant chess board across which ships move in the same manner as the chess pieces after which they are named. This potentially interesting concept is rather spoiled by the fact that both black and white pieces can be on the same side and gang up against other ships. This action is carried out by pirates and I suppose this is typical piratical behaviour but I found this 'rule-breaking' irritating and I think a competent chess player would find it deeply annoying.

A background theme that the author had not fully formulated was the colours of the Royal characters. Each character is named after a colour, except for the prince who only gains his name towards the end of the book. While this is shown to be a cause for celebration, the lack of build-up or explanation as to why this is important leaves the reader puzzled and excluded.



On the other hand, there were wonderful names for the other characters and beasts, showing great inventiveness, and in the corners of the narrative were interesting glimpses of this society, its habits and superstitions.

Overall, the fact that this is a first novel is fairly obvious. I hope that in subsequent works, Len Bailey develops some depth and subtlety of story-telling to go along with his interesting and original ideas.

## Ben Bova – *Powersat*

Reviewed by Paul Bateman

Tor, New York, 2005, 400pp, \$24.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-30923-8

I've been reviewing for these pages for a few years now and I feel as though with each book I should have a little checklist of areas a novel needs to cover to satisfy me. These elements would probably include: mystery, romance, humour, betrayal, politics, suspense, violence, sex and irreconcilable love. As with every novel, but particularly with science fiction, the central idea – to paraphrase Brian Aldiss – should be thought-provoking or wondrous. Many books I've reviewed miss one or more of these points and I've felt that the author hadn't fulfilled his or her potential and I could have spent my time on something more worthwhile. Ben Bova has produced a book that pushes all my buttons and I'm now a happy camper. So instead of the usual dry plot summary we'll have a look at each of these points in turn:

**Central idea** (more thought-provoking than wondrous, I feel, but I think President Bush should be taking notes): at the heart of the novel Bova suggests that many of America's problems can be solved by renewable energy, thus subverting terrorism on US soil that's funded by oil money. He admits it won't be easy and the strongest objectors are going to be the oil barons, resulting in extreme measures. Best of all, he says this in an entertaining thriller format that may owe a little to the odd James Bond film.

**Mystery:** Dan Randolph, an American capitalist, wants to break the oil cartels' hold over America by building the world's first powersat, a giant satellite in geosynchronous orbit, beaming solar energy to earth. However, his prototype spaceplane crashes on her first test flight. (The spaceplane was designed to be a cheap alternative to sending rockets to the powersat.) Randolph's own investigations suggest that the plane was sabotaged. But who could have done this?

**Romance:** possibly not that strong but it's linked with irreconcilable love as Randolph still has feelings for Jane Thorton, who left him to become a US senator while he built up his company.

**Betrayal:** well, if the spaceplane was sabotaged, only

one of Randolph's own employees could have access to the sort of information needed to carry out the deed and make it look like an accident.

**Politics:** NASA and the FAA want to shut Randolph's operation down and his company, Astro Manufacturing, is brought to the point of bankruptcy. A Japanese firm is interested in buying him out and it looks like a US oil company want their share too, but will they give him the money he needs and let him run things how he wants? Or will he get help from Jane Thornton and Morgan Scanwell, the Texan governor and presidential candidate?

**Suspense:** of course you know things are going to happen but you don't know when or how; but if I told you that would just spoil it, wouldn't it?

**Humour:** the novel contains a few jokes to lighten the mood without descending into comedy or farce.

**Violence:** if terrorism were going to be central to the plot, a bit of violence wouldn't go amiss. So there is some, including a bit which extrapolates further from the destruction of the Twin Towers, called the Day of Bridges.

**Sex:** Randolph has sex with someone he doesn't love, but there's nothing graphic for the faint of heart, so that's all right then. On that note, he doesn't really swear either, every potential f-word being replaced with 'damn' or 'double-damn' to the point that I suspect if the characters had been British their dialogue would have contained 'darned', 'what the devil?' and 'take that, you fiend!' Ultimately, though, he proves that graphic sex and swearing aren't essential to a decent book, but the under-fifteens might find it less appealing, particularly as their parents are more likely to approve.

All in all, I quite enjoyed this. It's easy to read with likeable characters and plot that doesn't drag like a number of Tom Clancy thrillers, overburdened with unnecessary technical detail. Perhaps it's not going to win shed-loads of awards or become a classic of the genre, but it makes a rainy spring afternoon or train journey pass more pleasantly.

## Eric Brown – *The Fall of Tartarus*

Reviewed by Martin Lewis

Gollancz, London, 2005, 312pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07618-6

Eric Brown is perhaps best described as a journeyman science fiction writer. A regular and popular contributor to the Pringle-era *Interzone* (it seems very strange to be typing those words) he has never managed to break through to novel length success. He continues to release books, however, this most recent being a collection of his Tartarus stories. Most originally appeared in *Interzone* but a couple were published in the defunct, and missed, Scottish magazine *Spectrum SF*.

Brown has always had a fascination with death and rebirth. This is most apparent in his Kethani series of stories – probably the best of Brown's recent work – but it is almost as clear here. The sun around Tartarus is due to go supernova, destroying all life, and this looms large,

literarily and metaphorically, over the planet.

In the title story a naïve youth, Sinclair Singer, arrives on this alien planet in search of information about his dead father. An inexperienced traveller, upon planetfall he is almost immediately robbed. When he contacts his father's lawyer he discovers that he was a mercenary who quit for ethical reasons and afterwards went on to take part in a famous, and frequently deadly, river race. He was never heard from again. Singer journeys to Charybdis, the start of the race, to find out more. On the way he falls in with a Blackman, a genetically and cybernetically modified human, who is coming to the end of his pre-determined lifespan. Forming a friendship they take part in the race together where, needless to say, they are triumphant.

Visiting a museum of the history of the discovers the Blackman is his father. Running out into the street he is just in time to see him self-destruct in the sky above.

This sets something of a template for the other stories in the collection: the protagonist in search of a lost loved one; the character going to extreme lengths in the pursuit of atonement; the not particularly shocking twist at the conclusion; the ever present whiff of melodrama. The fact that bereavement is the emotional engine of every story in this collection goes beyond a contrivance to being tawdrily manipulative. At least 'Hunting The Slarque' does provide some digression from this pattern: it is the protagonist who has died (and been subsequently resurrected.)

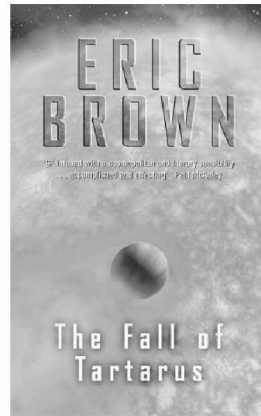
It is no accident that the best story in the collection is the one which strays furthest from the formula. That it is called 'A Prayer For The Dead' should warn you it doesn't

race Singer

stray too far. This coming of age story at least has some ring of emotional veracity but as too often Brown again resorts to cliché. So much of his writing is second-hand (his ideas, his imagery, his prose) that it is impossible to be engaged in the pseudo-spiritual way he clearly intends.

These are old fashioned, outdated planetary romances told in an overblown fashion ("that great, ancient, smouldering world sentenced to death by the mutinous primary which for millennia had granted the planet its very life.") and they are certainly not aided by their close proximity to one another here. Where his stories differ from their earlier models is that they aim to be character, rather than plot, based. Unfortunately for Brown he

is not proficient enough to sustain them in these terms and hence his repeated reliance on the crutch of death to attempt to breathe life into his stories. This collection demonstrates that Brown is stuck in a rut that he is unwilling, or unable, to get out of.



### Arthur C. Clarke and Stephen Baxter – *Time's Eye* Reviewed by Claire Brialey

Gollancz, London, 2005, 272pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07647-X

Things that this book is not: A sequel to *The Light of Other Days* (HarperCollins, 2000, reviewed in Vector 211). A stand-alone novel (it's subtitled *A Time Odyssey: Book One* with *Book Two, Sunstorm*, scheduled by Gollancz for July). An unalloyed success.

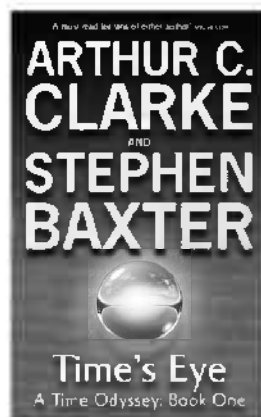
So what is it? It's initially a multi-stranded narrative, introducing characters in the north-west of India across history. And then it's a narrative about how individuals from these different time strands, with attitudes and behaviours broadly representative of their time and culture, are brought together and interact. It's hard to avoid a sense of sketchy stereotyping here: the careful balance of the multi-cultural mixed-gender UN military team of 2037 seems more designed to set up some anticipation of a culture clash with the colonial British Army of the Indian Northwest Frontier in 1885 than to paint a picture of our future international society. And as the action moves forward the narrative comes to rely too heavily on just such cultural misunderstandings, setting up further tensions within the international cosmonaut team on their way back home from the Space Station (in the same timeline as the UN team), in order to play out a conflict between them and the Mongols of the Golden Horde – which is largely unsurprising for all its pace and fourteenth-century bloodiness.

It's also a novel that brings together an eclectic range of famous names in order to mess with their personal histories. So alongside Genghis Khan and family we have Rudyard Kipling – an embedded journalist with the nineteenth century British Army – and Alexander the Great, both having a rather different career and lifespan than history suggests. This type of approach can be disconcerting; I found myself wondering what references I'd missed to other characters also being Somebodies. But the authors are taking no chance that the average reader

will miss a significant cultural reference, and there's no need for extra-curricular knowledge to be able to follow the plot. There's also a range of characters who seem deliberately anonymous: an ape-woman and her baby from the prehistoric past of the area, and soldiers of many armies whose names (like the apes') seem designed only to identify them during their brief stints of moving the action along rather than helping to distinguish them as characters. And, of course, the aliens.

Because this is also a novel about aliens, specifically about alien intervention in life on Earth. This is intervention so significant that it breaks down the barriers between time periods in certain geographic locations, can move individuals more precisely around time and space, and seems to signify an end to the world – one familiar element, at least, in a novel co-authored by Stephen Baxter! The alien Eyes may be more than just McGuffins, but much of the case for that remains to be made by the next novel and any more that may follow.

Ultimately, this isn't a book I'd expect from these two authors. It may be significant that they're described in the hardcover blurb in superlative terms, which even before I read the novel seemed to be protesting too much. It's because I know that both authors have written much better novels and stories that I was disappointed by the lack of depth and challenge here. On the face of it, this novel seems to reduce a range of historical perspectives to their simplest elements in order to play out a story of inscrutable aliens threatening all that is great about humanity's past and future – with some love interest and acts of personal heroism and nobility thrown in to contrast with the violence, vindictiveness and selfishness of rather more characters, while we all debate which of these is what's truly great about humanity.



**Joe Craig – *Jimmy Coates: Killer***

HarperCollins Children's Books, London, 2005, 304pp, £5.99, p/b, ISBN 0-00-719685-7

Review By Tom Hunter

Jimmy Coates is a cold-blooded killer. He can perform super-human acrobatics, operate experimental military combat vehicles, engage in hand-to-hand combat with multiple opponents using only cutlery and on those rare moments when an enemy manages to land a blow, he can heal himself super-fast and even regulate his own blood flow. All of which comes in pretty handy during the course of this book since he spends the greater part of it being hunted down across London by his creators, and their black-ops security squads, determined to bring their rogue project back under control.

Jimmy also has the perfect assassins disguise, because this particular top secret package of bio-teched designer violence also happens to come inside the body of a twelve year old boy; which for Jimmy at least is exactly what he thinks he is.

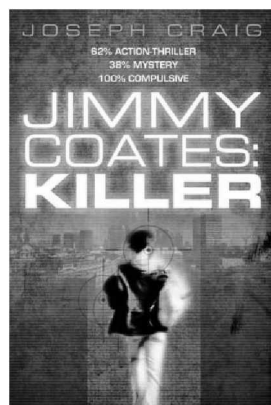
This is because his killer instinct programming wasn't meant to kick in until his eighteenth birthday. His designers had intended this growth period to allow Jimmy to develop his skills naturally, but when the project's owners (and this is one of those 'trust no one' conspiracies) decide to activate him early to take care of an emergency assassination job, Jimmy suddenly finds himself struggling not only with the forces who built/grew/bred him but with his own exponentially increasing abilities – special powers that come with a dangerous price.

So starts *Jimmy Coates: Killer*. The first in a new series of YA books aimed not so much at the post-Rowling hordes but rather those kids who wouldn't usually be seen dead reading a book and would be first in line to break Harry's glasses or mercilessly towel-flick him in the changing

rooms after Quidditch practice. After all when did Harry ever fly an attack helicopter down the Thames at midnight? While this may sound like *The Bourne Identity* meets *The Terminator*, and the boy's own, hard action surface may be designed to attract those readers turned off by the popular trend for fantasy trimmings in YA, the underlying themes of personal responsibility, power and a pleasingly grey morality and absence of neat resolutions makes Jimmy's character more reminiscent of Peter Parker and his struggles to do the right thing without actually knowing what it is or even really wanting to do it.

This isn't any old childhood wish-fulfilment story because in this case Jimmy really doesn't want his powers. He's well aware that they've put both him and his loved ones in danger – the book opens with shadowy agents arriving at his home – and worse still, it seems apparent that his powers don't want him either and Jimmy finds himself fighting a continual inner battle against his own hardwired killer instincts.

By turns excitingly action-packed, believably sensible and character driven, and then refreshingly paranoid, this is a book I'd be happy to recommend to the kid in everyone and even happier to recommend as a book for all those YA's themselves who must be terminally bored by now with nostalgia-crazed adults hijacking their lit-fix and really just fancy reading books that both reflect modern life and also have cool scenes where stuff blows up and the hero doesn't have to worry about getting the girl because he's twelve.

**Stephen Donaldson – *The Runes of the Earth***

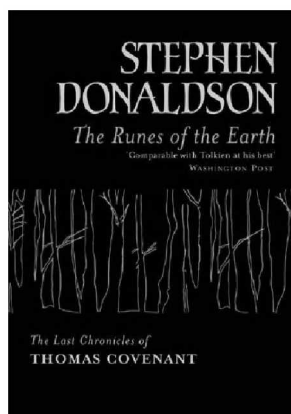
Gollancz, London, 2004, 593pp, £18.99, h/b, ISBN 0-575-07598-8

Reviewed by Andrew A. Adams

Stephen Donaldson came to prominence in the seventies with his *Chronicles of Thomas Covenant*, rejected by over twenty publishers but a massive seller when eventually published. He's a relatively slow writer (he can afford to be given his ongoing sales) and so twenty years after the release of *White Gold Wielder* (the last book of the Second Chronicles), we have *The Runes of the Earth*, the first of four volumes in *The Last Chronicles of Thomas Covenant*. Donaldson is one of those writers who tend to arouse strong feelings, both positive and negative, and particularly about his *Thomas Covenant* series. When I interviewed him in 1991, Donaldson talked about having the basis of a story he wanted to tell which would form the a third and final Covenant tale. He also said that he wasn't sure he would ever write it and that the more he was pressured to do so, the less likely he was to do it. Obviously the internal pressure to write it was greater than the external pressure, because here it is.

First off, I have to say that this is not a book to read if

you haven't read and liked the first two trilogies. If you didn't like the first six books you won't like this one either. If you haven't read the first six books, you won't have a clue what's going on with either the plot or the characters. However, there's no necessity to wade through the 2500 pages of the first two Chronicles if you have read them and liked them as Donaldson provides enough reminders of the background that you don't need them fresh in your mind.



Since *Covenant* himself died at the end of *White Gold Wielder* it will come as no surprise to fans that the main character is Linden Avery, *Covenant*'s companion and lover from the second Chronicles. A bunch of characters from our world provide significant continuity between the series in the first hundred pages set in our world. It

will also come as no surprise that the scene is set for Linden Avery's return to The Land and a new battle with Lord Foul. The Land that Avery returns to is nicely consistent with the previous sequences and Donaldson follows Chekov's Law ("If you bring a pistol onstage in Act



One, you must discharge it before the end of the play.") religiously so that every apparent discontinuity is explained within the pages of this volume.

Once beyond the scene setting in our world, the story moves along at a fast clip, a welcome change for anyone who liked the overall series but found *The One Tree's* travelogue rather tedious. The basic elements remain the same – defeat the bad guy without destroying the world. The tools remain the same but the characters have changed, both those we already know as individuals and representatives of groups common with earlier parts of the sequence. We arrive in *The Land* near Mithil Stonedown, still there about six thousand years after Thomas Covenant first arrived. Linden Avery, like Covenant in *The Wounded Land*, is disoriented by the changes since she was last there but once again finds allies immediately. However, the situation is more complicated. In the first Chronicles the situation was a straightforward war between Good and Evil

with some subtleties in the evil results of good intentions. In the Second, the situation was more complicated with deception and confusion, particularly early on. In *The Runes of the Earth*, the situation has grown even more confused, and there are many mysteries for Linden Avery to unravel. As we meet many apparently known quantities their allegiances and intentions are much more fluid than we are used to. The dynamics of their interplay has evolved and there's many mysteries still to be solved in the final three volumes of *The Final Chronicles*. My one criticism of this first book in the sequence is that Avery's actions seem to be inspired and completely correct so far. Despite her lack of confidence, she seems to have chosen correctly at every turn. However, with three books to go, I'm sure Donaldson has some twists and turns in store for her, and we may well find that some of her choices so far have not necessarily been for the best in the longer term.

If you liked the earlier books this won't disappoint. If you didn't, don't bother.

**Ronald M. Hahn, Olaf G. Hilscher and Michael K. Iwoleit (eds.) – *InterNova 1: Unexplored Territories***

Internova, 2005, Wuppertal (Germany), 203pp, €14.80, p/b, ISBN 3-8334-2741-8

Reviewed by Niall Harrison

*InterNova* is a new magazine dedicated to international science fiction. This first issue contains stories (translated into English if not originally published in that language) by authors from a diverse range of countries: Argentina, Brazil, China, Croatia, Germany, India, Israel, Italy, South Africa, and the UK. It's without doubt a valuable and admirable project – most of the stories presented here clearly deserve wider exposure. If I have a reservation, it's only that the editors' stated aim is to 'present writers who, starting from the base of contemporary sf storytelling, have advanced to something new, unique and surprising, expressing the depth of their own literary and cultural heritage', and I can't help thinking that the magazine they produced captures breadth better than depth.

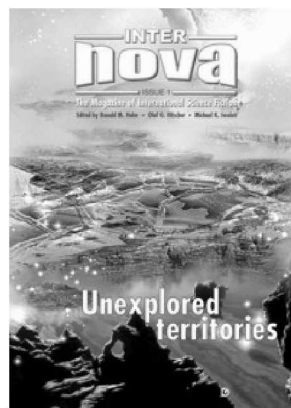
In the issue's best story, Vandana Singh's novella 'The Tetrahedron', a mysterious tetrahedron appears one day, at precisely 10:23 IST, in the middle of a Delhi street. The reaction from the rest of the world seems to involve as much surprise that such a thing could happen in India as it does surprise that it could happen at all. The story's protagonist, Maya, is tangential to the mystery; she is fascinated by it, but only a bystander, for much of the story forced to prioritise family matters. Her mother insists that it is not a part of their lives. Singh's story is not as immediate and vivid as last year's BSFA award-nominated 'Delhi', but it is thematically similar, in that it forces an examination of the assumptions implied by a common sfal trope. As a result, Maya's eventual escape from her conceptual framework genuinely matters, in a way that it might not if the setting from which she escapes was itself more common.

This effect – which could be summed up as the sense that technology is something that comes from somewhere else – is unarguably a deliberate narrative choice for Singh, but it is hard to draw comparisons with other stories. The equally mysterious artefacts in Wu Yan's 'Mouse Pad', for

example, or in 'God's Cut' by Eduardo J. Carletti, seem to be less overtly political. Further, the technology in the one UK story here, Eric Brown's 'Thursday's Child', is also alien in origin, and it's not like the extraordinary novum is an uncommon trope in Western sf to start with. So although the sense of being on the fringes that Singh's story evokes sounds like a plausible characteristic for 'international sf' (inasmuch as such a label is meaningful at all), with only one story from each country to go on it could equally well be a result of editorial taste, or even an artefact of reader expectation. It cannot be pinned down as part of a unique heritage.

In a similar way, the observation by one character in Aleksander Ziljak's pacy, passionate hunting story 'What Colour Is The Wind?' that 'life is the game that was always best played in twos' aptly describes the romantic streak found in around half the issue's stories. In 'God's Cut', for example, a quest and a love story shape each other into something genuinely strange, if a little too disjointed for my taste. But it's difficult to know whether the shared theme is the result of a deliberate selection effect or something more significant.

The issue's longest story, 'Her Destiny' by Guy Hasson, takes what some might describe as an axiom of love and treats it as a physical law, using it to shade the line between sf and fantasy in a manner reminiscent of some of Ted Chiang's hard fantasies. As the story begins, you suspect it's going to be an uploading story, a man saving his wife-to-be from death; but no cyberspace excursion occurs, and in fact only the last ten seconds of life are saved. As the story continues, it becomes an examination of memory and consciousness; and towards the end, there is a suggestion that fate hides in the quantum froth. That there really is such a thing as 'the one'. It's a conceit that could easily make for a facile and saccharine story, but Hasson controls his material firmly and delivers a moving examination of lost love and the stages of grief.



Like Singh's story, Hasson's piece is original to this issue, but fully two-thirds of the stories are (inevitably) reprints, dating from 2004 all the way back to 1981. It's another example of the magazine's breadth, and it does allow for a range of tone and theme that helps to compensate for any lack of depth. Arthur Goldstuck's 1994 tale of 'The Fabulous Yesterdays', for instance, is subtly different cyberpunk. The viewpoint character drifts through a hypercommercialised world, for the most part observing rather than creating the story: an encounter with a sort of revolutionary rock band who insist on jacking into the old powernet, in defiance of the authorities. It's a fascinating glimpse – the details make it – and alone justifies the reprint policy.

One way in which the magazine attempts to provide perspective is by offering some thoughtful nonfiction pieces. Lavie Tidhar's excellent essay on 'Science fiction, globalization and the People's Republic of China' (reprinted from *Foundation* 89) for instance, is juxtaposed with 'Mouse Pad', written by a past editor of *Science Fiction World* (the world's biggest-selling sf magazine). Sadly, Wu Yan's story is hampered by a notably clunky translation. As presented, the premise – a mysterious mouse pad that enables a man and his wife to enter a symbiosis with the internet, and with each other – seems incompletely explored, and the understanding of the internet as strange and magical seems overly familiar. Some

striking images survive the translation, but the story never becomes truly atmospheric. Thankfully, only one other story in the issue – Gerson Lodi-Ribeiro's 'Peak Time' – seems to suffer from this problem.

Almost the last thing in the issue is an article by Richard Kunzman, titled 'The eclipse of a genre and the birth of a nova'. In it, Kunzman refutes (with some gusto, and numerous interesting quotes from writers such as China Mieville, Michael Marshall Smith, Ted Chiang and Jeff Vandermeer) the idea that either science fiction or short fiction are dying, but also warns that we may now be 'in the same place that Harlan Ellison was before he published *Dangerous Visions* in 1968. Science fiction is stuck in a rut of its own making, and it needs an extraordinary effort from editors, writers and readers to heave it out and up to a new level.' Of course, he goes on to suggest that the international field, as represented by *InterNova*, could inject a vital freshness into sf's dialogue. I may quibble with the clarity with which the editors put forward their case, but if the evidence of the best stories here is anything to go by, in the end it's hard to disagree with Kunzman's conclusion.

[*InterNova* 1 is available from [www.nova-sf.de](http://www.nova-sf.de)]

## Robert A. Heinlein – *For Us, the Living*

Reviewed by Simon Morden

Hale, London, 2005, 222pp, £18.99, h/b, ISBN 0-7090-7761-0

Perry Nelson is taking a summer's day drive along the California Coast, when his tyre blows. He loses control, drives off the cliff and has an unfortunate meeting with the rocks below. The next thing he remembers, he's being pulled from a snowdrift by a pretty woman and carried to her house overlooking the scene of the accident. He crashed in 1939. It's now 2089, and Perry is about to suffer some serious future shock.

This is, apparently, Heinlein's lost first novel. Written in 1938 and 1939, it was never edited in his lifetime (he died 1988), and is published here with 'minor editorial changes for clarity and style'. Before anyone gets the wrong idea, I found this book absolutely fascinating, but not for its story – which pretty much begins and ends with the outline above.

There's very little attempt made at explaining Perry's time-slip; some cod nonsense about shared lives. There's no plot to speak of, no dramatic tension, no giant bugs, no freedom fighters, no new worlds to conquer. Trying to read *For Us, the Living* as a novel will get you bored and frustrated in equal measure, and most likely, you won't bother finishing.

Neither is this a 'show, don't tell' book. Perry is taught 'modern' ethics, civics and economics by a series of friendly professors, in great blocks of dialogue. You even get footnotes and an appendix in case you don't follow the arguments in the text.

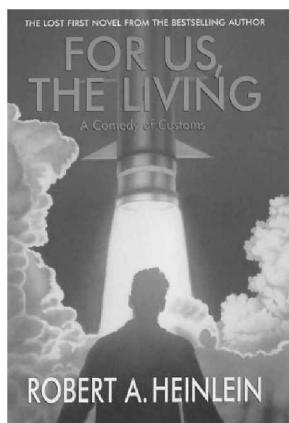
But once I realised that nothing of import was going to happen, I started to search for the book's purpose. Surely

there had to be more than Heinlein's estate trying to squeeze a bit more cash out of the man's discarded writing.

What I discovered was that this book is the seed-corn of Heinlein's later work. Almost everything is here: the relationship of the State to its people; an economic system outwardly similar to, but internally very different from, free-market capitalism; a participatory democracy where voting can genuinely be a life-or-death issue; his ideas on the obsolescence of religion; his view on sex and sexual mores; and quite naturally, the first appearance of the uber-competent Heinleinian hero.

To take an example: the President thinks it's a good idea to declare war. At the time of writing, Pearl Harbour hadn't happened, and the war in Europe was brewing up nicely, but with no prospect of US intervention. In the normal course of events, the armed forces would do the bidding of their C-in-C. In 2089, the electorate decide. If the motion is passed, those who agreed are drafted the very next day. Left wing or Right wing? It's a lot more complex than that.

The book is all world building, from start to finish, with Perry taken on a cook's tour to show the reader what a different, but great, place Heinlein believes this would be to live in. In this respect, it's a fantasy. The science is, sixty-odd years down the line, wildly inaccurate. The social aspects of the future US are more intriguing. Hints of those who won't comply with the new society and its economic system – sent, literally to Coventry. A criminal justice system based on the benign re-education of 'bad thoughts'.



Relationships and marriage that have become fluid and non-exclusive.

Read this as a textbook of early Heinlein ideas: it doesn't – can't – work as a novel because it lacks all sense

of plot. As a first vital data point in the evolution of the author's worldview, this will keep the academics happily fighting for years to come.

### Amanda Hemingway – *The Greenstone Grail*

Voyager, London, 2005, 376pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-00-715387-2

Reviewed by Lesley Hatch

This novel centres around Nathan, a twelve-year-old boy whose origins are somewhat mysterious – his mother is reluctant to explain the circumstances in which he was conceived. His story begins when she arrives at Thornyhill House, frightened and alone, carrying her infant son, and being pursued by invisible beings. The occupant of the house, Bartlemy Goodman, takes them in. To Bartlemy, Nathan is the sign he's been expecting for thousands of years, and he becomes an uncle to the boy.

Nathan enjoys an idyllic childhood until, one day, he comes across a ruined chapel in the wood and sees a vision of the Grail of the title – a cup filled with blood – and his life is destined never to be the same from that point on.

By the time Nathan reaches the age of twelve, life has become fairly settled for him and his mother. She has a job and a home, and Nathan attends a boarding school during the week. He has two close human friends, and is, in many respects a normal teenager, apart from two facts – he has a friend called a woodwose who inhabits Thornyhill Wood, and he finds himself dreaming of an alien world in which he is initially invisible. This changes when he rescues a man of that world from drowning, and brings him to Earth.

And then there is the Grail itself – which defies all attempts to date it, and which is the subject of a court case

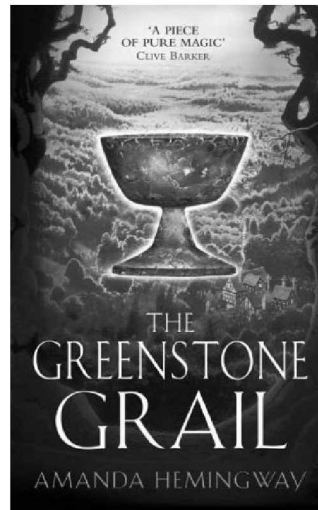
to settle who owns it. Add to this a couple of mysterious deaths, a malevolent water spirit, and Nathan's increasingly frequent excursions into the alien world, and the scene is set for the actual appearance of the Grail, which is only briefly seen before being stolen at the height of a fabricated

thunderstorm, and returned to its world of origin – the planet Nathan has been visiting in his dreams. As the only person who can travel there, he has to get it back.

If this novel has a theme at all, it is that nothing and no-one is what it or they seem. Bartlemy is the most obvious example: he cultivates the belief that a member of his family has always lived in the area, dispensing good food and wisdom in equal measures. However, he is more than that: he is also a practitioner of magic – and then there is his dog, Hoover, who is much more than an ordinary pet. Even the Grail is not, as you might expect it to be, the Holy Grail of the Last Supper, but one of three artifacts from the alien world, where people live far longer than on Earth, but are unable

to have children. To them, the Grail is seen as a means to end the 'spell' that left them in this state.

Apart from some of the characters starting their sentences with a verb and not a pronoun, I enjoyed this novel, and look forward to the next volume.



### Paul McAuley – *Little Machines*

PS Publishing, Harrogate, 2005, £35.00, 329pp, h/b, ISBN 1-902880-94-3

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery



The characteristic sound of the science fiction short story (and often novel) is that of the lid of Pandora's box slamming shut. Too often too late. The genie (virus, technology, alien, boojum) is out of the bottle, and all we can do is fear for, and live with, the

consequences. Like the fable of Pandora, the well-crafted science fiction story serves as a warning of what might be, but also (science fiction authors being peculiarly poised on the technological, cultural and popular *Zeitgeist*) that this may well how things already are, and we had best find methods of dealing with it or go under.

This handsome, if rather expensive hardback (there is also a deluxe slipcased edition of 200, priced £60/\$90), graced with a cover from a Chesley Bonestell painting, is the third collection of Paul McAuley's short stories, after *The King of the Hill* (1991) and *The Invisible Country* (1996).

The seventeen stories here, fronted by a short introduction by Greg Bear and backed by the author's

Afterword and story notes, span the period of those two earlier collections and up to 2003, although the earliest, 'Cross Roads Blues', originally published in *Interzone* in 1991, has been expanded and revised for this collection.

Bear likens these stories to pearls. Smoothly polished, refractive surfaces that each embed a little bit of grit at the centre. An irritation, or itch, that once lodged cannot be expelled or ignored, but only transformed by the writer's craft to something rare and precious. For McAuley, short stories are like the 'little machines' of the collection's title, intricately geared and meshed, and with the potential that the very best of them (although he makes no claims for his own) can achieve a polished perfection that novels, more forgiving of occasional mistakes and kludges, rarely can.

While it might be too much to suggest that each of the stories contained here achieve that ideal, the two that open and close this collection come pretty near, while several others – two of them linked by a common theme – show evidence that a piece of the pearl's grit has got under the author's skin and the process of encapsulation may not yet be complete.

Philip K. Dick was arguably sf's only genuine maverick

genius. Yet he always hankered after a respectability as mainstream writer that eluded him during his lifetime. What if he had? In 'The Two Dicks', Phil Dick is the author of acclaimed mainstream novel *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, Nixon is serving his second term, Bob Dylan known only as an obscure folk singer who died of a drug overdose, and a quiet, soft spoken Southern man with impressive sideburns, who once had dreams of being a singer, runs a donut franchise. But Dick gets the idea that there may be another reality, one he and others have been steered away from, one where a suppressed trashy science fiction novel he once wrote, *The Man in the High Castle*, has a whole new meaning.

In 'Residuals', written in collaboration with Kim Newman, Ray, an alcoholic wreck, is haunted by the memories of how he and two friends blew up an alien ship and saved the Earth from invasion. Now, years later, he is taken back by the FBI to the crash site where the other survivor, Mitchell, appears to be recreating a strange simulacrum of the destroyed alien ship out of junk, and Ray finds he must save the Earth from invasion all over again.

The flashy elegance Oz Hardy, the bookdealer protagonist in 'The Proxy' may also owe something to Newman's sartorial style. (I'm not sure if Newman is also a fan of Gilbert and Sullivan). Oz is commissioned by an old gent, Colonel Sullivan, to act as a buyer for a rare manuscript in an internet auction, and stumbles across a dangerous but highly profitable new use of the internet for dealing in rare artefacts.

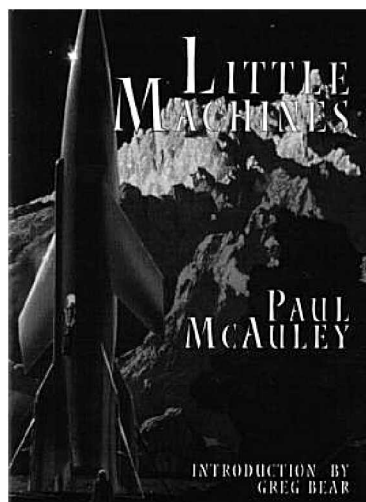
'All Tomorrow's Parties' is a pendant to McAuley's

Confluence trilogy, set in a far future where a clade of immortal posthuman clones gather to seek distraction and relief from boredom (hunting big game in the Pleistocene with Hemmingway, dancing at New Orleans Mardi Gras on a recreated Earth. (There are a number of nice anachronistic jokes, reminiscent of Moorcock's *Dancers at the End of Time* sequence). Even as they dance, drink and choose lovers, the partygoers are unaware a war thousands of years old is raging across the Galaxy to overthrow their transcendent Empire.

'Alien TV' and 'Before the Flood' are a pair of loosely linked stories set in the wake of live transmissions from an alien culture, where humanity's reactions run the gamut of culture shock, distress, boredom and cult obsession. McAuley suspects they may have the seeds of a future novel, and this reviewer would like to learn the backstory to the second and more disturbing of these tales.

Several stories betray a more than ambivalent attitude to sf writers and fans, of which 'I Spy' is certainly the darkest, whose comics fan protagonist moves from abused childhood to voyeurism to and serial murder and propitiatory ritual sacrifice.

'Cross Road Blues', originally published in 1991 in *Interzone* and revised here, may be McAuley's best-remembered story. In a manner similar to Crowley's 'The Great Work of Time', this is a near gem of a closed time paradox story in which the course of America's future hangs on a key turning point in the career of legendary bluesman Robert Johnson, a one-time loser whose almost overnight acquisition of his astonishing guitar technique was reputed to have come from a deal with the devil. It's an excellent close to an impressive collection.



## Todd McCaffrey – *Dragonsblood* 📖

Reviewed by Pamela Stuart

Bantam, London, 2005, 438pp, £16.99, h/b, ISBN 0-593-05361

This is the first of the Pern series to be written by Todd McCaffrey alone, following his collaboration last year with his mother, Anne McCaffrey, on *Dragon's Kin* (reviewed in Vector 234). This solo effort is placed just a few years on from *Dragon's Kin*, with the young hero of that book, Kindan, now an adult harper, sent away from the Harper Hall, for some undisclosed scandal.

The Long Interval between Thread invasions is at an end, and as usual when there has been a long interval several of the Dragon Weyrleaders are disbelieving and uncooperative. Lorana, a young healer who is also a gifted artist, is on a trip South, classifying and illustrating the weird fauna of Pern. She has two fire-lizards of her own and is able to hear all dragons. With Threadfall imminent, she arranges passage home working as ships-healer. After threats to her life, she escapes in a small boat, but a terrible storm breaks out and as she seems about to drown she commands her fire-lizards to leave her and save themselves. In their reluctant trip Between, they go back in time to the era when Wind Blossom who helped

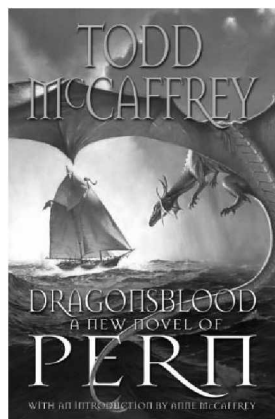
develop the Dragons and Watchwhers, is still alive. Disastrously, they arrive carrying a plague which affects all the dragonkind.

Back in the present, Thread is beginning to fall, and the Plague is spreading among the dragons, soon there will not be enough to fight thread and the whole planet will be devastated, unless a cure can be found.

Two groups of people are labouring night and day to find an answer. Back in the Past, Wind-Blossom and her helpers are trying to work out a method of immunisation for their own dragons and a way of passing down the knowledge to their descendants who will have to cope with the Plague. In the present, another small group, including Lorana and Kindan, are frantically following clues they have found in the mouldering records the

ancients have left for them.

The story skips back and forth through time, with one small fire-lizard as the link. In spite of the physical and mental dangers the Dragonriders manage to breed up





replacements by going several Turns back in time to rear the young hatchlings in a time before the plague, and finally they find the message left by the dying WindBlossom.

It must please all the followers of the Pern books that Todd McCaffrey is filling in some of the gaps. The constant

movement between Times is rather confusing on the first reading. More detail would help; perhaps he intends to do as Anne did, describing the same section of time from several different people's experiences. It will be interesting to see how the new series evolves.

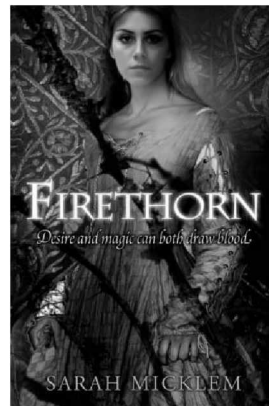
### Sarah Micklem – *Firethorn*

Reviewed by Estelle Roberts

HarperCollins, London, 2005, 383pp, £12.99, h/b, ISBN 0-00-719305-X

This is Sarah Micklem's debut novel, which goes down the well trodden path of examining the nature of love and relationships within a fantasy framework. During one Midsummer Festival the eponymous heroine finds herself falling for Sire Galen, a man who is socially her superior, and accepts his invitation to accompany him to war as a form of camp follower. He is superstitious, as most soldiers are, and genuinely believes that she will bring him luck. What begins as a purely sexual arrangement gradually deepens into a much more meaningful relationship despite the attitudes of those around them, many of whom disapprove of such things, either because of jealousy or the belief that it distracts the men from concentrating on training and military matters.

The novel is fairly light on plot, the war and its cause being essentially background to the machinations, rivalries, betrayals and camaraderies of a military training ground. Micklem uses *Firethorn* as an outside observer of these and this does work reasonably well. The relative status of men and women is explored, and, although this is by no means a new topic, it is handled with some skill, particularly when examining the ridiculous superstitions involved. It is believed, for example, that a woman touching a man's open wound will cause it to fester and the man to die. There are a fair few figures out of central casting, the young lad who is sweet but not very bright, the lord twisted with jealousy and hatred, the



experienced and good hearted older woman, but *Firethorn* herself is actually a well developed character. She also attempts to make the reader understand why a woman would want to stay with a married man who wagers with another that he can take the virginity of a young high-born woman, and then proceeds to do so. The consequences of this are terrible and far reaching, yet *Firethorn* stands by her warrior, even to the extent of nursing this woman and enduring her vile insults. It is an attraction that she does not fully understand herself, even blaming her obsession on a love spell that she cast on Galen that seems to affect her more than him, and railing against the relationship on more than one occasion. She also has to endure trial by ordeal and being skinned in the worst imaginable place by Galen's obsessively jealous rival. This is, however, offset by the love that the two genuinely share, and while their overwhelming passion is well described, the reader has ultimately to decide whether they believe the trade off is worth it.

The main problem with this novel is that it does take a long time to get going, and while it reads as though major action is imminent at points, it never quite delivers on this promise, which can make it a frustrating book at times. This is balanced to a certain extent by the in depth and acute observations about relationships and some good characterisation. Overall this story is very passable, if not overwhelming, entertainment.

### Richard Morgan – *Woken Furies*

Reviewed by Stuart Carter

Gollancz, London, 2005, 436pp, £9.99, h/b, ISBN 0-575-07325-X

Having taken a break from his Protectorate universe and main protagonist, Takeshi Kovacs, with his previous novel *Market Forces*, *Woken Furies* marks an uncompromising return for Richard Morgan to far-flung, far future, far-gone mayhem.

Kovacs has returned to his birthplace of Harlan's World, an unpleasant place firmly under the heel of organised crime and big business. Grim, gritty and (yes, let's get all three nouns out of the way at once, shall we?) noir-ish, Harlan's World is the kind of place you'd expect to produce someone like Kovacs. The man is there on a personal mission of vengeance in memory of a lost love, but is blown off course when an ordinary bar room brawl turns out to have complicated consequences. Under the only slightly ironic name of Micky Serendipity, Kovacs winds up in the machine-infested badlands on the wrong side of the planet pursued by, well, just about everyone who's anyone really.

Things go from complicated to complicated-squared when the leader of the machine decommissioning team he

falls in with is apparently – impossibly – possessed by the recorded personality of Quellcrist Falconer. 'Quell', as she is better known, died centuries ago; then she was merely the most famous revolutionary leader in the entire Protectorate, now she is a bona fide legend. And then things go from complicated-squared to complicated-cubed when it transpires that the ruling First Families have unearthed and given a new body to a 200-year-old stored copy of Takeshi Kovacs – an earlier, meaner and cockier version, driven by youthful enthusiasm to kill his tired old embarrassment of a copy. This 'dual sleeving' is, of course, just about the most illegal thing you can do in the Protectorate universe, especially when the dual-bodied person is a former member of the Envoys, the Protectorate's own invincible shock troops – the most highly trained and feared fighting force ever seen anywhere.

Furthermore, those of you familiar with Morgan's previous books may recall that Harlan's World is a bit special in that it's ringed with ancient Martian orbital platforms, still carrying out their inexplicable mission after

half a million years, that will instantly shoot down any flying machine more complicated than a helicopter, or even one of those that breaks a roughly 400-metre ceiling. Are they related at all to the 'mimints' (Military Machine Intelligences) that the Decoms hunt/are hunted by? Are the mimints connected to the return of Quell? Is Quell's return the catalyst for a new civil war on Harlan's World? Can Kovacs possibly extricate himself from the mess he is growing increasingly tangled in?

The question for the reader must be: how much misery, horror and death can you possibly stand? It too often feels as though *Woken Angels* is an unending slog through all of the above. Nothing ever goes right for Kovacs, from whose viewpoint the entire book is told; but for various reasons that I can't reveal here without spoiling things, it's very hard to maintain any sympathy or empathy for the man. He's a bastard. He knows he's a bastard: sometimes he glories in it, sometimes he agonises about it, but it's what

he is, and reading about a bastard getting shot, beaten and stabbed, and seeing all his companions being inexorably murdered, frankly becomes a bit much.

*Woken Furies* is beautifully written: as usual the noir comparisons are absolutely spot-on, there are razor-sharp metaphors and similes on every single page, and the plot is a deep, dark slow-moving shark beneath the surface of the story. But it's more depressing than ever before, and ultimately becomes very tiring – not tiresome, but tiring. There are growing portents of much larger galactic-scale events, there are the Martian remains and an entire universe to explore, and yet we get no more than a tantalising glimpse of them, mired as we seem to be permanently in Kovacs' bleak chaotic world. No amount of graphically well-portrayed casual sex could quite make up for this to a science fiction fan. I want technoporn rather than just porn!

### Jerry Olton – *Anywhere But Here*

Reviewed by Lesley Hatch

Tor, New York, 2005, 382pp, \$25.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-30619-7

This is the third of Jerry Olton's books, following *Abandon in Place* and *The Getaway Special*, based around the premise of cheap hyperdrive travel being made readily available on the Internet to anyone who wants it, but you do not have to read the previous novels to follow events. Travelling off-planet and settling on other worlds has become commonplace, and this has had its effects on the world economy. For Trent Stinson, a construction worker in small-town America, work is thin on the ground. He has the option of going to other planets to work, but has never been fond of commuting. In addition, the American Government has made it illegal to possess a hyperdrive engine, which has ruled out his only other source of income – fitting other peoples' vehicles for space travel. His wife, Donna, has been laid off from her work in a jewellery store due to the Government seizing the stock to prevent panic buying of precious metals. So, when they find flyers in their local bar, encouraging people to leave for Alpha Centauri, they decide to take a look. Donna downloads the required software, and they set off in their modified pickup truck and camper, mindful of the fact that they might get shot down, which almost happened the last time they went into space.

Their arrival on Onnescu, the first extra-solar colony, gets off to an eventful start when they help out some other (alien) colonists, and they end up doing a favour for the human colonists, which in turn leads to them narrowly escaping a missile attack by the American Government on

a French colony. It is after this that they get lost in space, through no fault of their own, and a series of adventures follow. They not only have to survive these adventures, but get back home so that they can try and help all the other colonists under threat from the Americans.

This novel has everything you could wish for in a science fiction adventure: numerous interesting (and sometimes dangerous) alien worlds, intriguing inhabitants of other planets, and there is never a dull moment. There is a fair amount of hard science forming the background against which the action takes place, but this does not detract from the events that befall everyone, and actually enhances it at times. The author has provided a neatly written counterpoint to certain activities on Earth, and one which is all too believable given recent world events.

How Trent and Donna survive all their adventures, and attempt to fulfil the promise they made, results in a meeting with the Galactic Federation and the creator of the hyperdrive, who uncovers the depths to which the American Government have sunk when opposing the space travellers, and there is a great twist at the end which amused me immensely.

The novel ends on an optimistic note, with scope for further adventures, and I would definitely like to see more of Trent and Donna. I cannot praise this novel highly enough.

### K.J. Parker – *Devices and Desires*

Reviewed by Susan Peak

Orbit, London, 2005, 548pp, £12.99, t/p, ISBN 1-84149-275-2

This book, the first in a trilogy, is an enjoyable and rather unusual read. It is a fantasy set in a medieval-type world, with three predominant countries: Mezantia, a republic run by Guilds, Eremia Montis and the Vadani, both dukedoms. Mezantia is a highly technological country, exporting its products (the 'devices' of the title) extensively to other countries, and itself treating engineering in an almost holy way – the specifications are in effect Holy Writ, and departing from them, even for improvement, is Abomination. The other two countries are much more

primitive, although the Vadani are quite wealthy from their silver mines. One of Mezantia's people, Ziani Vaatzes, is tried for Abomination and sentenced to death; he escapes, and the story's main plot is the actions he takes to ensure that his wife and daughter do not suffer for what he has done. As one of his actions is to develop weapons technology in Eremia, a major factor in a very bloody war between Eremia and Mezantia, one theme of the book is clearly that of the large consequences that can flow from ordinary people's desires. This is matched by the utter

determination of Mezantia to ensure that no secrets escape their country – even if it means wiping out Eremia.

Alongside this is the story of Duke Valens of the Vadani, who is an extremely competent ruler, and who has a friendship with the Eremian Duke's wife, Veatriz Sirupati. She had been a professional hostage – being the fifth of seven daughters – and had eventually married Duke Orsea, ruler of Eremia. Duke Valens is very keen to maintain a balance of power in the area, and is adept at diplomatic manoeuvring. Duke Valens' friendship with Veatriz is maintained entirely through letters, which adds an interestingly old-fashioned quality to the book, as they are another key factor in the story.

Other themes in the story are those of betrayal – sometimes unexpectedly so – and people's mixed motives for whatever they do.

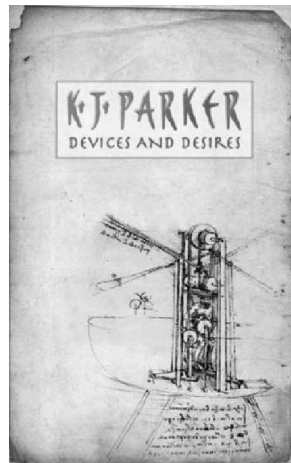
K. J. Parker's style of writing is quiet, it tends towards the understated and restrained, with a nice line in dry humour. I found a faint echo of Mervyn Peake in the style – a bit surprising as *Devices and Desires* is nowhere near as

gothic as the *Gormenghast* books. But there is an underlying sense of grotesquery, partly in the names, partly in the consequences of actions taken to an extreme. There are no superheroes in this story – all the characters fit their contexts, and are very well drawn. Men tend to dominate – the only female character of any significance is Veatriz Sirupati – though that is consistent with the medieval feel.

The pace is quite slow, but very readable; the tone remains much the same throughout – almost flat, certainly lacking intensity. There is very little info-dumping, but there is occasionally a tendency to provide too little information. The reader can be aware that characters know, or should know, important things without being told what they are, almost to teasing point. The book has no map, but I found this helpful rather than otherwise since it allowed the story to come

first.

The main story in this first volume is satisfactorily concluded, but sufficient issues are left for a follow-up to be a realistic prospect. An unusual, slightly disturbing, yet enjoyable read.



### Mary Doria Russell – *A Thread of Grace*

Reviewed by Niall Harrison

Doubleday, London, 2005, 430pp, £16.99, h/b, ISBN 0-385-60866-7

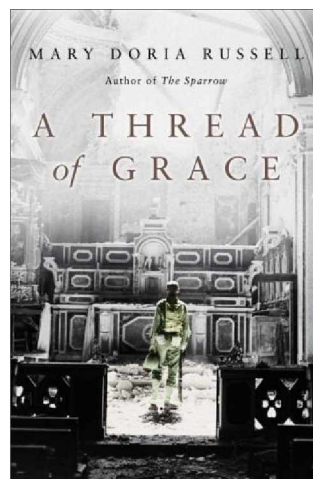
Despite the presence of a four-page epilogue set in 2007, Mary Doria Russell's third novel is not science fiction. Despite the presence of a map, and a list of dramatis personae, it is also not epic fantasy; and nor is it any of the other flavours of the speculative continuum. It is instead a detailed historical novel, set in Northern Italy in 1943 and 1945, between Italy's break with Germany and the final Allied liberation of the country.

Not sf by any definition, then, but – and here comes the attempt to justify the presence of a review in the pages of *Vector* – it is surely a novel of interest to science fiction readers. *The Sparrow*, Russell's first-contact tale, first published in 1997, won the Arthur C. Clarke, James Tiptree Jr. and BSFA Awards (and earned Russell herself the John W. Campbell), and is considered by many people, myself included, to be one of the most powerful and significant examinations of faith and redemption in the field. *A Thread of Grace* is a thematic companion to both *The Sparrow* and its successor, *Children of God*. It inhabits different genres entirely – there are elements of the thriller here, as well as historical fiction – but does not sacrifice depth. The characters are, by and large, people of action and not words, but Russell still displays an extraordinary gift for taking situations that would, in the hands of other writers, be stark black and white, and making them complex. In this book as in the earlier works, there is a fundamental moral honesty, a willingness to look at both the very good and the very bad in humanity, and search out some truths.

Of course, I don't mean to downplay the differences between the books, either. For one thing, it is very different

in tone – without doubt a busier, more crowded work. That cast list I mentioned has over two dozen names on it, most of whom have nontrivial parts to play in the story. Russell's talent for creating characters who seem larger than life yet resist caricaturisation remains, however, and she deploys it to good effect, offering a graceful omniscient voice that knows players on all sides of the conflict: Italian Jews, German Jews, Italian Catholics, German fascists, and even an English signalman. And despite the looming darkness, the early part of the novel is generous with moments of spirit, warmth and even humour.

It doesn't last. *A Thread of Grace* is the story of a sheltering; the point at which the refugees who have been moving south by degrees, always one step ahead of the Nazis, have nowhere left to go. It is a study of the mentality of war, that state which is, one character opines, 'emotionally exciting and morally restful' (p.134). And most importantly, it is an examination of the limits of human kindness. Early on Schramm, a Nazi deserter, offers a grim prophecy to the closest thing the novel has to a traditional hero, Renzo Leoni: "Be as blind and deaf as you have to be. Feel nothing. Only the heartless will survive." (p.38) Is such coldness, in fact, the only rational, or the only possible, response to the sort of horror represented by Nazi Germany? Russell's answer is ambiguous, because *A Thread of Grace* is full of contrasts. The novel's title is taken from a quotation – "no matter how dark the tapestry God weaves for us, there's always a thread of grace" – and it is appropriate. Certainly, in this sprawling story, there is harrowing brutality and sorrow, but also astonishing



nobility, and beauty, and some of the most admirable characters I have encountered for quite some time.

Take Leoni, because as the most prominent of the whirlwind of characters, he is perhaps not coincidentally the most memorable (although Claudette comes close); and because as a strong protagonist, he will inevitably attract comparisons to Emilio Sandoz. Leoni is a man in search of atonement; bold, at times extravagant, and at times self-destructive. When asked what his place in things is, his apparently insouciant reply is "Oh, I'm definitely a shithead. I'm just trying to commit a better class of sin than I used to" (p.177). It is only much later, after he has become (sometimes against his better judgement) an instrumental part of the Italian Resistance, that he is willing to admit to himself that peace is not so easy to achieve. His journey of self-discovery is deftly written and touching.

And yet, and yet ... for all its scope, and complexity, and consummate skill, in the end this book is somehow less powerful than *The Sparrow*, and I think I have an idea about the reason why. At the Oxford Literary Festival last

April, Kazuo Ishiguro talked a little about how he sees the relationship between speculative and realistic fictions. There is a tradition of realist fiction – in which *A Thread of Grace* firmly stands – that offers a character, or a place, or a time as an exemplar, to stand for an idea. Ishiguro said that recently he finds himself a little uneasy with this, and worried that the context can sometimes overwhelm the principle (apparently he's considering an invented or counterfactual world for his next novel for just such reasons), and I think maybe that's what happens in *A Thread of Grace*. It illuminates, yet by the nature of the story it tells, it exists inevitably in the shadow of reality. If you like, it's a novel about World War II, not a novel about war; a novel about the redemption of a Nazi deserter, not a novel about redemption. Arguably, of course, that's as it should be. It would be disconcerting indeed if, on this matter, fiction could escape from history – and in that respect, Russell's book is just one more thread in the largest tapestry of all.

## Geoff Ryman – *Air*

Reviewed by Claire Brialey

Gollancz, London, 2005, 400pp, £10.99, t/p, ISBN 0-575-07697-6  
St Martin's Press, New York, 2004, 390pp, \$14.95, t/p, ISBN 0-312-26121-7



is about. Except of course we don't.

It's only one part of the compelling sympathy that Geoff Ryman creates between his readers and characters, but it hits you at the outset. It's easy to feel the rush of the familiar as you begin to explore the village life of the main viewpoint character, Chung Mae Wang. It seems that this will be a typical Geoff Ryman novel, revisiting and reprising some of the most powerful settings and themes from his earlier writing. But you'd be missing a key point that this is Karzistan and not the *Undiscovered Country*. And you'd also be forgetting that there's no such thing as a typical Geoff Ryman novel.

So just when you think you know what you're getting, you realise that there is much, much more to come – although at this stage you still have no idea how much more; and so it works for Mae and her neighbours in the village. They have their everyday lives to survive, their livelihoods to protect and their ambitions to realise, and their relationships to thrill and depress and confuse them. They may individually resist or embrace change, in both personal and political forms, but these views all rest on a belief that they each understand it.

And yet unimagined change is, quite literally, in the Air.

This is a novel of ideas: ideas that can change the way the world works. Air is the new technology which the Government plans to roll out to all communities, to connect them with one another and with the world, to

bring them knowledge and information and communication and drag them kicking and screaming into the century of the future (where their corporate sponsors will find it all very productive). Chung Mae receives an unplanned early total-immersion experience of Air which opens her mind even wider to new ideas than she had believed possible, and which set her up as a human tipping point.

This is a novel of forces that people can't control: technological change, cultural change, emotion and desire, and physical forces of nature. These forces are shown to be equally irresistible, powerful, potentially destructive and potentially transforming: all can be turned to people's advantage if they can be understood and mastered; all require forethought and preparation in order to seize that advantage or even to survive; and all, it seems, rely on interactions between individuals to deliver the best result for the community as a whole. The community of this novel face these forces both as realities of their future and as mutually reinforcing metaphors of the effect of change on different people.

This is a novel of character: Mae is a complex creation of her various experiences and knowledge and learning, and – for all that we see the world mostly through her eyes – all the people with whom she interacts are equally complex and individual. Her friends, and the people she comes to trust, and the people who distrust her, and her rivals, and her lovers, and the old woman who comes to live part-time

in Mae's head through Air are all powerfully imagined as real people. We come to know them as she does, as she changes and they change and their development affects one another; and yet we also have opportunities to take a step back, from our own vantage point in Mae's head, and



understand her as a subjective narrator. As a reading experience this goes beyond sympathy into recognition: there are points of genuine empathy to be found in this book with all sorts of characters. We all have the capacity to experience the emotional challenges Mae faces and to make our own versions of the mistakes that she does, as much as we have the affirming potential to exhibit similar foresight and perseverance.

This is also a novel of challenge. The ideas and the changes that the characters struggle to accept are accompanied by a need for suspension of disbelief on the part of the reader: Mae's receptiveness to changes in her

own life and first-hand experience of others' lives through Air lead her to creation of new life in a biologically bizarre pregnancy that doesn't quite make a convincing leap out of allegory. But it's as enduringly thought-provoking as anything in the novel, and provides an ending that walks straight into the future.

This is a novel that I find myself amazed, for all my unexpected patriotic pride in seeing an all-British shortlist this year, isn't in contention for the Hugo Award for Best Novel of 2004.

This is a novel that you really have to read.

### Angie Sage – *Magyk*

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

Bloomsbury, London, 2005, 564pp, £12.99, h/b, ISBN 0-7475-7587-8

This is a children's book, designed – whether deliberately or not – to appeal to the same readers who love Harry Potter, and it has already reached the best-seller lists. It's the first volume of the Septimus Heap trilogy, set in a magical realm where wizardry is common. The plot deals with the efforts of DomDaniel, an evil wizard, to gain power, and his conflict with the representatives of good, principally the Heap family.

I found the book hard to get into, mostly because there are a lot of Heaps – there need to be, as Septimus is a seventh son – and it took me a while to get them all straight. I also felt that the initial impetus to the plot, about a royal child being brought up in secret, so that she herself doesn't know who she is, has become a bit of a cliché. I was confused later in the book by the comings and goings through the marshes, as characters hide, are pursued, and make forays to and fro for various laudable or nefarious purposes. I saw the Big Surprise at the end of the book coming from a long way off, and I suspect that most young readers would see it as well.

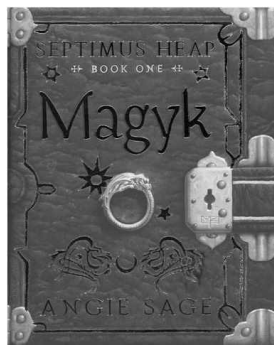
In spite of these negative comments, however, I have to confess that I warmed to the book as I went along. The characters aren't explored in any depth, but they are

engaging, and depicted with a good deal of warmth and humour. I especially liked Marcia, the ExtraOrdinary Wizard. Good comes off better than evil; DomDaniel is no Voldemort, and I found it hard to take him seriously as a threat. There are also a number of minor characters with delightful cameo parts; one thing I liked a lot was the

section after the end of the main story, where the writer adds several sections to explain what happened to some of these spear-carriers after they vanished from the story in dire circumstances. Sage also provides a lot of imaginative detail in the description of the world and the magic and how they work.

The style is readable, though I wondered exactly where the book is aimed. The length and some of the language suggests a young adult audience, although neither the plot nor the characterisation is complex enough to

appeal to this age group. I'd suggest children of around 10-12 who are looking for a fun read; it won't make them think, and to be fair I don't think it's meant to. I also don't think it's one of those children's books which will cross over and become popular with an adult audience; if you buy it for your children you might enjoy a sneaky read of it after they've gone to bed, and why not?



### Brandon Sanderson – *Elantris*

Reviewed by Sue Thomason

Tor, New York, 2005, 492pp, \$24.95, h/b (reviewed in proof), ISBN 0-765-31177-1

The city of Elantris was the magical heart of Arelon, inhabited by those touched by the mysterious transformation called the Shaod. The Shaod changed ordinary people into radiant, powerful beings charged with the Dor – the force behind all things – and able to manipulate it through the accurate drawing of Aons – ideographs with specific forms and meanings. Ten years ago, all that changed. The city was stricken with a terrible blight, its people who had thought themselves invulnerable became living dead. The Shaod was renamed the Reed – punishment, retribution. The people it hideously transformed were thrown into Elantris to suffer and rot. The townspeople of Kae, who had depended on Elantris for food, healing, and other necessities were thrown into chaos – easy prey, perhaps, for the soldier-priests of the proselytising religion of Jaddeth... But wait! Here comes a princess from the independent kingdom of Teo, betrothed to Prince Raoden of Kae. She arrives to find herself legally a

widow, just in time for his funeral... Can she hope to oppose the machinations of Jaddeth's gynorm?

This is a first novel, quite accurately described by Simon R. Green as "a marvellous, magic monster of a book". It's absolutely stuffed with both good things and bad. Bad things first. The initial pace is slow. V-e-r-y slow. (The first 150 pages are the worst.) None of the characters are engaging as people; all are one-dimensional mouthpieces for particular political or philosophical positions. The Token Woman is a tall sharp-tongued princess who supports sharecropping as a great social advance because it produces more profit than slavery. There's a lot of totally unnecessary made-up vocabulary (kolo, sule?) and no glossary. There is, however, a glossary of Aons, and a badly-drawn, generic-fantasy map. One of the story's major motivators is religious conflict, but the actual beliefs of the various religions are never mentioned (they all seem to believe in a single High God; after that the major difference




seems to be that they're, er, different). And the timescale is unbelievable; Elantris fell ten years ago, the change in society is radical and complete, most people can barely remember what things were like before.

Now the good things. The plot structure is intricate, complex, and satisfyingly resolved in one volume. Essential information is never withheld from the reader and interesting clues for the discerning are left just where they need to be. The magic is engaging, consistent and original, and the fact that it doesn't work for most of the book (one major character spends much of his time struggling to restore the city's power supply – magical power, that is) means that it is never used as a *deus ex machina* to wallpaper over plot holes.

For me, the book's core is a powerful myth: Order from Chaos, Creation after Destruction, rebuilding after the fall. Elantris (the echo of Atlantis is probably deliberate) has become a city of filth, literally covered in slime. Those affected by the Reed are treated like lepers; they are ugly, clumsy, and in permanent pain, but capable of hope, and of building a peaceful constructive community (after being suitably inspired by a Great Leader). It's a story about making things better, cleaning up the city. (The leader doesn't do much cleaning himself, of course; he inspires others to clean while he studies Important Stuff.) The progression from past perfection through utter degradation to restored perfection is a satisfying but dangerous fantasy. Things are never that simple in real life.

### Manda Scott – *Boudica: Dreaming the Bull*

Manda Scott – *Boudica: Dreaming the Hound* 

Bantam, London, 2005, 624pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0 553 81407 9

Bantam, London, 2005, 478pp, £12.99, h/b, ISBN 0-593-05262-5

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

In these two novels, the second and third volumes in Manda Scott's *Boudica* series, pre-Roman Britain is brought vividly to life. Drawing on the outline of events that are known from historical sources, the author brings together two of the most charismatic figures from this long ago time: Boudica, in this novel known as Breaca, her more usual name being a title, 'she who brings victory' and Caradoc, called Caractacus by the Romans. Whether or not these two leaders of the resistance against the Roman invasion and occupation of Britain did ever meet cannot be proved, but they certainly should have. Whether or not the tribal society of Pre-Roman Britain was exactly as it is portrayed in these novels does not matter. The author has transformed the few historical facts that we have into creating an entirely convincing world of her own imagination.

The first novel in this series, *Dreaming the Eagle*, told of Breaca's early life. *Dreaming the Bull* begins with the Romans already holding the east of Britain. Breaca, Caradoc and the warriors they lead continue the fight against the Legions from the dreamers' Isle of Mona in the west. Breaca and Caradoc have two children, a son Cunomar and a daughter Grainne, who has great power as a dreamer. Betrayed to the Romans, Caradoc is captured along with his daughter Cygfa, already a warrior, and Cunomar, and taken to Rome, where he is tortured. Meanwhile, Breaca's brother Ban, has been sold into slavery. Believing his entire family including Breaca slain, Ban, now calling himself Julius Valerius, has chosen to become a cavalry officer in the legions and an initiate of the *Mithras*, the soldiers' god. Fighting his own people, he becomes infamous as the rider of a vicious pied warhorse. Recalled to Rome, Ban is instrumental in the escape of

Caradoc and his children to Gaul, but is named traitor by the Romans he served and is forced into exile in Britain.

In *Dreaming the Hound*, Breaca still leads the warriors of Mona against the Romans, often tracking and killing them alone in the mountains of the west. She knows that to drive the Romans from Britain she must return to her own lands, the lands of the Eoeni, in the east, and from this point the novel follows the historical narrative of Breaca's marriage to Pratsutagos, his death and the consequences of his ill-advised will that left half his kingdom to the Emperor, and the subsequent flogging of Breaca and rape of her daughters by the Romans. Once again however, these few historical facts are made into a compelling and powerful drama, in which characters experience appalling suffering and perform acts of extraordinary bravery.

An outline of the plots of these books does not, however, convey the atmosphere created by the author's vivid portrayal of the people that inhabit Breaca's world, the society in which they live, and their belief in the power of their druids, known here as dreamers. This is a world in which both gods and the ghosts of the dead speak to the living, and where violence, sometimes ritualised, is ever present. Descriptions of battles and fights abound in historical and fantastical fiction, but there can be few writers who are able to make a reader believe that they know what it is like to throw a spear, or that this is what it felt like to a warrior nearly two thousand years ago. The *Boudica* series is proving to be a tremendous achievement, succeeding by a blending of historical fact and what is simply fantasy writing at its best.

### Charles Stross – *The Hidden Family*

Tor, New York, 2005, 304pp, \$24.95, h/b (reviewed in proof), ISBN 0-765-31347-2

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

Book Two of *The Merchant Princes* proves not so much a sequel to as the second half of the story started in *The Family Trade* (which I reviewed in Vector 240).

The story so far. Investigative reporter Miriam Beckstein discovers a locket in her dead mother's personal effects whose odd design triggers the ability to cross into a quasi-Nordic alternate world whose feudal society is stratified between a medieval peasantry and a cluster of powerful

and rich ruling clans of world-walkers funded by cross-world drug running operations and engaged in perpetual internecine intrigues and black ops warfare with each other.

Miriam's own ability to world-walk is no accident. It turns out that she is actually a long lost cousin and heir to the head of the family, Duke Angbard, her parents having been family members and world-walkers, murdered in the

US while she was an infant. Miriam's unexpected reappearance provokes a number of reactions amongst various branches of the family, not all of them favourable, and after one too many assassination attempts she takes matters into her own hands and absconds at the end of book one back into 'our' world, with one of the Duke's ladies-in waiting, Brilliana, to lie low and plan her next move.

In *The Hidden Family* Stross ramps up the confusion factor another notch by introducing a third world. In contrast to the feudal society of Gruinmarkt, 'world three' (as Miriam terms it) has a technology level somewhere between the late 1880s and 1920, but where history took a radically different turn to our world. North America is 'New Britain', while England itself is under the rule of a Scottish-French alliance.

Miriam, experimenting with an unfamiliar world-walker's talisman taken from her last (and now late) would-be assassin, finds herself in this low technology world which she both understands and can exploit, with a perfect opportunity to safeguard her position by setting up a trading empire of her own. Without the resources of the Gruinmarkt's system of couriers (apart from a bottomless credit card drawn on the Family's account), and with more scruples than her cousins, Miriam looks for something more portable on which to found her trading empire and settles on information, intellectual property and patents from her own world which will be new and valuable to world three. Things like improved brakes for the new-fangled automobiles, glues, resins, simple antibiotics. Here Stross, in a section cheekily titled 'Capitalism for

Beginners', uses Miriam as his mouthpiece and actor in a lesson on economic theory, and why an entrepreneurial economy based on adding value can better the Family's purely mercantile one, based on moving stuff about. In a similar way to Neal Stephenson, Stross combines theory with example, showing how a resourceful and intelligent woman can build a financial empire from almost nothing (well, a couple of smuggled gold bars and some carefully chosen 21<sup>st</sup> century artefacts come in handy as a start-up) and outmanoeuvre her (male) rivals.

It is this new economic model that Miriam, aided by her old-time friend Paulette and new-found accomplice Brilliana, hopes will eventually break the Family's feudal mindset and force then to modernise. (And, not coincidentally, give up their reliance on drug profiteering.) Unfortunately, Miriam's relatively sudden rise to prominence draws unwelcome attention not just from the New Britain government but from another group of world-walkers, a lost branch of the family engaged in a secret vendetta against the Gruinmarkt. However, on the eve of an extraordinary meeting of the Family in which Miriam hopes to both secure her position and heal the rift between the different branches, a highly placed traitor in Duke Angbard's organisation makes his own move, forcing matters to a crisis.

*The Hidden Family* is an intriguing and hugely entertaining romp that gives full rein to Stross's mischievous sense of humour and invention. Although the next work from Stross is the long-anticipated hard sf *Accelerando*, I can't help feeling this isn't the last we'll see of Miriam or the Family.

## Charles Stross – *Iron Sunrise*

Reviewed by Stuart Carter

Orbit, London, 2005, 419pp, £15.99, h/b, ISBN 1-84149-335-X



*Iron Sunrise* is the sequel to *Singularity Sky* (reviewed by Pete Young in Vector 236), but it's worth noting from the start that rather like, say, Harry Harrison's *Stainless Steel Rat* novels, you don't have to read them in order; you don't, in fact, need to read

*Singularity Sky* at all and can still thoroughly enjoy *Iron Sunrise*. I don't recommend that you do this, mainly because *Iron Sunrise* is a highly enjoyable book in its own right. Stross has made significant concessions to readers who've just joined him, however, and there are pocket guides to previous events contained herein.

There are other similarities to the *Stainless Steel Rat* (specifically *The Stainless Steel Rat's Revenge* and *The Stainless Steel Rat Wants You*) since *Iron Sunrise* features a similarly chilling group of undeniably bad guys, the ReMastered, working behind the scenes and following a strange, secretive dogma towards galactic domination, just like the Grey Men in Harrison's books. Fortunately, although we have no Slippery Jim DiGriz, we do have Rachel Mansour, agent of Earth's United Nations, and her husband Martin Springfield, sometime agent of the godlike (but definitely

not God) Eschaton – both familiar from *Singularity Sky*.

The agreeable, if rather dull, world of New Moscow has been reduced to a cinder, all of its population killed after the sun unexpectedly goes nova. It turns out that this event was deliberate, if inexplicable. Even worse, in an apparently not uncommon 24<sup>th</sup> century equivalent of Mutually Assured Destruction, New Moscow's defences have launched a fleet of almost entirely undetectable slower-than-light missiles towards the presumed culprit, the rather less agreeable or dull planet of New Dresden in a neighbouring star system, whose inhabitants, it must be admitted, were in the middle of a trade dispute with New Moscow. In less than a quarter of a century, in a now somewhat pointless gesture of vengeance, the New Moscow missiles will pulverise New Dresden.

The only way to stop the missiles is to convince at least three of New Moscow's remaining diplomats to send an abort code to the missiles. It rapidly becomes clear that things aren't quite as clear-cut as they might seem, however, after Wednesday Shadowmist, a teenaged survivor from an outlying New Moscow space habitat, has discovered some decidedly odd and definitely incriminating documents just before the habitat is evacuated and destroyed. Somebody doesn't want these documents to be



seen and is going to some pains to make sure Wednesday – and anyone she knows – quickly becomes an ex-survivor. The race is on to reach the surviving diplomats, stop the missiles, save Wednesday and her evidence, figure out just who the hell destroyed New Moscow and why, and what the ReMastered are up to...

I don't think it's any secret that Charles Stross is a very fine writer, and an exceptionally clever fellow too. *Iron Sunrise* showcases both these achievements rather well – the broken sequences depicting the death of New Moscow are stunning in their slow-motion depiction of an unmitigated holocaust, all the more so for being such a discordant mixture of big, cold science, spiked with the occasional moment of tiny human pathos. Stross still hasn't quite mastered the depiction of human relationships: Wednesday's relationship with the reporter/warblogger Frank the Nose rings, at times, rather false, and I'm still not sure I believe in the dynamics of ReMastered society – it's just too horrid to accept – but Stross is getting better at it.

He can, when he wants, rival Egan for psychotically uncompromising and difficult scientific explainorising (as George W. Bush might say), but he usually has more irony, warmth and comedy in his writing (a favourite target of his, not missed here, is bureaucracy). There are noticeably

fewer mountainous infodumps to digest in *Iron Sunrise*, but that's because most of them were dispensed, relatively painlessly, in *Singularity Sky*. That said, I actually rather enjoy many of these digressions in Stross's work, although they can at times be head-splittingly hard work (the prosecution would draw your attention to his short story 'The Concrete Jungle' at <http://www.goldengryphon.com/Stross-Concrete.html>, m'lud). These particular books are Stross in a noticeably 'fun' mode; still with enough hard science to make perhaps the less experienced sf reader wince, but nothing too head spinning for the average Vector reader.

*Iron Sunrise* is up for a Hugo for Best Novel, part of an all-British list of nominees. I hope it's not too much of a put-down to say that, having read the other nominees, I *wouldn't* give this book the Hugo, but that's only because of the quite astonishing strength of this year's list (he says, waving his Union Jack). Any other year I think *Iron Sunrise* would have been in with a damn fine chance; as it is I'll be very much looking forward to the next book in this series.

## G.P. Taylor – *Wormwood*

Reviewed by Simon Morden

Faber and Faber, London, 2004, 312pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-571-22150-5

Sabian Blake has acquired the cabalistic book, the *Nemorensis*. He sees its possession as both his entry into the elite scientific circles of his day, and the confirmation of his position as the country's foremost mystic. By combining his two skills, he has successfully predicted the appearance of a comet, *Wormwood*, in the skies above London – which may or may not strike the Capital.

His servant girl Agetta has other concerns: cold, hard cash and someone to love her. Her encounter with the mysterious Yezinia provides the promise of both, but does the Absinthe-wielding noblewoman have her best interests at heart?

Of course she doesn't. *Wormwood* contains a veritable Rogue's Gallery of ne'er-do-wells, footpads, traitors, sorcerers and evil-doers, looking for any and every chance to climb to the top of the eighteenth century dunghill which is the setting for G. P. Taylor's second book. After the success (by any fair measure) of *Shadowmancer* (reviewed in Vector 233), I was intrigued to see whether Taylor was a one-trick pony or not.

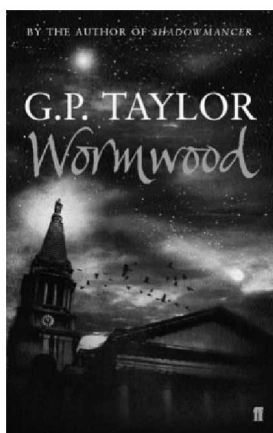
My verdict is that *Wormwood* is much more of a curate's egg. There are encouraging signs that Taylor is growing as a story-teller, capable of producing much more subtle tones of dark and light than perhaps are seen in *Shadowmancer*. The plot is complex, involving, sinister and moving. But perhaps because of the deeper intricacies, the writing and characterisation are stretched too thin. The prose sometimes descends into purple obscurity – and I'm an adult reader – and a cod Blackadderness that should have been avoided. Neither of the main protagonists are likeable: he's a puffed-up twit drunk on ephemeral power, she's a scabrous thieving urchin with no more sense than a

fly. Hardly anyone behaves with decency, even those you might (given Taylor's faith) anticipate.

This gives the book what I can only describe as a slightly 'sticky' feel to it, as if wallowing in all that uncleanness contaminates the whole adventure. For sure, there's plenty of invention, plot twists and action, but there's no one to root for. Not Blake, not Agetta, not even the righteous Abram, who comes across as savage, cold-hearted and deliberately cruel.

There is too, the ending. The popular conception of books written by Christians is that someone has to be saved on the last page. And bugger me, he walks straight into it. The act itself is not forced, considering what's gone before. It does, however, count against what is actually a good set-up for a next book. Stories can end with spiritual revelation and conversion: witness the end of Orwell's 1984. But Christian authors have turned this into a cringeworthy cliché – it's virtually mandatory in some Christian publishing houses – and it's a pretty objectionable one at that. There's no rule that needs to be followed here, and I was hoping for something more inventive.

*Wormwood* starts off messily, gradually straightens itself out and builds to a pyrotechnic conclusion. It's not as good a book as *Shadowmancer*, which in its own, simpler way, was a better story and more suited to Taylor's style. *Wormwood* is not a straight fight between good and evil: the fact that none of the parties deserve to win instils a detachment that isn't helpful. What does bring hope is that Taylor seems much more confident toward the end. I can't say I particularly enjoyed *Wormwood*, but I am intrigued to see what he comes up with next.





# Particles

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 – *Horizon Storms*

Pocket Books, London, 2005, 659pp, £9.99, t/p, ISBN 0-7434-3067-0  
Paperback edition of this very, very, long space opera series which is planned to reach seven volumes (well, the series is called *The Saga of Seven Suns*). The second volume, *A Forest of Stars*, was reviewed by Pete Young in Vector 231, who found it so-so and lacking in depth.

## Kelley Armstrong – *Haunted* ☞

Orbit, London, 2005, 495pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 1-84149-341-4  
Ms Armstrong is really hitting her stride now with the publication of the fifth book in her *Women of the Otherworld* series, which started with *Bitten* at the end of 2002. *Industrial Magic*, the fourth book, was reviewed in Vector 239 by Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc who placed it clearly within the genre now known as F<sup>5</sup> (Feisty Ferocious Faux-Feminist Female Fantôme Fighting Fictions™, although I may be a little behind in my literary theory so this could have gained an additional 'F' by now). *Haunted* features Eve Levine, half-demon, black witch and devoted mother, who just happens to have been dead for three years when The Fates (not at all The Powers That Be) 'persuade' her to hunt down an evil spirit which has escaped from hell (sounds just my type of book). Unlike other series in the same genre (say, the Anita Blake books for example) Armstrong's have broadened out and expanded, with this volume appearing to have little, other than the setting, in common with the earlier books. Colin and Mitch commented that the series picked up with *Industrial Magic*, which they described as "an easy-to-read and enjoyable adventure" and hopefully this new addition will continue the trend.

## Neal Asher – *Cowl*

Tor, New York, 2005, 304pp, \$14.95, t/p, ISBN 0-765-31512-2  
American edition of this novel first published in Britain in 2004. This was reviewed favourably by Dave M. Roberts in Vector 234, "Cowl is another highly entertaining, fast moving and frequently violent novel. With dinosaurs in it. Sit back and enjoy the ride", to which little more can be added (other than I found it didn't quite live up to this – getting rather disjointed about the half-way point). I must, however, point out that Asher has been blessed with some truly impressive cover art for his UK editions and this has continued in America with a stunning cover by Bruce Jensen.

## Ben Bova – *Mercury*

Tor, New York, 2005, 320pp, \$24.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-3041-0

## Ben Bova – *Tales of the Grand Tour*

Tor, New York, 2005, 384pp, \$14.95, p/b, ISBN 0-765-31044-9  
And after *Venus*, *Jupiter* and *Saturn* comes.... *Mercury*, the latest volume in Bova's *Grand Tour* series where one man hopes to find wealth in the Mercury's desolation. *Tales of*

*the Grand Tour* collects Bova's short fiction set around some of the characters and events from both the Planet books and the Asteroid Wars series (which has been very highly praised by Mark Greener, see for example his review of *The Silent War* in Vector 237).

## Philip K. Dick – *Mary and the Giant*

Gollancz, London, 2005, 232pp, £7.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07466-3

## Philip K. Dick – *In Milton Lumky Territory*

Gollancz, London, 2005, 213pp, £7.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07465-6

Gollancz may be publishing a lot of reprints at the moment (see the number in this column) but at least they are (in the main) very interesting ones. Here we have two of Dick's mainstream novels re-published in handsome paperback editions. The first, *Mary and the Giant*, was written around 1954-1955 but only published in 1987, and is a portrait of 50's small-town California and Mary Anne Reynolds' attempt to live within the societies deeply prejudiced views on sexuality and race. Described as "dark, oppressive and fascinating" by Vector's expert on the author, Dr A. M. Butler (in *The Pocket Essential Philip K. Dick*, Pocket Essentials, 2000). *In Milton Lumky Territory* is a small-town comedy of embarrassment centred on Bruce Stevens and his developing relationship with his former fifth-grade teacher, with the mysterious salesman Milton Lumky a shadowy presence around the town. Again not published until 1985, many years after it was written in 1958, but as Dr Butler points out, with a sexual relationship between a former teacher and pupil it's hardly surprising that it wasn't published in 50's America.

## Charlaine Harris – *Dead to the World* ☞

Orbit, London, 2005, 321pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 1-84149-370-8

And the F<sup>5</sup> bandwagon just keeps on rolling with the publication of *Dead to the World*, the fourth of the Sookie Stackhouse Vampire Mysteries. Previous volumes in the series (which, strictly, where only F<sup>7</sup>) have been analysed by our expert consultants on the undead Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc with the second and third books, *Living Dead in Dallas* and *Club Dead* covered in Vector 236. Here they memorably describe them as "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". Not that this is 'great art', rather they are so hilariously misguided that they are almost beyond critical analysis (but that won't stop Vector from trying...). For the uninitiated Sookie is a vampire. Who can read minds (providing the mind is thinking about sex). And is a cocktail waitress in Louisiana. Who comes across a half-naked, sexy, vampire called Eric (yes, really) with amnesia firstseen in *Club Dead*. But someone wants Eric dead

(that's properly dead rather than undead). And yes, it's up to Sookie to wade into the battle between witches, vampires and werewolves to save him. Now what I really want to see are the cross-over books with Buffy and Anita Blake going head-to-head in the Women of the Otherworld universe whilst Sookie keeps score (but I'm betting on Vicki Nelson to win).

**M. John Harrison – *Anima***

Gollancz, London, 2005, 473pp, £8.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07594-5  
No, not a new novel from M. John Harrison (if it was we would not be hiding it away here but loudly proclaiming it in the main reviews column) but another class reprint from Gollancz. Here we have an omnibus edition of two Harrison's earlier novels, *The Course of the Heart* (from 1992) and *Signs of Life* (1997), the link being that they are both love stories. But as this is Harrison they are not by any means straight-forward but are utterly beguiling. The Oxford Dictionary gives the meaning of anima as: noun (psychoanalysis) (in Jungian psychology) the feminine part of a man's personality, so these are clearly not going to be simple 'boy-meets-girl' tales. I've only read *Signs of Life* and I'd recommend this collection for this alone.

**David J. Howe, Stephen James Walker and Mark Stammers – *The Handbook: The Unofficial and Unauthorised Guide To the Production of Doctor Who***

Telos Publishing, Tolworth, 2005, 816pp, £14.99, p/b, ISBN 1-903889-59-6  
And the book is as long as the title suggests! This is a revised and updated edition of a number of previously available *Dr Who Handbooks* (one for each Doctor?) covering the background and production of all the TV series other than the current Christopher Eccleston incarnation. This is either a fascinating and comprehensive resource or deeply, deeply sad depending on how obsessed you are with the series (and although I grew up watching Jon Pertwee – and do like the current Doctor – I'd go with the second view).

**Gwyneth Jones – *Divine Endurance***

Gollancz, London, 2005, 306pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07012-9  
First published in 1984 this is a welcome return to print for Ms Jones 'cat book' but given that this is Gwyneth Jones it's much more interesting than this implies. Set in the land of the Peninsula – a future version of the Indonesian archipelago – Cho, searching for her lost brother, arrives, with her cat, Divine Endurance, just as revolution is starting in a society ruled by veiled women, where most male children remain just household slaves. Excellent Dominic Harman cover (yes I did just say that) and good to see that the publishers are proudly proclaiming Gwyneth Jones as 'Winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award' (which, if you are not keeping, up she won for *Bold as Love*).

**Brian Lumley and Stanley Wiater (eds.) – *The Brian Lumley Companion***

Tor, New York, 2005, 400pp, \$26.95, h/b, ISBN 0-312-85670-9  
Now this is a specialist purchase being a "must-have guide to the life and works of Brian Lumley" – so I think we can take it as read that you need to be a big fan of this horror writer before you even consider this volume, which contains articles, interviews, bibliography and concordances. In my idle moments doing this column when I come across one of the author's novels I'm almost tempted by the sound of them. But just remember Simon

Morden's comments in the last issue of *Vector* where he reviewed Lumley's *Khai of Khem* which included comments such as "a writing style that goes against many of the things I teach in Primary school", "rampant misogyny and racial stereotyping" and "it hit all my 'Danger, Will Robinson!' buttons in a way that has rarely been equalled. I'm sure there's a demand for this sort of thing, but I wish there wasn't". You have been warned.

**Iain McLaughlin and Claire Bartlett – *Time Hunter: Echoes***

Telos Publishing, Tolworth, 2005, 148pp, £7.99, p/b, ISBN 1-903889-45-6  
Sixth volume in this sort-of spin-off from the publishers' *Dr Who* novellas, with our heroes Honoré and Emily trapped in a massive contradiction in time: the tower-block headquarters of Dragon Industries.

**Larry Niven – *Ringworld***

Gollancz, London, 2005, 288pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07702-6  
One of the classics of big-dump-object sf is republished as SF Masterwork 60. The eponymous ringworld is a circular ribbon of matter six hundred million miles long and the book follows a small team of explorers – two human, a mad puppeteer and a cat-like alien – as they trek across the world. This is the first of Niven's *Ringworld* books (with the fourth in the series, *Ringworld's Children*, reviewed in *Vector* 237), part of his Known Space series and one of those books that anyone interested in the development of sf really should have read.

**Marianne De Pierres – *Crash Deluxe* £8**

Orbit, London, 2005, 324pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 1-84149-258-2  
Parrish Plessis is back, in her third adventure in the future (Australian) megacity of The Tert, following on from *Nylon Angel* and *Code Noir*. This is presumed to be a 'good thing' but as I could not finish the first – bored almost immediately by the third-hand, second-rate ideas (but my mind has strangely failed to retain any more details) – I would beg to differ. As would Colin Bird (beg to differ with my view that is) who has reviewed the earlier volumes (in *Vector* 233 and 237) finding them rather more enjoyable than I did, describing Ms De Pierres as having a "a knack for spinning her tales at breakneck pace" although he did find the second a tad less enjoyable. In *Crash Deluxe* (oh, and the titles sound like they have come from a program design to generate meaningless pseudo-cyberpunk word combinations) we have more of the same with our heroine Parrish having just one little task: bring down the media. And I'm not going to mention how bad the covers are.

**Christopher Priest – *The Glamour***

Gollancz, London, 2005, 235pp, £7.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07579-1  
Another reprint and again not just any old book but rather one of the key works (which would also have to include *The Affirmation*, *The Separation* and *The Prestige*?) by one of our best writers, and one of the Guests of Honour at this year's Worldcon in Glasgow. So if you don't already have a copy then buy one now (actually, even if you do have a copy you should buy another as it's a lovely edition in a similar style to the Gollancz paperback of *The Separation*). But what is the glamour? Well, it's described as "the unsuspected underworld to our normal lives, seductive and sinister, peopled by those who can never be seen. It exists on the edge of reality, full of doubt, behind a veil of invisibility". Any attempt by me to further describe the story will never do it justice, so again, just buy the book. But if



you do still need further convincing then you'll have to get out your back issues as *The Glamour* was first reviewed by us back in April 1985 (by Paul Kincaid, *Vector* 124/5) and again in 1997 (Paul again in *Vector* 191), with *Paperback Inferno* having a go in 1986 (K. V. Bailey, *Paperback Inferno* 159).

### Robert Reed – *The Well of Stars*

Tor, New York, 2005, 352pp, \$25.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-30560-6  
This is the American hardback – with an excellent cover by Lee Gibbons – first published in paperback in the UK by Orbit last year. This is far-future sf with a giant ship, first encountered in *Marrow*, travelling across the galaxy to counter an external alien threat. In *Vector* 240 L. J. Hurst he found this to be “full of the cold of space, empty of human feeling, and that vacuum permeates *The Well of Stars*”.

### A3R Roberts – *Star Warped* ☐

Gollancz, London, 2005, 384p, £7.99, h/b, ISBN 0-575-07688-7

### A. R. R. Roberts – *The Va Dinci Cod* ☐

Gollancz, London, 2005, 180pp, £6.99, h/b, ISBN 0-575-07719-0

Oh God no! Please make it stop. Will it never end? I just can't take any more of this hilarity. Just when you thought it was safe to go back into the bookshop (time for a *Jaws* parody?) along come two more books in Dr Roberts' evil scheme to parody the world and adopting cunning pseudonyms so that we'd never realise it's him till too late. The first is a re-telling of some well known sci-fi film (“a long time ago, in a parody far, far away” – if only it was).

What is really scary here is the potential for five more (but even Dr Roberts couldn't make Jar Jar Binks any more ‘hilariously’ offensive?).

The second of Dr Roberts' new books (“there's something fishy going on...”) beggars belief as I thought the ‘original’ was a parody of a conspiracy thriller that no one took remotely seriously (other than the many millions too befuddled to realise that IT'S NOT TRUE). At least Dr Roberts' book will be better written and have more literary merit than the source (by which you will have now have realised that I really, really, didn't like it – being one of those poor suckers who wasted their time thinking that all those millions of readers couldn't be wrong). Should I start taking odds for what's next? And now I just devoted far too much exposure to these books – people may realise they exist and even be tempted to buy them. Must stop now<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Which if any one has not yet worked it out is *The Da Vinci Code*, soon to be a major motion picture starring Mr Shaky-Hand himself.

<sup>2</sup> Must admit, however, that I do have respect for Dr Roberts' ability not only to churn these out but (presumably) get paid for it.

### Robert Silverberg – *Dying Inside*

Gollancz, London, 2005, 199pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07525-2

SF Masterwork 59 is Silverberg's highly regarded 1972 novel charting the life of David Selig as his god-like capacity to probe minds slowly starts to fade with the onset of middle age. You really can't fault the majority of Gollancz's selections in the SF Masterwork series and this is no exception.

## Fantasy round-up

### R. Scott Baker – *The Darkness That Comes Before*

Orbit, London, 2005, 644pp, £7.99, p/b, ISBN 1-84149-408-9

Debut fantasy novel from R. Scott Baker and, unsurprisingly, the start of a series, called *The Prince of Nothing*. At first sight this appears to be a first publication but with a copyright date of 2003. Which is a hint as this was first published in 2004 but by rival publisher Simon & Schuster. So what about the book? Well, we reviewed it in *Vector* 235 where Estelle Roberts found that yes, this does appear to be in the standard fantasy tradition but remarkably described it as a “tremendously impressive debut in a crowded genre” and very much looking forward to the rest of the series, the next of which is *The Warrior Prophet*, due from Orbit in July 2005.

### Terry Brooks – *Tanemquill*

Pocket Books, London, 2005, 469, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-7434-1498-5

Paperback of the second volume in *The High Druid of Shannara* series, following *Jarka Rules* (which was reviewed rather unfavourably in *Vector* 233).

### Steven Brust and Megan Lindholm – *The Gypsy*

Tor, New York, 2005, 272pp, \$13.95, p/b, ISBN 0-765-31192-5

Re-print of this 1992 book which started life as a song cycle before becoming a novel and is described as a combination of police procedural and dark fairytale – which has just sold it to me. I'll report back if its any good.

### Mark Chadbourne – *The Queen of Sinister*

Gollancz, London, 2005, 435pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07653-4

Second volume of *The Dark Age* sequence, following on from *The Devil in Green*, is now out in paperback. Reviewed by Cherith Baldry in *Vector* 236 where she found it an exciting story but with a scenario very familiar from the author's earlier trilogy, *The Age of Misrule*. She was, however, still interested in the next volume.

### Michael Cobley – *Shadowmasque* ☐

Simon & Schuster, London, 2005, 448pp, £10.99, t/p, ISBN 0-7432-5682-4

Book three, and concluding volume, of the *Shadowkings* series. Appears another routine fantasy but the series does have its fans (Ariel at [www.thealienonline.net](http://www.thealienonline.net) for one).

### David and Leigh Eddings – *The Treasured One*

Voyager, London, 2005, 519pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-00-715763-0

Second book of *The Dreamers* series is now out in paperback. It's by the Eddings so you know what to expect.

### Simon R. Green – *Deathstalker War*

Gollancz, London, 2005, 570pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-60061-6

Reprint of this 1997 novel, unsurprisingly part of the authors long running *Deathstalker* series. So it must be popular?

### Robert Holdstock – *The Hollowing*

Tor, New York, 2005, 336pp, \$14.95, p/b, ISBN 0-765-31110-0,

American paperback edition of the third volume in Holdstock's *Mythago Cycle* (following on from *Mythago Wood* and *Lavondyss*).

### Ian Irvine – *Chimaera*

Orbit, London, 2005, 836pp, £7.99, p/b, ISBN 1-84149-325-2

Paperback edition (more like a small brick) of the fourth volume in *The Well of Echoes* series. Maps and glossary but no quote from *The Guardian*.

### L. E. Modesitt – *Alector's Choice*

Tor, New York, 2005, 496pp, \$27.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-31387-1

Fourth book in the *Corean Chronicles* – surprisingly a traditional fantasy series – with this being a prequel to the original trilogy of *Legacies*, *Darknesses* and *Scepters*. Will likely only be of interest if you have already read these.

**Andre Norton – *Beast Master's Planet***

Tor, New York, 2005, 352pp, \$24.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-31327-8  
 Omnibus edition of two of the late Andre Norton's *Beast Master* series, containing *The Beast Master* and *Lord of Thunder* (from 1959 and 1962 respectively), which collectively are also known as the Hosteen Storm Adventure Novels. I find it hard to believe that these will have any relevance to today's readership.

**Martin Scott – *Thraxas Under Siege* CB**

Orbit, London, 2005, 265pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 1-84149-254-X  
 Eighth in this humorous/fantasy/private investigator series, the first of which, imaginatively titled *Thraxas*, won the World Fantasy Award (must have been a very bad year). The series does have it supporters and comes with the now obligatory quote from *The Guardian* ("blindingly funny, deeply subversive") but given that it's 'humorous' and 'fantasy' it will be no surprise to hear that I'm not a supporter. Did try the first but... I prefer him as Martin Millar, especially *The Good Fairies of New York*, now that is an excellent book: drunken punk fairies running riot in the city!

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

Gollancz, London, 2005, 369pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07642-3  
 This was a Recommended Read when reviewed by Farah Mendelssohn in *Vector* 236 where she was very impressed

indeed describing it as a book "which is about as solidly grounded in genre [fantasy] as it is possible to get, and which, far from being hackneyed is *breathhtaking*". Farah is not alone as may other people have been similarly impressed (see, for example Ariel's review at [www.thealienonline.net](http://www.thealienonline.net)). And the paperback comes with quotes from Miéville, Grimwood and Morgan. Err... Why? I have to be the dissenting voice here as I found it, well, rather dull and uninteresting. Vaguely interested in the lead character, Jant, but not with anything that happens around him. Then at least I did manage to finish it (just, with rather a lot of skimming) whereas I know others who could only get to page five. The sequel, *No Present Like Time*, has just been published and will be reviewed in a future *Vector* by another person who liked the first. What is the world coming to that all these people are disagreeing with me?

**Sarah Zettel – *Camelot's Shadow***

HarperCollins, London, 2005, 436pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-00-717109-9  
 The start of Zettel's take on the Arthurian myth, which to me sounds very average indeed, with 'beautiful but feisty' heroine, a 'wicked sorcerer' and a 'gallant knight' (I kid you not, that's what the publicity information says). We'll find out more (and whether I'm just being prejudiced) when we review the second volume, *Camelot's Honour*, in a future *Vector*.

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**Reviewer's Key:** AAA – Andrew A. Adams; CB1 – Cherith Baldry; CB2 – Claire Biale; ER – Estelle Roberts; LB – Lynne Bispham; LH – Lesley Hatch; ML – Martin Lewis; NH – Niall Harrison; P – Particle; PB – Paul Bateman; PH – Penny Hill; PS – Pamela Stuart; SC – Stuart Carter; SJ – Steve Jeffery; SM – Simon Morden; SP – Susan Peak; ST – Sue Thomason; TH – Tom Hunter.