

# Vector

The critical journal of the British Science Fiction Association



No. 268

AUTUMN 2011

£4.00

# Vector 268

The Critical Journal of the British Science Fiction Association

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Published by the BSFA Ltd @2011 ISSN 05050448  
All opinions are those of the individual contributors and  
should not necessarily be taken as the views of the BSFA.

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BSFA Website [www.bsfa.co.uk](http://www.bsfa.co.uk)

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# Torque Control

When I first took on *Vector*, a themed issue in honour of Diana Wynne Jones was one of the first things to occur to me. She was already ailing then, and, in the early planning stages, I hoped that she would be able to read this issue for itself. It was not to be, as you probably know. She died of ovarian cancer in March of this year. (Not, as was widely reported, lung cancer, although the cancer had invaded her lungs.)

In the wake of her death, there was an outpouring of grief, and tributes, from obituaries in newspapers and science fiction magazines to posts in discussion groups and blogs, about the way she had made the author who she or he was today, in some part. I'm one of those people. I was introduced to *Witch Week* at the age of 10 by a mentoring school librarian. The DWJ fan community unexpectedly reconnected me with Farah Mendlesohn within only a few weeks of when I moved back to the UK. And there are a number of friends I might never have met had I not attended the 2009 conference on Diana in Bristol.

A major theme of the articles, interview, and discussion in this issue is influences, both authors who influenced Jones in her work, and those whom she, in turn, influenced. Some of those are her scholars and fans, often both simultaneously, for, as Mendlesohn tells us, she made her own critics, teaching her readers the process of critical reading through the process of their reading her books.

Despite her death, she has still contributed to this issue in the form of an excerpt of an interview which Charlie Butler did with her this past February, and which will be forthcoming next year in its entirety in *Reflections*, a collection of Diana's essays and lectures. The interview deals, in part, with some of the authors who influenced her, as well as aspects of myth she has made use of in her work, and a near-encounter with an Australian aboriginal river spirit.

Jessica Yates focuses on her influence and influences, particularly with respect to children's literature. Her article is partially biography, partially scholarship, and partially a heartfelt appreciation of Diana and the range of her work, a tribute to the author and her accomplishments.

Meredith MacArdle, who maintains the official Jones fan page and who republished her first book *Changeover*, provides an exploration of some of the wide-ranging religions whose elements Diana has incorporated in her novels over the years, and the ways in which she adapted existing magical systems to suit her worlds. (Although not Australian river spirits; Jones mentioned those in her interview as an example of mythic material she had *not* made use of.)

The dense, thought-provoking richness of Diana's books can be chewy for reader of her works of English prose, but English is not the only language in which her works are published and read. Gili Bar-Hillel, translator and of many of her works in Israel, offers fascinating insight into the many challenges of translating her work into Hebrew. Words which are multifaceted in one language do not necessarily contain the same constellation of meaning in another after all, and Jones frequently used layered words as keys to plot points. Diana was aware of the challenge her work posed, as shown both in Gili's



correspondence with her, in search of clarification, and in the interview, where she comments on the difficulty of translating the astrological myths of *The Game* into Japanese, with its different mythic planetary associations.

Speaking of Japan, contemporary international awareness of Jones' work has been heightened by Hayao Miyazaki's adaptation of *Howl's Moving Castle* into a full-length animated film. In her essay, Gill Othen considers the two filmic adaptations of Jones' work in her article, both the Miyazaki movie, and the early '90s BBC six-part adaptation of *Archer's Goon*, and their relationships with their source novels.

This issue also includes a transcript of the BSFA London Meeting in September, 2010, in which Farah Mendlesohn and Charlie Butler discussed Diana and her influences and influencings, from *The Faerie Queene* to Lemony Snicket.

In other news, this issue sees the first of a three-part series on issues of reproduction in science fiction stories. Victor Grech's article surveys and taxonomises infertility in science fiction, looking primarily at novels, but a number of films and short stories as well. As a medical doctor, his central concern is in seeing the way science fiction responds to and reflects the concerns of our world with infertility, from the radiation of bombs to the radiation of space to biological warfare. Grech argues, in part, that nature is often at least as strange as what science fiction has to give us.

Diana too often thought that the truth of parts of her life was stranger than fiction, framing stories of her travel jinx or improbably other encounters with the assertion that she could never have used a given experience in one of her novels; no one would think it plausible.

# 2011 BSFA AWARDS

Donna Scott

## What are the BSFA Awards?

The BSFA awards are presented annually by the British Science Fiction Association, based on a vote of BSFA members and – in recent years – members of the British national science fiction convention Eastercon. They are *fan* awards that not only seek to honour the most worthy examples in each category, but to promote the genre of science fiction, and get people reading, talking about and enjoying all that contemporary science fiction has to offer.

**The 2011 awards ceremony will be held at Olympus 2012,**

**The 2012 Eastercon, 6th - 9th April 2012**

**Radisson Edwardian Hotel, Heathrow, London, UK.**

## Who can nominate?

You may nominate a work if you:

Are a member of the BSFA

**AND**

Send or give your nominations to the Awards Administrator by midnight on January 13th 2012.

We are *officially* open to receive nominations for the 2011 BSFA Awards from September 2011... but did you know you can send in your nominations *at any time*? As soon as the previous year's ceremony is over and done with, I am happy to accept your nominations for the next year *at any time*. So, you don't have to try to remember about that great story you just read, or the wonderful piece of art you just saw. Tell us about the things that impress you, and we'll make sure eligible nominations are included on the list of nominated works on the website.

## What are the categories?

The **Best Novel** award is open to any novel-length work of science fiction or fantasy that has been published in the UK for the first time in 2011. (Serialised novels are eligible, provided that the publication date of the concluding part is in 2011). If a novel has been previously published elsewhere, but it hasn't been published in the UK until 2011, it is eligible.

The **Best Short Fiction** award is open to any shorter work of science fiction or fantasy, up to and including novellas (40,000 words or under), first published in 2011 (in a magazine, in a book, in audio format, or any electronic or web-based format). This includes short fiction published in books and magazines published outside the UK

The **Best Artwork** award is open to any single science fictional or fantastic image that first appeared in 2011. Again, provided the artwork hasn't been published before 2011 it doesn't matter where it appears.

The **Best Non-Fiction** award is open to any written work about science fiction and/or fantasy which appeared in its current form in 2011. Whole collections comprised entirely of unrevised work that has been published elsewhere previous to 2011 are ineligible.

Subject to these other rules, you may nominate as many works in each category as you wish. You may not make multiple nominations for a single work. The shortlists for these four awards will normally comprise the five works in each category

that receive the most individual nominations by the deadline. In the event of a tie for fifth place, the number of shortlisted works may be reduced to four or increased to six, for example, as appropriate. Works published by the BSFA, or in association with the BSFA, are ineligible for a BSFA award.

Not sure if the work you want to nominate fits the above criteria? Don't worry, the definitions are kept as open as possible to allow for multifarious multimedia interpretation... if you're not sure, just ask!

**Please do not vote for your own work.**

Return your nominations to **Donna Scott, BSFA Awards Administrator** awards@bsfa.co.uk / 11 Stanhope Road, Northampton NN2 6JU

## What happens with my nomination?

Following the official opening of nominations, keep an eye on the BSFA site and we'll update the lists of received nominations as often as we get new ones in – the list changes on a daily basis as we draw close to the deadline.

After the deadline, a shortlist gets drawn up for each category, and then BSFA members and members of Eastercon can vote on these.

The shortlist will be displayed after 16<sup>th</sup> January 2012 and advance postal/email votes from BSFA members and Eastercon members who cannot attend the convention must then be received by me on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2012, to ensure I can bring them with me to the convention. Please note, I will attempt to acknowledge all nominations and votes sent electronically at my earliest convenience. Forms for advance voting will go out to the membership and a PDF will also be made available on the website. You do not *have* to use the forms, but if you do, I will be forever grateful! Attendees of the convention will be able to vote until midday on the day of the ceremony at the ballot boxes. Full names only, please! And no voting twice!

## How can I find out who has won?

If you are a member of Eastercon, you are invited to come along to the award ceremony. If you are not able to attend, follow #bsfaawards on Twitter for the live results, and check the BSFA website shortly after.

## Besides nominating/voting, how can I get involved?

We'd love you to! Feel free to use the internet to discuss your lists, or point to your discussions elsewhere (beware enthusiastic advertisers and self-promoters! You are more likely to deter nominations than attract them if you come across as a bit 'spammy'). I am open to any ideas you may have for the improvement of the awards in any capacity, so you can write to me, or, if you have opened a public discussion, please let me know about that also. We are also grateful for the assistance of vigilant list-checkers at nomination time to help us spot any anomalous entries.

The BSFA Awards also has a tradition of presenting awards as created by fan artists. Previous artworks given as awards have included textiles, photography, sculpture and paper art. Each year, the recipients are truly honoured to receive these unique pieces, created by individuals with a passion for the genre. If you would like to be considered as an Awards Artist, we would love to hear from you. A materials budget is available.

# AN EXCERPT FROM “A CONVERSATION WITH DIANA WYNNE JONES”

CHARLIE BUTLER  
15th February 2011, Bristol

This excerpt comes from an interview Charlie Butler did with Diana Wynne Jones, and is printed here thanks to Charlie Butler, the publisher, and Diana's agent. The full text will be published in 2012 in *Reflections*, a collection of her collected essays and lectures.

**CB:** *Something you've drawn on quite a lot in writing fantasy, and very notably in your fairly-recent book The Game, are different kinds of existing folk-tales and mythologies. You've made use of a wide range of them, in fact, from Norse mythology in Eight Days of Luke, to Greek mythology there in The Game, Celtic mythology in several places –*

**DWJ:** And Grimm's fairy-tales, and various other things. All the European things, basically.

**CB:** *Yes. Of course, there's no reason one can't use mythology in non-fantasy fiction – there's Ulysses, for example – but it does seem to have a particular affinity with fantasy, doesn't it? Is that another attraction for you?*

**DWJ:** I don't know. Myth is in its way fantasy fiction itself, isn't it? It's just that myths were done so long ago that they've been honed down into a shape that makes a basic appeal to everybody, and you know that they're going to get there and resonate, you know? I don't think I've ever based a whole book on a particular myth, though you can correct me on that.

**CB:** *Well, not on one. You could say in a sense that Fire and Hemlock is based on 'Tam Lin' –*

**DWJ:** Yes, that's true...

**CB:** *—but even there it's only one of many myths that are in the mix. None of your books are retellings, or anything like that.*

**DWJ:** No, I wouldn't want to do a retelling. I think that would be very boring. You take it and run with it, basically, whatever it is.

**CB:** *If you know in advance exactly how it's going to turn out, then that is going to detract from the interest?*

**DWJ:** It is in a way, although it can sometimes work out

very well. There are people who can tell a thing in such a way that it works even though you know what's going to happen. In Tolkien's case he tells you what's going to happen and it does, but it's still breathtaking. You're not sure it's going to come off, and you worry and wonder, and read on avidly.

**CB:** *You've long been "big in Japan." There's Miyazaki's Howl's Moving Castle film, of course, and many translations, but presumably they aren't able to draw on the same stockpot of myth that you use, or at least not with such ease.*

**DWJ:** No.

**CB:** *I wonder how they read you, given that?*

**DWJ:** I really don't know, but they seem to enjoy it. I think it is because, as I said, all these myths and legends and fairy stories and so forth, even though they're from a foreign source, have been honed into the right kind of shape anyway so that people pick up on them. I can only think that it's that. But I've been very lucky in Japan: the publishers that I have seem to be prepared to publish anything that I write, which is awfully good of them. They had tremendous trouble with *The Game* because their whole galaxy and mythology is quite quite different, and I hadn't realised how different until they started sending me emails saying, "Jupiter doesn't mean this to us, it means something quite other. How are we going to handle that? And what about the two young men, one in the sun and one in the shade – are they supposed to be ruffians or high-born?" High born? That's a Japanese concept. And I had to say "You'll have to do them high born, I think, if it's important." Oh and all sorts of things. The Pleiades are different to the Japanese as well, of course.



**CB:** *Do they have their own astrology?*

**DWJ:** Oh, they do! Yes. But I only got glimpses of it. I got sent a summary of it by the main publishing lady, but it was so different from anything we have here that I almost couldn't take it in. So I really don't understand the popularity of things in Japan – but it does seem to work!

**CB:** *Are there any mythological figures or stories that you would steer clear of? I'm thinking of a preface that Garth Nix wrote to one of his stories, where in the first draft he'd used some kind of Aboriginal material and he'd been warned off because this was seen as trespassing on the cultural property, if not identity, of—*

**DWJ:** The Aborigines warned him off?

**CB:** *His publisher did.*

**DWJ:** Yes, the Australians are very sensitive about that, I know. I would avoid Aboriginal myths because I don't really know them. Though you can see that the land is actually engorged with them, really. When I was in Perth, a whole road was closed and we had to take an enormous detour avoiding the river because apparently there was a river spirit in there, a very large one, and the Aborigines said it would be disturbed by cars thundering along the bank of the river. So every day there were huge traffic jams trying to get round the secondary roads.

**CB:** *The river spirit wasn't there all the time, then?*

**DWJ:** It had suddenly appeared and taken up its station. It seemed to occupy about an acre of river – quite a lot, anyway, and it may have had strands running off it, I don't know. Anyway, the Aborigines had brought caravans and camped by the place to warn people off. And the town council had said "Yes, of course we will do what you want," because there was an awful lot of guilt, understandably, about the treatment of the Aborigines.

**CB:** *Perhaps we could talk a little about influence? You've mentioned in the book the impact Tolkien had on you, for example; but what does influence actually mean, for you? It's not the same as "taking ideas from," is it?*

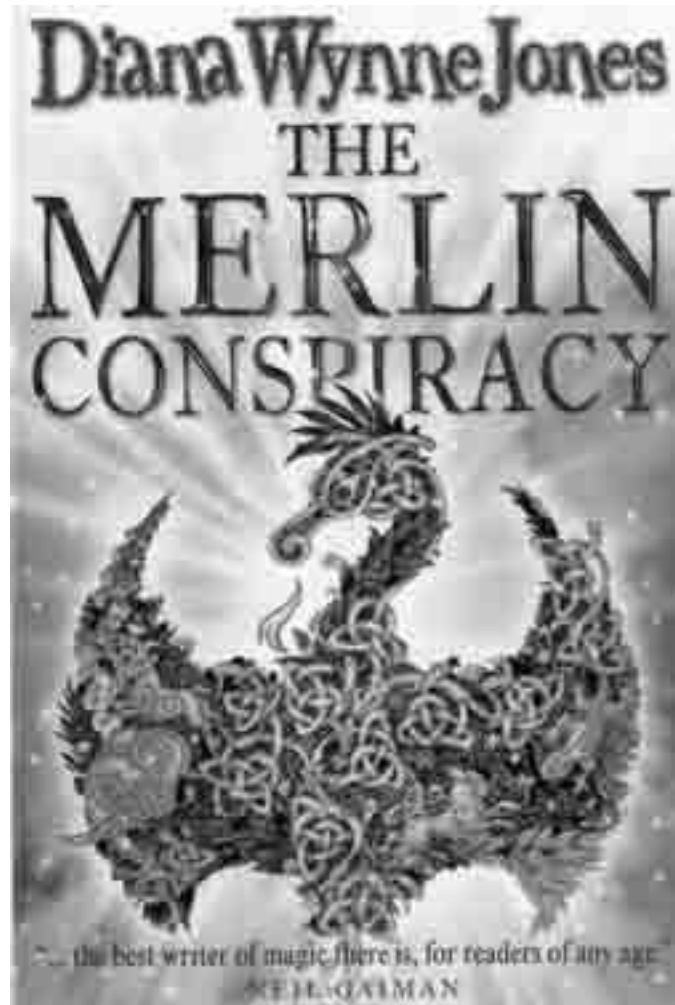
**DWJ:** No, I think it's more about the *way* to do it. With Tolkien, as I said in the book, it was "Gosh, you can write a whole three-volume fantasy – this is marvellous, let's do this thing." With other influences like C. S. Lewis, the "how to do it" thing that grabbed me was that he was always so completely clear about what was happening. You are never in any doubt who is where, and doing what – and much more complicated things than that.

**CB:** *He had a very well-organized mind, I think.*

**DWJ:** Yes, though you wouldn't know it to look at him. And – let's see about other influences...

**CB:** *When I interviewed you on a previous occasion you mentioned George Meredith as an influence. Can you expand on that?*

**DWJ:** Well, Meredith has this perfectly serious, and even overly serious emotional account of things in his books, but every so often they burst into – well, not exactly fantasy, but things that are so fantastic that you might think of them as fantasy. Also, they're very funny. It's the mingle, the seamless mingle that he does between things that are



funny and things that are extremely serious. *The Egoist* is a very good example, but there are others. *Evan Harrington* is one. I shouldn't suppose anyone has read it. In that book, somebody is masquerading quite unintentionally as an aristocrat at a weekend country house party. It isn't side-splittingly hilarious, it's just continuous-chuckle hilarious. It's also really very sensitive about this bloke's feelings. And then there's *Diana of the Crossways*, which again in its central parts is extremely serious, and it gives me a start of guilt when I think of what that woman did, but it still has these extraordinary comic bits, which are seamlessly plaited in. And that really is something I do find I like to do, and how I would want to do things. I wouldn't want to just tell a serious narrative, or just a hilariously silly one.

**CB:** *So it's not just "Here's a serious scene, and now it's time for a bit of light relief so let's have a comic scene," but somehow plaiting them more closely than that?*

**DWJ:** Much more closely, yes. And one's arriving out of the other.

**CB:** *I also remember your image of Langland's way of writing Piers Plowman being like the tide creeping up the shore, one wave after another and a little higher each time, and that this lay behind the structure of Fire and Hemlock in some way.*

**DWJ:** Yes it did. But it's very difficult to describe how.

**CB:** *What I've just described is fairly amorphous. You couldn't pin down a passage and say "Yes, here's the page where she does that!"*

**DWJ:** I suppose it's the threat turning into more-than-threat that's gradually creeping in *Fire and Hemlock*.

**CB:** *Things that were merely translucent becoming opaque.*

**DWJ:** That's right. Which is one of the awful things that tends to happen to you in puberty, actually. Everything suddenly becomes opaque and confusing and too complicated to cope with. And you have to fight your way out of that. But never say that any of my books are about growing up!

**CB:** *No!*

**DWJ:** Or I shall reach for my gun!

**CB:** *Or about the necessity of coming to terms with it!*

**DWJ:** Quite, yes! As if anyone ever really does.

**CB:** *I know you're dyslexic and left-handed, and in both those ways you're coming at things from a slightly unusual angle, and I wonder if you feel that has had any relevance to the way you see and therefore write about the world?*

**DWJ:** It probably has, but the trouble is you see that it's normal for me. All it is is a struggle to try and keep level with right-handed ways of going on. I wouldn't know about that, because the way I see things is, to me, normal. But I think you're probably right and I think it probably does.

**CB:** *I was thinking of that part in The Merlin Conspiracy where it turns out that Grundo's magic is at ninety degrees to the magic of the universe he lives in.*

**DWJ:** Yes, he does everything back to front. Yes, that was the bit where I thought, well, there are quite a lot of people who are dyslexic: let's give them a champion, as it were.

One thing it's very good for, actually, being dyslexic, is solving anagrams. It ought to make me a past master at Scrabble, but it doesn't – but I'm very good at anagrams in crosswords, because I think my brain stores things scrambled as opposed to ordinary brains.

**CB:** *The unscrambling muscles must be quite well developed.*

**DWJ:** I think they are, yes. Though I did fail a driving test purely through dyslexia, because every time he told me to turn right I turned left. And we got lost. The examiner was furious, seething, and he failed me on the spot. Which was reasonable, of course. Goodness knows where we ended up. It was a completely strange part of Oxford to me, and obviously to the examiner as well. He couldn't wait to get out of the car when we finally worked our way back to civilization.

[www.jameswhiteaward.com](http://www.jameswhiteaward.com)

The James White Award is an annual science fiction short story competition open to non-professional writers. Stories entered into the competition must be original and previously unpublished. The award is sponsored by Interzone and administered by the British Science Fiction Association.

This year's judges are novelists Jon Courtenay Grimwood and Juliet E McKenna and Interzone editor Andy Cox.

The winning story will receive £200 plus publication in Interzone, the UK's leading science fiction magazine. Entry is free.

Entries are now being accepted. The closing date for this year's competition is 31 January 2012. The winner will be announced at Eastercon. For more information visit [www.jameswhiteaward.com](http://www.jameswhiteaward.com).

**interzone**



# TRANSLATING DIANA WYNNE JONES

Gili Bar-Hillel Semo

Editor of children and YA books,  
Graff Publishing, Tel Aviv

Diana Wynne Jones has been one of my very favorite authors since I first discovered her books at the age of seven, in the British Council Library in my hometown of Jerusalem. Twenty years later I found myself in charge of children's books at a large Israeli publishing house, Keter. I promptly purchased the translation rights to two of Jones's books, *Charmed Life* and *The Lives of Christopher Chant*, taking advantage of a lapse in attention to sneak these titles into my list before anyone could question why I was investing in old books by a relatively unknown author. Diana Wynne Jones was a huge influence on my literary life, and I felt it my mission to make her work accessible to Hebrew-speaking readers, young and old.

I have since been involved in the editing of translations of three more of Jones' books, and myself had the privilege of translating *Howl's Moving Castle* into Hebrew. With this background, I can state from experience and with authority that Jones was an astonishing virtuoso of the English language. Furthermore, she had the habit of weaving into her writing so many cultural references and allusions, that translating her works was a constant process of discovery, delight, and despair: delight at the cleverness of it all, despair at the impossibility of conveying the full complexity of the text in translation.

Take for example the use of poetry in *Howl's Moving Castle*. In this book, a mimeographed homework assignment from a school in Wales is smuggled into the magical land of Ingary, where a wicked witch reframes the text as a curse against the Wizard Howl. The homework assignment is to read the first verse of a poem (which happens to be "Song" by John Donne) and then, "decide what this is about, write a second verse yourself". John Donne's poem now functions on several different layers: in one world, it is a classic poem deconstructed in a rather silly homework assignment; in another world, it is a curse to be deciphered and broken.

The translation of this poem needs to rhyme and scan and read like a classic, archaic poem that could be taught at school. In some cases, a translator might choose to substitute one poem for a different poem deemed to be more appropriate or more familiar in the target language, but here such a substitution is impossible, because the poem also functions as an integral part of the plot of the book: as the story progresses, the curse comes true, and



the different lines of the poem are revisited. Moreover, each line is revisited in a surprising way, sometimes involving wordplay. For example, when John Donne wrote "and find / what wind / serves to advance an honest mind", he most likely meant "wind" in the sense of device, or trickery; one of the impossible tasks listed in the poem is to find a form of trickery that advances honesty. There is plenty of well-intentioned trickery in *Howl's Moving Castle*, but "wind" is also used in reference to a wind that blows and advances Howl while he is being honest during the last phase of his curse. The poor translator now needs to find a translation that works both ways. If that were not enough, there are also scenes in the book in which different characters discuss and analyze Donne's poem, misinterpreting it in various ways: Sophie and Michael think it is a spell, and try to work it with different magical ingredients, while Howl's belligerent nephew in Wales thinks it's a poem about submarines. All this, too, needs to fit into the translation.

Common practice when poetry is quoted in a translated novel is to quote from an existing translation, as opposed to retranslating the poem; but when a poem



needs to function on so many levels simultaneously, using an existing translation ceases to be an option. The translation of the poem needs to be tailor-fit to its various functions in the text, a nearly impossible mission. How did I do it? I can't really explain to non-Hebrew speakers, but I can say that it was extremely tricky work, and one of the feats of which I am most proud in my entire career as a translator.

I've shown how clever Diana Wynne Jones could be when she was openly using John Donne's poem, squeezing out every drop of meaning to use on several different levels. She could also be sneaky with her use of allusions, slipping them in at unexpected junctions. "Busy old fool, unruly Sophie," chides Howl at one point, and how pleased was I to have recognized this as a quote from another John Donne poem, "The Sun Rising" ("Busy old fool, unruly sun..."). But then what, as a translator, do I do with such information? Donne is nowhere near as canonical in Hebrew as he is in English, and such a short snippet would not be recognizable. I translated the line in elevated, poetic language which I hope conveyed the tongue-in-cheekiness of Howl's reprimand, but I doubt any Hebrew readers made the connection to Donne. And for every such quote I was able to identify, my heart filled with dread at the thought of all the allusions I may have missed. Other Diana Wynne Jones fans whom I contacted online were able to inform me that Howl belts out snatches of a well known rugby ditty, and that Calcifer sings snips of a traditional Welsh lullaby. All this is fascinating to know, but nearly impossible to convey in translation. I ended up adding a translator's afterword in which I shared some of the information I had picked up while researching my translation.

Online resources were indispensable while working on Diana Wynne Jones's books for Keter and later for Graff Publishing. Not least of our resources was wonderful Minnow, a friend and neighbor of Diana's who occasionally would telephone Diana to ask her questions on our behalf. It was thus we were able to receive some explanations for the enigmatic list at the opening of *Archer's Goon*: the whole list is a sort of inside joke inspired by something Diana had heard about thesis requirements in Denmark, and each item on the list is a bit of clever wordplay on some cliché or figure of speech, hinting to a character in the book, i.e. "All power corrupts, but we need electricity." A quip such as "It pays to increase your word power", which in English plays on the tension between a Reader's Digest platitude and an actual statement about how magic works in this book, in Hebrew falls flat. The only way to keep it witty in translation was to invent new bits of wordplay based on figures of speech in Hebrew. Translator Yael Achmon suggested taking a biblical quote, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Proverbs, 18:21), and modifying it in accordance with the story to "Death and life are in the power of the typewriter". Minnow ran this suggestion by Diana Wynne Jones and we were immensely gratified to hear that the author gave a good chortle, the ultimate stamp of approval for us, and the sort of feedback not all translators are fortunate to be able to receive.

More often than not, the challenge in translating Diana Wynne Jones's prose was not deciphering the meaning



in English, but finding a satisfactory way to render this meaning in Hebrew. Jones had a devilish trick of packing many layers of meaning into a single word. No example demonstrates this better than *The Homeward Bounders*, in which every single concept signified by the word "bound" seems to come into play: "intending to go", "obliged", "determined", "tied", "limit or boundary", "leap, jump" and so on. The eponymous Homeward Bounders are a group of people who have been exiled from their home worlds, and forced to jump from world to world, burdened by the hope that one day they may return home; or in other words, homeward bound, they are bound to bound from bound to bound, bound by hope. This is not a mere pun, but a running thread in the book that ties together its various themes. In Hebrew, each one of these different meanings is best translated by a different word, and the running thread is lost.

Rather than give it up as a lost cause, translator Inbal Saggiv-Nakdimon, at my urging, sought to compensate by finding a set of thematically significant words which could have a similar packed-meaning effect in Hebrew. Eventually and after much deliberation and toying around, we decided to call the Homeward Bounders

*muktzim* (מיצקום) a word which can be read to signify multiple meanings: "untouchables", "allotted", "pushed to the edges". The term *muktzim* is related to *katzeh*, "edge",



which is the word we used for the “bounds” walked by the Homeward Bounders, and to *kizon*, “extreme” or “endpoint”, which we used for “boundary”. It’s not quite as clever or as tidy as the original, but we hope it conveys some of the linguistic cleverness.

Literally every book I’ve worked on of Jones’s was fraught with these multiple layers of meaning and allusion. Not always was the wordplay central to the plot; in many cases it was quite incidental. One paragraph in *Howl’s Moving Castle* contains the sentences: “Everything in the room was blue and gold and white, and small and fine. Mrs. Pentstemmon was finest of all.” The bait and switch with the meaning of the word “fine” is every bit as important as the information conveyed in these sentences: it is the sort of subtle, clever wordplay that Jones seemed to revel in using. I translated as best I could, “refined and noble”, but I try as I may I could not get the words to work as well in Hebrew. Some authors use wordplay to show off how clever they are. It seems to me that in Diana Wynne Jones’s case, she was so very clever that she couldn’t help playing with words as she wrote them, not to show off, but simply because she delighted in the language.

Critics tend to be dismissive of language in children’s fantasy, assuming that the plot is the central draw in this form of writing; as noted by Farah Mendelsohn, a

Jones fan and a scholar whose own research is a striking exception to this rule, “there is surprisingly little written on the rhetoric or poetics of the fantastic” [*Rhetorics of Fantasy*, xvi]. Diana Wynne Jones constructed terrific plots, but I believe that one of the reasons she is so loved and appreciated by fellow authors, and by particularly well-read readers, is that readers to whom language is important recognize how masterful Jones was in her use of the English language and of the English literary tradition. A translator cannot ignore these aspects, so central to the craft of translation. It has been my pleasure and my privilege to bring the stories of Diana Wynne Jones to readers in the Hebrew language, and I hope that myself and my fellow Hebrew translators – Netta Yedid, Yael Achmon, Inbal Saggiv-Nakdimon and Yael Inbar – have also succeeded in doing justice to the wonder of her words.

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Covers for *Howl’s Moving Castle* from Keter Publishing, artwork by David Polonsky (page 9) and *Archer’s Goon* (page 10) and *The Homeward Bounders* (this page) both from Graff Publishing, artwork by Ofra Amit.

# DIANA WYNNE JONES IN THE CONTEXT OF CHILDREN'S FANTASY

Jessica Yates

When I finished my graduate training and became a school librarian in 1973, my ambition was to combine this with reviewing children's books in my spare time. I began reviewing for several magazines, specialising in children's fantasy, and *Eight Days of Luke* (1975) was the first of Diana's books I reviewed. I joined a children's books discussion group and made friends with Laura Cecil, Diana's agent, who welcomed my enthusiasm and kept me up to date with Diana's publications and key events in her professional life ever since. Diana was then published by Macmillan, along with other outstanding writers like Robert Westall, Gwyneth Jones and Tanith Lee.

The history of British children's literature should record a group of authors, mainly fantasists, who experienced World War II as children, went up to Oxford in the 1950s, read arts subjects like English and History, and began writing soon after graduating. These included Diana, Penelope Lively, Penelope Farmer, Susan Cooper, Jill Paton Walsh, and Alan Garner, the only man in the group, who went down before taking his degree to concentrate on creative writing. Their fantasies or historical novels are characterised by a strong sense of good and evil, based on English folklore rather than C.S. Lewis-type Christianity, and are often set among English or Welsh landscapes.

Compelled to make Diana one of my "special" authors, along with Tolkien and Lewis, I collected her in hardback and paperback, and when I was invited to write essays for *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers* I placed my bid for Diana as well as Tolkien, and was awarded both of them along with several other authors. The first edition came out in 1978, and I updated my essays twice more. For the 4<sup>th</sup> edition, published in the mid-1990s, the editors decided to split the coverage into two volumes, for children's and YA authors, and I upgraded my essay on Diana, promoted to be a YA author, and Tolkien likewise; for the children's writers volume, I also wrote new essays for Terry Pratchett, who became one of Diana's author-admirers, and Annie Dalton, one of Diana's heirs.

Although Diana knew through Laura of my love for and promotion of her work in the Tolkien Society, for which I served as Secretary for four years, and the school library world, we rarely met, so I can't claim her as a friend, but Laura saw to it that wherever Diana came

to London for a big event, I would know. The first time we met was in Autumn 1981 at a private party held by Macmillan to celebrate the publication of *The Homeward Bounders*, and I was much in awe to meet both Diana and her husband John Burrow.

In 1987 the Tolkien Society decided to celebrate *The Hobbit's* fiftieth anniversary with a one-day conference in London, and I invited Diana to speak as part of an afternoon on children's fantasy since *The Hobbit*. She came all the way from Bristol, gave her talk on her debt to Tolkien, and generously signed piles of books afterwards. (My talk to introduce the session, 'Fifty years of Fantasy' was published in *Books for Keeps* that September, along with an Authorgraph double spread on Diana.) She later granted me permission to include her long-short story 'Dragon Reserve, Home Eight', in my anthology *Dragons and Warrior Daughters*, Collins Lions, 1989.

By now Diana was well known in fandom as well as the world of children's literature. She served on panels at the Brighton Worldcon in 1987 and was Special Guest at the World Fantasy Convention in London 1988, contributing a story to the convention collection *Gaslight and Ghosts*. Diana's story, 'The Green Stone', was evidence that she had been studying the sword-and-sorcery genre.

Diana had begun by writing long children's fantasies in the Nesbit tradition, where children's lives, already problematic, become more so with the addition of magic, and are finally resolved when the youngsters work out how to use the magic. Then she moved to her trademark resolution, in which the youngster discovers his/her inherent but unknown magic powers. As well as standalone novels she had two fantasy sequences going, the Chrestomanci cycle, and the Dalemark series set in a fantasy world, the nearest she got to epic fantasy.

Diana was to develop her approach to her older and adult readers in two ways. The first was to write young-adult romantic fantasy, first with *Fire and Hemlock* (US 1984, UK 1985) and then *Howl's Moving Castle* (1986), in both of which the would-be lovers are menaced by an evil witch figure and the heroine, though inexperienced in magic, has to undo a spell or curse.

In the 1990s Diana rewarded her adult fans with two wonderful adult fantasies, *A Sudden Wild Magic* (1992) and *Deep Secret* (1997) set at a fantasy convention, with many in-jokes about fandom. This is one of my all-time

favourites: the humour of the fannish jokes, the brilliant interweaving of plots A and B, the mystic journey to the otherworld of Babylon, and the final reveal of a powerful VIP living under a secret identity.

In 1993 Diana concluded her epic fantasy *Dalemark* series, left to mature since 1979 when *The Spellcoats* made it a trilogy. Now with *The Crown of Dalemark* we had the full quartet. Diana found the key to conclude the story by creating Maewen, a girl of our modern times, caught back into the past to help find the lost crown and other tokens of the king. Maewen is another present to Diana's readers, a character with which we readily identify. *The Dalemark Quartet* was published in 1993 in trade paperback with excellent covers, by Methuen, Diana's publishers since 1984.

By the late 1990s her books were going out of print in the UK, but her fortunes took a giant upturn thanks to the blossoming cult of Harry Potter! The Children's Books Editor of HarperCollins, Stella Paskins, was delighted to welcome Diana to her list, and reprinted her backlist with bright new covers (apart from *Dalemark* which had gone to OUP). They held a launch party for Diana at the Magic Circle, Euston, in 2000 AD and promoted her books with a focus on Chrestomanci, sensibly pointing up those books which Harry Potter fans might go for.

In November 2004 the annual Roehampton conference on children's literature, this time titled *East Meets West*, invited Diana to celebrate her seventieth birthday with a large Chrestomanci-themed cake, and of course after tea she signed many books. I last saw her in October 2007 when she came to London to see the ballet of *Black Maria* at Sadler's Wells. After that I heard she was ill, and when I found she had donated her manuscripts and typescripts to Seven Stories in Newcastle, I prepared for bad news. At least the newspaper obituarists and her author-friends on the Internet really did her proud when she did pass away in March 2011.

Diana had had plenty of feedback, from her children and those of her friends, and from many signing sessions, on the kind of youngsters who enjoyed her work, and both positive and negative feedback from adults. In her 1991 article 'Two kinds of writing', now on the Internet, she says that adults need more explanation than children, who understand her books at once. Her views were summarised in the Chrestomanci booklet published by HarperCollins for the 2000 AD launch.

Q: You have written for both children and adults. Which do you prefer and what do you see as the differences between the two styles?

A: Writing for adults you have to keep reminding them of what is going on. The poor things have given up using their brains when they read. Children you only need to tell things to once.

I really think there are two kinds of adults, and two kinds of children. In Diana's full-length essay she cites a mother who couldn't understand *The Homeward Bounders*, though her son did, and a schoolmaster who couldn't follow *Charmed Life*. The problem is surely wider than Diana's writings alone. There are people – children and adults – who are resistant to fantasy, and even to fiction altogether,



and there are many children who reach secondary school without having read and enjoyed a children's book of modest length. So when Diana writes in *Nexus*: "I have never yet come across a child who didn't understand *Charmed Life*" she writes of her self-selected audience. I have come across many who did enjoy it, and also many who had problems with the genre, or weren't ready for a book that length.

The prudent school librarian doesn't force a book on a child before they are ready; the child may have a negative reaction to that author, and to the librarian. It is hard to encourage a wide range of children to read quality authors of longer novels, such as Garner, Sutcliffe, and Le Guin, so publishers must keep reissuing them with attractive but not misleading covers.

The trick is to find writers who satisfy one's criteria for quality and moral sense, but also have that readability which gets children reading everything they have written: longstanding readable writers are Roald Dahl, Judy Blume and J. Wilson, and Enid Blyton; and the Rowling revolution brought fantasy back into fashion, both the books and films. With Diana, I would tend to recommend the standalones and *Charmed Life* as the best ones to start on, and certainly not the YA books until you are sure of your reader, which means the librarian must know the books too (not much of a chore!). It would also help if the BBC would release *Archer's Goon* (1992) on DVD more widely. (It is only out in Japan.)

There is always the chance of a reluctant reader coming on a DWJ fantasy by him/herself and becoming



a devoted reader of her books, and more. Ironically the best fantasy authors have a greater chance of staying well-read than older, more dated realistic authors. In the last library I worked in before my retirement in 2010, we stocked DWJ in the new editions, and they were read by literate youngsters, along with Pullman's trilogy, but my clique of fantasy fans were more enthusiastic for Tamora Pierce and David Eddings.

Although Diana hasn't had the fame of Rowling, I doubt she would have wanted it. She had the enthusiasm of thousands of children and adults and a warm welcome at conventions. Although she only won one award over here, the *Guardian* Award for *Charmed Life*, she was shortlisted for the Children's Book Award and the Carnegie Medal several times, and won the juvenile category of the Mythopoeic Society twice, for *The Crown of Dalemark* and *Dark Lord of Derkholm*. In 2007 she received the Lifetime Achievement Award of the World Fantasy Association. To the Mythopoeic Society in 1999 she said: "A book for children is first of all to enjoy, and after that it can be full of all the other things books can do for children – mostly, I believe, to encourage them to think for themselves."

The main way Diana does this is to present her leading characters with a moral and intellectual choice, to solve the problems they find themselves in, a characteristic of many great children's books, such as *The Hobbit*, and the *Chronicles of Narnia*, books which Diana admired. Another way in which she provokes thought, is to enrich her fantasies with mythic and literary allusions. There is an

excellent essay on some of Diana's sources in *East Meets West*, by Nikki Humble, 'The rewards of intertextuality', and I would like to add a few rather more obscure example of her intertextual work.

Humble mentions the importance of T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* to *Fire and Hemlock*, but doesn't give examples. I'd like to provide a few, but first from *The Spellcoats*: "Outside was nothing but yellow-brown River, streaming past so full and quiet...I have never been so near thinking the River a god as then." And now the opening lines of *The Dry Salvages* by Eliot:

"I do not know much about gods, but I think that the river

Is a sullen brown god – untamed and intractable."

I will only mention the obvious parallel in *Fire and Hemlock*, between the garden in Laurel's Hunsdon House, and the rose garden with its drained pool "and the pool was filled with water out of sunlight" in Eliot's *Burnt Norton*, and leave you to compare the two passages. Hunsdon House itself is a real place, and also a tune I played when learning the recorder. It is a stately home, currently the residence of a boxing promoter, as I learned when I saw a photograph in the newspaper. Imagine Diana's delight when she saw it! Of course, now the house has its own page on wikipedia, but with no mention of Diana's book, last time I checked.

Serendipity brought this final connection with Diana. Reading *Sight and Sound* for August 2010 I came upon an article 'The young and the restless' about a rare and wonderful film called *The Ballad of Tam Lin/The Devil's Widow* (1970). The film was directed by Roddy McDowall of *Planet of the Apes* fame, and several lines in Dunn's plot summary have parallels with *Fire and Hemlock* as the film is set in the modern day and tells of the conflict between an ageing rich lady played by Ava Gardner, whose private secretary is named Elroy, and young Janet for Tom Lynn (Ian McShane). (*Fire and Hemlock* fans really should at least read the detailed synopsis on IMDB!) Did Diana once see this film, or are the parallels independent, with the film's scriptwriter and Diana, both creative artists looking for a modern setting for the ballad?

In *Hexwood*, there's a collection of folktale and literary characters rejoicing at the end when the wood has been restored to its powers. Do I spy Mr. Tumnus, and certainly the Little White Horse of Elizabeth Goudge (one of Rowling's favourites)? These are easy to spot, but I suspect very few will understand when Martin's *alter ego* is revealed to be Fitela. One would expect a dragon-slayer from legend to be called Siegfried or Sigurd, but Diana had already employed that hero in *Eight Days of Luke*, so found an alternative name for the son of Sigmund, Fitela, his sister-son in *Beowulf*. Fitela is more commonly known as Sinfiotli, Sigmund's first son in the *Volsung Saga*, his son by his sister Signy (and he wasn't a dragon-slayer, not even in *Beowulf*).

As a Pratchett fan I spotted at least one motif in common with work by Diana. In *A Sudden Wild Magic* the two leading male characters are found to be really one, split into two by evil magic, and reunited at the climax to be a fit partner for the heroine. In Terry's *Thief of Time* (2001) the two leading young men are also found to be one and reunite to become a fit boyfriend for Susan. Both



Diana and Terry used the classic Moorcock *Behold the Man* plot where somebody goes back in time to replace somebody who has died by violence, so that history may work out as it should: it's the plot of *The Crown of Dalemark* and *Night Watch*, but it's rare both for a woman to use this plot and for it to feature a teenage heroine.

Even as Diana referred to the work of other published authors and inspired others, so too has she influenced the work of fanfiction writers.

In July 2009 the first conference on Diana's books was held in Bristol, but sadly Diana could not be there. Even so the atmosphere was fizzing and many papers were presented. I decided not to compete with the academics, and took a sideways look at Dalemark with 'Loose ends in *The Crown of Dalemark* and some fanfictional solutions' for I had a private disagreement with some entries in the Guide to Dalemark and had composed over time solutions which suited me better, especially rejecting the death of Mitt's mother in the Great Uprising.

I have much enjoyed these works of fanfiction which are ingenious in filling genuine gaps and in Diana's spirit; my favourites are a story of Navis helping Kialan escape just after the opening of *Cart and Cwiddar*, and one about Hobin the revolutionary which, although incompatible with my version, is a *tour de force*. There are non-Dalemark stories too, such as one about Polly and Tom wondering whether Laurel has designs on their unborn baby. As long as the fan writers keep their high standards we have some consolation for Diana's untimely death.

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# THE MISTRESS OF MAGIC

Meredith MacArdle

**D**iana Wynne Jones was a mistress of myths and the mythosphere. She produced some wonderful interpretations of legends that range from the Greek Titan Prometheus who brought fire to poor, cold humanity (*The Homeward Bounders*), to the Norse pantheon and hero stories (*Eight Days of Luke*), the Welsh shadow god Gwyn ap Nudd (*The Merlin Conspiracy*), and touched upon a whole plethora of myths in *The Game* and other books.

It is clear from her works that she researched myths, legends and fairy tales carefully, and was fully familiar with their traditional stories before she reworked them into her own books. And I think it is equally clear that she researched different types of magic, witchcraft or occultism, and was equally comfortable with adapting them for her splendid magical fantasies.

So Diana Wynne Jones was just as much a mistress of magic (a title given by the ancient Egyptians to their goddess Isis) as she was of myth.

Modern paganism, witchcraft and the occult, at least here in the UK, are now widely accepted in society, although that was not the case until relatively recently. Schools now know that some of their kids come from openly Wiccan families, and every bookshop has its 'Mind, Body and Spirit' section where books of spells are openly displayed.

In Scandinavia, the old religion, worshipping deities such as Odin, Thor, and Freya, is officially recognised, and in Norway some of the groups are allowed to perform legal civil ceremonies. Followers of this religion often perform magical rituals that they believe were associated with the religion. In fact, a prayer could be considered a spell, since it is an attempt to cause the universe to grant wishes. The US, which is currently in the grip of fundamentalist Christianity, is less comfortable with openly acknowledging the large number of modern pagans in its midst. But overall, there has never been so much interest in what can broadly be called the New Age, with its magic and spells, and it has never been easier to find out about all sorts of occult movements.

Because of this burgeoning interest in paganism and the occult, I thought it would be interesting to look at the wide range of magics that Diana wrote about, and to examine how much they reflect real-life magical systems. Of course, most pagans and magicians are not just in it for the spells. Wicca, shamanism, etc all have underlying spiritual systems which are the main interest for most practitioners. But DWJ only delved into religious or spiritual matters when it carried the plot along. For example, in *Charmed Life* the Chrestomanci Castle party attends church (even

though Milly was herself once a goddess from very different religion than that of Christianity). But what happens in church is not only a very funny episode, it also adds to our knowledge of Gwendolen's character and our understanding of the time and place that the story is set in.

Although forbidden to perform magic, Gwendolen makes the figures in the stained glass windows move about, fight each other, or dance around pulling silly faces. Then she causes the funeral statue of a crusader knight to sit up and thumb his nose at the vicar. In her campaign to irritate Chrestomanci, Gwendolen proves herself to be petty and spiteful, but we also gain a glimpse of an old-fashioned village lifestyle where the whole community goes to church and speaks to the vicar afterwards.

## HOWL

I run a website about Diana, and I used to pass on messages from readers to her. There were stacks and stacks of emails from some women and even more teenage girls saying how they were in love with one of her characters. It was clear to me that women divide into two camps. They fall in love with either the dapper enchanter Chrestomanci with his flamboyant dressing gowns, or with the heartless magician Howl with his glamorous costumes. I don't know who the blokes go for, but perhaps it is time to conduct a survey, especially since the Japanese director Hayao Miyazaki's Studio Ghibli anime film of *Howl's Moving Castle* gave us a fleeting view of Howl's very fetching backside.

Although Howl comes from Wales, his magic does not usually reflect any system practised in our world. An exception is when he moves the castle, when he has his apprentice chalk a five-pointed star inside a circle on the floor, while he himself rushes around painting mystical signs inside the star and circle. These are standard features of most Western magical traditions, here adapted by Diana to her own purposes. Howl also has seven-league boots and magic potions in his bathroom, but as Diana makes clear from the first sentence, these belong to fairy tales, whichever world one happens to be in, whether it is ours or Ingary, where *Howl's Moving Castle* is set: "In the land of Ingary, where such things as seven-league boots and cloaks of invisibility really exist, it is quite a misfortune to be born the eldest of three." (Methuen Teens 1986, p 1)

Like many of Diana's characters, Howl is a magician because he has an innate magical ability, and someone without that ability simply could not do the spells that he does. In Ingary, magicians have to learn their trade, but like any other profession, if one does not have the necessary abilities, they will not succeed.

In this book the evil fire demon fixes a spell into a

poem, and when all the lines of the poem come true, the spell is unleashed. This practice is reminiscent of Tibetan Buddhist prayer-wheels, or Roman inscriptions given to shrines or altars of gods, where the implication is that once the words are recited and heard by Buddha, or read by the gods, the conditions are met and the wish will come true.

## GIFTS

Just a few pages into *The Merlin Conspiracy*, Roddy confirms that, in her world of Blest, magic is a gift one is born with when she describes why she is so friendly with the younger boy Grundo: "The other children our age were sons and daughters of Court officials, who had no gift for magic. They were perfectly friendly ... but they just had a more normal outlook." (Collins paperback 2004, p9)

That magical ability is a gift and brings an unusual outlook to life is also stressed in *Power of Three*, where a psychic ability such as finding lost things or predicting the future is actually called a Gift. People who have one are certainly respected and can proudly flaunt a special gold collar, but this does not mean that they are superior in every way.

Throughout Diana's books, a message to readers is that gifts and abilities should be used responsibly, and they do not automatically confer special status or privileges. Gwendolen of *Charmed Life* is a bitchy witch because she makes the mistake of thinking that her strong magical potential means that anyone without her powers is not as important as she is, and should look up to her. She therefore treats other people with disdain or worse. (As it happens she has actually stolen magic from Cat to enhance her natural abilities!) Gair in *Power of Three* epitomises this message from the other side of the equation. His sister and brother both have gifts, although the spoiled young boy Ceri is not given his ceremonial collar at once. His mother tells her husband, "But Ceri's far too conceited already. Give him the collar when he's old enough to have earned it. For the moment, I think this Gift is best forgotten." (Beaver 1989, p 57)

Gair feels humble, ordinary and that he has let his parents down. He is convinced he is a failure in life. As a result, instead of playing with other kids, he sits on his own and broods. "Ceri ... wanted to consult Gair. Gair, to his great astonishment, discovered that his habit of sitting apart on the windowsill had given him a reputation for wisdom among all the children ... Gair was ashamed. He wanted to explain to Ceri that he only sat there because he was ordinary." (p 57)

Similarly, in *The Magicians of Caprona*, the children Angelica and Tonino feel that they are disappointments to their families because they do not have the same standard of magical abilities as the rest. As it happens, they simply have different magical skills which the White Devil exploits, but their sense of failure makes them a weak point in their powerful families' magical defences.

Another of Diana's messages is that everyone has their own special abilities and characteristics.

*Power of Three*, incidentally, does contain a magical system that partly reflects real occultism. Gair's people use spells that depend on knowing the "words". These have to be learnt, and people can get them wrong so that nothing happens, but in order to reveal a creature's real nature, or to open the gates to their hidden settlements, they have

to speak the right "words". In our world, from Kabbalah through to Wicca, so much of occultism depends on knowing the secret names of things, the true names of the elements or the angels or the worlds of psychic existence. In *Witch Week*, the force of words is typified in the Simon Says spell, which makes everything the arrogant boy Simon says come true (and later is reversed so that everything he says never happens or has happened), as well as in Nan's ability to describe and explain facts. Words have power, inside stories and inside magic circles.

## CHRESTOMANCI

In the Chrestomanci series everyone has their own different style of magic. Practitioners are also graded, into warlocks, witches, magicians, enchanter. They are policed by Chrestomanci, a title given to a nine-lived enchanter, who is the only person powerful enough to control all the other magicians. Within the Chrestomanci stories there are financial wizards, plant wizards, bio-mechanical wizards, and musicians who sing their spells.

We learn very little about their magical techniques, but there is at least one magician whose work mirrors practices that occultists use in our world. In *Charmed Life* the children's tutor, Michael Saunders, has his own round, castle turret workshop room, crammed full of what I imagine a medieval alchemist would have had. Herbs and dried plants, burning incense, a pentagram painted on the floor, and alchemical equipment: "One table was crowded with torts and limbecks, some bubbling, some empty. A second was piled with books and scrolls. The third bench had signs chalked all over it and a mummified creature of some sort lying among the signs." (Puffin 1979, p 68) The entire description of his room brings to mind an old woodcut illustration of a typical historical magician's work place, the sort of room most modern occultists would give their dragon's blood to have.

## MERLIN AND MORE

One of Diana's books in which the magic users most nearly mirror those in real life is *The Merlin Conspiracy*. The plot involves visits to multiple worlds, each with their own system of magic, so it is only to be expected that at least some of these systems would reflect ideas that occultists here and now explore.

Quite near the beginning of the book, the teenager Nick is thrown from our world into a different one, and takes part in a magical ritual designed to cast a protective circle around a cricket stadium so that the crown prince can safely take part in a match.

This particular group of magicians work "skyclad", which in their case means wearing a special uniform. Diana must have known that this word "skyclad" was popularized by the new religion of Wicca, or modern, nature-loving, goddess-worshipping witchcraft, founded by the naturist Gerald Gardner, and means to be naked. As she did so often, she took a word or a phrase and turned it on itself so that, in the context of the story, it smoothly and naturally meant something new.

Nick is forced to run around the physical boundaries of this protective circle, not once but three times, tracing the circle with water, candles, and salt. These are classic symbols to represent er – water – then fire and earth. I



assume that the fourth element, air, is taken to be ever-present. To strengthen the protective circle, the four senior magicians each take a stand at one of the four compass points. Using the four physical elements, associating them with compass points, and casting circles are classic parts of what is loosely called the “Western Mystery Tradition”, in which a demarcation between the physical and mystical worlds, the use of material symbols to represent immaterial concepts, the casting of circles within which the magical work takes place, the use of swords as a ritual weapon of both defence and attack, are all features. People who use the occult systems of the Golden Dawn; Dion Fortune’s Society of the Inner Light; Wicca, particularly the Alexandrian form developed by Alex Sanders; or any of the derivations of Aleister Crowley’s Thelemic OTO, will instantly recognise the trappings of this ritual. However, DWJ added on to it a shamanic concept of the magicians tapping into their totem animals. Once again, this shows how she could take an idea, twist it, and make it uniquely her own.

In *The Merlin Conspiracy*, Merlin is not a person as such, but is a position, the title given to the supreme magician of England, who has to attune himself to the land by visiting all the important magical sites. Likewise the king (similar to the Fisher King of Arthurian legend), has to constantly roam the land to maintain the mystical, royal link to the country.

I have actually met a man who claims to be a sort of reincarnation of King Arthur, and who legally changed his name to King Arthur Pendragon. I’ve also met several men who have adopted the name Merlin, although so far none

of the ones I have met have claimed to be the reincarnation of the magician of the Arthurian legend. I have also met a cat called Merlin, who has a frighteningly otherworldly stare, which makes me think he is far more likely to be a magic-user than most of these pagan men.

Although *The Merlin Conspiracy* introduces several different types of magic, from a unique flower-based system to weather wizards, there are not many other magicians who seem to mirror real-life practices. Some that do are the Prayermaster and his prayerboys, and the families of hereditary witches and wizards.

As usual, DWJ put her own unique spin on the idea of praying. The unpleasant Prayermaster says that spells are “filth” and that what he does, to “raise up correct prayers” “in purity and the proper form” is “wholly lawful”. However, when we see him set a prayer in motion – “Let the prayer be answered that opens all portals!” – he moves into a ritual position and his intonation sounds exactly like a spell (p 222).

It is Roddy who encounters the family of hereditary witches, who are her grandmother, aunts and cousins. In this system, the women and men live separately, and only get together for a temporary marriage to produce the next generations. At the age of seven boys are sent to live with the estranged menfolk, while only girls carry on living with the women, and each small group clings on frantically to what it has been taught are its precious heritage and traditions. They are so blinkered that they are not only closed to new ideas, but they also do not question the rights or wrongs of what they have been taught.

There are shades of feminist separatism here, particularly the Dianic pagan women who worship the fierce Greek huntress goddess Diana, and will have no spiritual truck with men or male deities. But there are also reflections of the modern-day witches who claim to be the descendants of a centuries-long tradition of folklore, magic and witchcraft that has survived in rural areas from before the arrival of Christianity in Britain, right up to the present day.

Unfortunately, there seems to be no convincing evidence that these claims are true. There are families who can show several generations who have been initiated into some form of witchcraft, but nothing seems to go back beyond the Victorian period when there was a revival of interest into ancient Britain and “Celtic” society and culture.

There isn’t room to explore much more, but from these few books I think it is obvious that Diana was familiar with modern paganism as well as a wide range of other contemporary religious practice. There are reflections of these to be found in her stories, but they are actually few and hard to find. Her imagination was wider than the real world, and out of nothing or by linking together just a few strands of thought, she created an incredible range of different magical systems that her witches, wizards, enchanters and sorcerers could follow. In short, she wrote her own magic.

**Meredith MacArdle is such a big fan of Diana Wynne Jones that she produced a fanzine, *Charmed Lives*, ([www.leemac.freemove.co.uk](http://www.leemac.freemove.co.uk)). She has also reprinted Diana’s first, long-out-of-print book *Changeover*, available at <http://www.moondustbooks.biz>**

# DIANA ON SCREEN: TWO FILMED VERSIONS OF BOOKS BY DIANA WYNNE JONES

Gill Othen

Many of those who love books have a complex relationship with screen adaptations of their favourites. The desire to see what has been painted so vividly with words is strong, but stronger still is the terror that “they” will “get it wrong”. For every fan of Colin Firth in a wet shirt there is a reader speechless in horror at Donald Sutherland’s Mr Bennet.

Fans of the writer Diana Wynne Jones have fewer horrors to face, as only two of her books have been adapted for the screen, but perhaps a little more wistfulness that no screenwriter or studio of integrity has been excited by the possibilities of “The Homeward Bounders” or the astonishing worlds of Chrestomanci. We give our heart to no arriviste boy wizard, however blockbusting his films have been. We would just like to see Cat and Chrestomanci Castle, at least as much as we want to run a mile from any portrayal of them.

The first of DWJ’s books to be translated into the more populist media was “Archer’s Goon”, which was adapted by the BBC in 1992, back in the days of rather more generous budgets for children’s TV. DWJ’s novel about a family beset by the worst ravages of officialdom and of misdirected public services, which turn out to be literally caused by people “out to get them”, became a six-part live-action serial for broadcast in that slot between arrival home from school and the serious adult concerns of the evening news. It was a workmanlike production, starring Susan Jameson and Roger Lloyd Pack, and two excellent child actors, Angela Forry as Awful and Jamie de Courcey as Howard. The special effects budget was BBC-scale; the best sequences are probably those which are less “space-age” and more domestic. The visit to Hathaway, for example, is charming, while the finale perhaps inevitably lacks the scale implied in the novel.

The intended audience and timing led inevitably to a

certain broadening of the story and themes – in particular the strange family which dominated the town seemed unpleasant rather than threatening and the distinctions between the better and worse members was blurred somewhat. The Goon, central to the development of the story, seemed to remain much the same throughout, and his infatuation with Fifi took a back seat. The subtle commentary Jones maintains through her narrative was absent; in the book the themes of honesty, integrity and moral responsibility are central, as in so many of DWJ’s works. Howard and Quentin both have to accept some responsibility for the dilemma they find themselves in, and it is clear that the repair of the town and the society damaged by the family will be a lengthy project. The TV series, perhaps predictably, has a simpler, “happy” ending.

Like so many BBC properties, it has not been released for sale since the development of digital media. Except, bizarrely, in Japan. Through the wonders of the internet it is possible to buy the full series, complete with the offer of Japanese subtitles and a set of option screens in Japanese script only. The series makes no great demands on the viewer, but is amusing, respectful of the original and enjoyable enough to be very much worth watching.

The Japanese connection may in fact have come about because of the other book of Diana’s which has been filmed. In 2004 Studio Ghibli, the great Japanese animation group, released Howl’s Moving Castle, directed by Hayao Miyazaki, who was awarded an Oscar in 2003 for Spirited Away. Ghibli, and Miyazaki, have garnered both awards and passionate fans in Europe for many years with their trademark anime style of detailed character drawings and lush, painterly landscapes. The concept of a moving castle excited Miyazaki and Diana was happy to agree to the adaptation. The director visited





her in person to give her a private screening in her home city of Bristol a year before the English-language version was released, and she was both excited and thrilled by the film.

On close examination, however, the film and the book are very far apart in a number of ways, though both exceptionally good examples of their own genres. Miyazaki borrowed some plot elements and characters from the novel, but brought to the film his own sensibilities and concerns: it became, as DWJ described it, "Something rich and strange".

In the book the writer establishes the setting by linking immediately to a number of familiar fairy tale tropes – three daughters, their father dead, need to make their own way in the world. There is a wicked witch, a castle, an era with some elements of the mediaeval, and, through the names ("Market Chipping", "Kingsbury"), a strong sense that it is an archetypal English form of pseudo-middle ages. However, as soon as she establishes these features, the writer begins to subvert them – the heroine is the oldest daughter, and well aware that the rules of fiction therefore give her little prospect of success in life. The stepmother is good, not evil, it would seem, taking the girls into her confidence, dealing with them fairly. In the earlier chapters, however, there is already a suggestion that nothing should be taken at face value; when Sophie,

the heroine, visits one of her sisters she discovers that not only have the girls exchanged places, but that they pity her and assume that the mother-figure has been exploiting her. Later in the novel Sophie discovers that, as usual in DWJ's worlds, the truth is more complex and more nuanced than any of them had supposed. There is a war, mentioned almost as an afterthought, but it has little effect on the citizens of Market Chipping other than a mild sense of threat.

Miyazaki borrowed from this what he chose. The pair of sisters becomes a single girl, reduced to a very minor role in the story, while the mother becomes little more than a stereotype, used briefly to emphasise Sophie's isolation and then again, near the end, as a plot device. The demands of a comparatively short film rather than a lengthy novel mean that we see very little of Sophie's life before she is the victim of the Witch's spell, and her own specific magic, by which she gives power to the hats she makes is not really explored.

Instead, what concerns Miyazaki most is the brooding presence of the war machine. Most of his films contain elements of his dislike of war and conventional heroism; here the village, a sort of exuberant mingling of central European settings, is full of rough soldiery, a noisy distraction and a potential threat to the gentle Sophie. She first encounters Howl, indeed, when she is accosted by

a pair of soldiers, rather than on her way to join in local festivities.

The characterisation of Howl serves very different purposes in the novel and the film. Miyazaki gives us a dreamy hero, intent on saving the people he guards, ready, if necessary, for any sacrifice to combat the threat of the encroaching enemy, though it is made clear in the film that War itself is the chief enemy rather than any specific nation. The Howl of the novel is very different – he is selfish and capable of throwing atrocious tantrums. He has considerable power but really cannot be bothered to use it. Sophie labels him, early on, as a “slitherer-outer”, and he uses his powers principally, it seems, to avoid responsibility. Howl is presented initially as something of a stereotype; we only gradually learn, with Sophie, that he is much more complex than he first seems. He is also very much a source of comedy; it is interesting to compare the occasion, in film and novel, when he is covered in green slime. Jones makes the entire incident comic, linked to his childishness and selfishness, while Miyazaki gives a sort of nobility to his despair, although his line, “I see no point in living if I can’t be beautiful” suggests a similar level of conceit.

Beyond this, Howl’s predicament is altered. Instead of the threat to his soul and heart posed by Miss Angorian, who is entirely absent from the film, he runs the risk of becoming a monster in his fight to protect the community from the monstrous war machines. Only Sophie’s love can save him, rather than her intellect and determination, and the pair run off together at the end of the film into a countryside now made idyllic.

Denial of human potential and the acceptance of stereotypes is a major theme of the book. Most figures appear initially as two-dimensional, yet many deepen and become rounded characters through the process of accepting their full potential. Sophie, when we first meet her, is fitting into the world as she perceives it, bewitching herself as she does the hats by telling herself she is worthless. As an old woman she gives up any hope of a future; ironically this liberates her. She allows her innate good sense and strength of character to come into play as she quickly establishes herself at the heart of the castle. In the film she has to do less to gain acceptance within the group; although she attempts to cook by threatening Calcifer if he does not allow her to use the frying pan, Howl takes over the chore from her with gentle gallantry.

Miyazaki sees the somewhat abstract concept of war as the chief enemy, and significantly reduces the impact of two characters. In the book, the Scarecrow is only revealed as benign at the denouement, and is a terrifying creation to Sophie almost until that point, even though, in true folk-tale style, her casual kindness has endowed it with the ability to seek out some form of redemption. Similarly, Miyazaki’s witch is a very much more ambiguous character who becomes a senile but almost attractive inhabitant of the castle, rather than the epitome of evil rotted from within of the original book. Madam Sullivan, the aristocratic magical being at the heart of much of the mystery in the film seems to be an amalgam of several female characters and one male, most of whom are rather more sinister in the novel.

Understandably Miyazaki changes some important references on which the original novel depends. Howl’s



multiple personalities are explored in the book as we see him from a number of perspectives; as Sophie learns more about him, we see more reasons for his nature. One delightful episode in which “Howl” is revealed to be “Howell Jenkins” and takes Sophie and Michael to visit his family in Wales is omitted completely; it is likely that many non-British readers of the book fail to spot the archetypal Welshman, keen on rugby, drinking and family. One crucial element developed in that visit is the nature of the spell, a poem by John Donne. Miyazaki makes a passing reference to the falling star of Donne’s “Song”, but the other elements disappear – the wind which serves to advance an honest mind, the fallen star and, hilariously, the mandrake root “got with child” punctuate the development of the story but not the film. In the end, however, both media triumphantly demonstrate that it is perfectly possible to find a “woman true and fair”, though first she herself has to learn that she is both.

Miyazaki’s castle is a masterpiece of visual art and animation. It has strong elements of steampunk in its design and very clearly a personality of its own, emphasised by what amounts to an implied face and Baba Yaga style chicken’s legs. Jones’s castle is very much in the European mould: tall, narrow and dark. Miyazaki adds scale and his castle seems to have considerably more autonomy – it is never quite clear that Calcifer provides the motive power.

And so on. There are many differences, as you might expect. Jones works in a verbal medium; her book is full of her usual mix of descriptive detail, quirky language and humour. Miyazaki works in a visual medium; his work is lush and luscious, and details of plot are less important to him. In the book the ending is a traditional (for DWJ) gathering of key characters and a revelation of the complexities of the plot after the destruction of the antagonist. Miyazaki makes something very different, drawing on the trope embedded in “Beauty and the Beast”, as both Sophie and Howl see through the ugliness temporarily affecting their exterior selves to discover the inner beauty.

Diana Wynne Jones summed it up, as one might expect. Thrilled and intrigued by what had become of her book, she focused on what she saw as the essential thread linking the two – love. Beyond that, both serve as triumphant assertions of selfhood, of autonomy and of integrity.

# DIANA WYNNE JONES: A BSFA DISCUSSION

transcribed by  
Shana Worthen

In September 2010, the BSFA London meeting was a panel on Diana Wynne Jones and her influences, comprising Farah Mendlesohn (FM) and Charlie Butler (CB), and moderated by Shana Worthen (SW).

**CB** – I was just writing about catch phrases and so on for the JFA journal, and I was thinking back to the Diana Wynne Jones conference which some of us in this room were at back in Bristol last year, and how one of the nice things about being in a conference with eighty-five people or so from fourteen different countries, who had all of them pretty much read everything DWJ had ever written one of the nice things was being able to drop in phrases such as “Hathaway, send a bus”.

**FM** – And everyone knows what you’re talking about.

**CB** – I was thinking about that because in some ways it was slightly amazing. It’s something which interests me quite a lot. It was at the same time quite an inclusive thing. It marked us all out as members, for this purpose, of the same tribe. We are all DWJ fans, we can pick up each others’ references. At the same time, I think there’s always a hind brain awareness that other people listening from the outside wouldn’t know what the hell we mean. There’s this exclusive aspect to it as well. That’s something I think that Diana’s actually quite interested in her books. So I was just mentioning that as you’re dropping in catch phrases [prior to the beginning of the panel].

**FM** – And if you want to take the idea of a closed world, Diana was one of three children. I think it was Gwyneth Jones said to me that once you get past two, you create a world. Two children are just two children. But three children and four children create actually their own little community with catch phrases and structures, and I think that the way she does that in her books may come from that experience, because there’s almost always those inward-looking communities which are in themselves, for themselves, constructed in concentric circles.

It’s no shame on anybody if they haven’t read every DWJ. It must be up to 50 by now.

**CB** – Well on the way.

**FM** – It was 43 when I did the book.

**CB** – It depends on how you count them, with the different collections of short stories and so on. Somewhere between 45 and 50.

**SW** – A bit of background for those of you who don’t know: both Farah and Charlie are authors of book entirely or in large part about the work of DWJ.

**FM** – Yes. In fact, that’s sort of how we met. Were we introduced or did I read your article?

**CB** – Somewhere in between. There’s a guy named Simon Flynn who met you at a conference. I don’t know if you remember him.

**FB** – That’s right. He said that this guy was also writing a book on Diana, at which point I panicked.

**CB** – He was working at my place at the time and said, “Oh, I’ve just met this woman called Farah and, you know, she’s working on Diana” and I panicked. So it was a toss-up between hiring a hit-man and sending an email. The email was definitely cheaper, and I’ve never regretted it.

**FB** – We ended up working as writing buddies for about three years, and the really nice thing – I remember realizing that here was an entire chapter I could drop, because I could just say “and you can see this discussed in Charlie Butler’s forthcoming book etc.” and an entire chapter I’d never wanted to write in the first place just went whoosh.

**CB** – Another nice thing about our books, as it happened, is that they were quite complementary. Yours was much more analytical and mine was a comparative study.

**FB** – The key thing was that yours was far more biographical. All the biographical stuff I didn’t want to touch was all the stuff that you were exploring. So that was really nice. I don’t mean to give the impression that Charlie’s book is a biography. It’s not. But it’s very much a study contextualized in the lives of the four writers he considers, so in that sense, it’s quite different from what I did, which was almost the classic close reading.

**CB** – The four authors to whom Farah alludes, just in case you’re wondering, were Diana, Alan Garner, Susan Cooper, and Penelope Lively, all of whom shared these kind of biographical coincidences, inasmuch as they were born within a year or two of each other, they all went to Oxford at about the same time, they all, one way or another – apart from Penelope Lively, had CS Lewis and

Tolkien as people whose lectures they went to, whether or not they were officially meant to. And they all seemed to share, to me as I was growing up and reading their books, certain preoccupations to do with landscape, and to do with history and memory. So that was really the spur for me to write that book. So Farah is quite right. There was in some sense - one of the clues for me was looking at their biographical coincidences, being small children during the second World War, the educational experiences, the general media which they shared but, of course, as soon as you start to look closely at any of those things, you realize that what divides them is just as important as what separates them, and they're all very individual writers as well. But there was a kind of playing off of similarity and difference going on throughout that book

**FW** – Where do you want us to go with this?

**SW** – I think, in contrast, you should say a bit about your book

**FM** – Do I have to?

**SW** – Or Charlie could describe your book for you.

**CB** – No, I did mine!

**FM** – Mine was absolutely a labor of love, and came about quite by accident at a time when I was terribly depressed, having trouble getting book contracts, and convinced my academic career was going absolutely nowhere, and was about to leave academia. And I was at ICFA, the International Conference for the Fantastic in the Arts, which I would recommend as a sort of weird hybrid conference/convention. Mostly conference, but a hell of a lot of convention. It has usually has an attendance of about 30 or 40 authors and a total attendance of about 300. That's a pretty high proportion.

And I got introduced to Jack Zipes in the bar.

No, I need to back up slightly. That's right. They had a panel on Harry Potter and modern children's fantasy and somebody dropped out of the panel and I was asked if I would be on it. And you know that awful dawning sense of misspent youth? We were about halfway through the panel when I realized that I, the scratch person on the panel, had actually read more children's fiction than everybody else on the panel put together. And I'd never thought of myself in any sense whatsoever as a children's literature scholar. I'm still not a children's literature scholar whatever the children's literature scholars say. But anyways, I was then introduced to Jack Zipes who'd been in the audience, he's only attended a couple of times, and he said, "And what would you like to write on?" And I said, "I don't know."

And he said, "If you could write on anything you like -" And I said, "Diana Wynne Jones!" And he said, "Great, send me a chapter!"

Which is possibly one of the most frightening drinks I have ever been bought. Which left me the thing about how to do it. And I am a historian. And I maintain I am an historian even if I do write about literature and reading

And one of the things which marks out a historians is that we don't tend to be very interested in a text, an event. I know there are exceptions to this rule. But as a general rule of thumb, what we're interested in is triangulation. If you have this bit of information, this bit of information,

and this bit of information, what's the bit in the middle, what's the synthesis. So my book, apart from the very first chapter which is all about everything that's wrong with *Wilkin's Tooth*, and why all the things that are wrong with it are really, really interesting, every other chapter takes a way of looking at Diana's books and looks at them through that particular lens. So that the chapter on time games is on part about her use of different theories of physics, but is also about the way she actually uses grammatical and rhetorical structures to shift you through time. Keep in mind that I'm a historian, so I was bootstrapping some of these topics from scratch, as in, literally going through everything from Plato to Gödel, working my way through *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, all the stuff I'd just never done before. But in contrast there's also a chapter on the use of magic, and the way that's structured around notions of childhood and growing up. I've forgotten half the chapters these days, it's been a while since I've read it.

**CB** – I've got a copy, it's just in my bag over there.

**FM** – But the complication in all this, is that my career having completely run onto the rocks and getting absolutely solidly nowhere, at the same time, I published an article called "Toward a Taxonomy of Fantasy". And this is where I sound like an egotistical twerp, because that came out the same year, and when I went to ICFA that year, I could not walk through the mezzanine, which was twice the length of this room, without being stopped every hundred yards by people who wanted to talk about that article. I've never experienced anything like this and probably never will again.

So by the time I left the conference, I had the contract for that book as well. So I've suddenly got two book contracts and then within six months I had a third. This is not the way to do it, it really isn't, and it's not good for you, and it was a nightmare.

But that meant I ended up with a situation where I was writing a book on the theory of fantasy and then a book on the practice of that theory, which meshed, so that what was supposed to happen was that *Rhetorics of Fantasy* would come out first and establish the groundwork, then the Diana Wynne Jones book would come out and show the practice of that, only then I got chicken pox and I got post-viral fatigue syndrome, which mean I didn't write for six months. And Wesleyan would give me an extension and Routledge wouldn't. So the books came out in the wrong order, because I only needed three of the *Rhetorics* chapters in order to be able to write the Jones book, I didn't need the fourth chapter. So it all ended up really rather peculiarly entangled, but I think that enormously strengthened the book on Jones, and it had this very clear theoretical underpinning that was in itself intrinsically interesting to people. It was a book that, until *Rhetorics* came out, was being quoted for the theory as much as it was for a study of Diana

The best bit? Was when my little sister, who was 18 at the time, phoned me up to say her best friend had just got her reading list in literature at Newcastle and my book was on it. That's what you want to hear: glory in the eyes of your little sister.

So that's the book. But we're still not really talking about Diana here.

**SW** – Diana and you. We can work our way more into Diana. How did Diana become such an important part of your work life?

**FM** – She made us.

**SW** – Explain.

**FM** – This is actually the argument of one of the chapters. There's a book on children's fantasy by John Rowe Townsend, is it? I can't remember the name of the book.

**CB** – There's a whole book which he kind of revised every now again called *Written for Children*.

**FM** – In 1985, he described Diana Wynne Jones as a minor-but-quite-interesting-author. That's it. That one line.

**CB** – That's fighting talk!

**FM** – Well. What starts to become really obvious when you look at the critics before the '90s is that they all think she's a minor-but-very-interesting writer. When criticism of Jones takes off, it takes off very, very fast indeed. We literally go from nothing to thirty or forty articles, and two monographs, and various other stuff happening, I'd say, within a couple of years.

**CB** – I think it's slightly more complicated than that. It's a case of a prophet without honour in her own country, because where DWJ criticism was being done was Australia and America.

**FM** – There's still not much.

**CB** – Not much, but in this country, pretty much nothing. Hello, Jessica [Yates].

**FM** – The other major expert on Jones.

**CB** – Yes, indeed. Taking the broad picture, you're absolutely right. There was quite an explosion, I think, Harry Potter-fueled partly.

**FM** – Mostly because we were up in arms.

**CB** – Mostly because we were up in arms. Blood, dander, and hackles were all up. People were saying "Diana Wynne Jones did it first!"

**FM** – And better.

**CB** – And better. And of course HarperCollins started to bring out back issues, the reprints.

**FM** – The criticism was already out there. Those back issues didn't come out until I had almost finished my book.

**CB** – No, they started before that.

**FM** – Not really. I know because I was having trouble finding the books. Best excuse for buying a whole set of first editions? You cost the first editions, then you cost the daily trip from Reading to the British Library, and then you go for whichever is cheaper.

**CB** – But before your book or indeed mine, in 2002 there was the first book about Diana Wynne Jones, *An Exciting and Exacting Wisdom*.

**FM** – And that's what I'm thinking of really. But they key thing is that we are all about the same age. We're all within a particular age band, and hence my theory that

DWJ quite literally educated her own critics in how to read her through books. Because you can actually start somebody off on Jones by saying "well, how old is your kid?" And pick a book from each age group. Because from the 70s onward she's working up through the age groups, so those of us who started reading her in the 70s,

we were literally walking along the critical cliff with her all the way as she got cleverer more sophisticated, so did we. And I really do think that's a major issue.

The book that of course most people's favourite – it's not mine – is *Fire and Hemlock*, and you can keep reading that book, and the more literature you have read, the more that book will open out.

**CB** – I think it's deliberately designed that way.

**FM** – And it is a teaching book, she talks about this. I suppose if you want to ask why is Jones fascinating, for me it's partially that she's a pedagogic writer, and she's a pedagogic writer essentially engaged in an argument about what our children like. And if you read an awful lot of pedagogy, and an awful lot of what should be written for children, you'll find comments like 'children don't get this, children have to have X explained to them, don't write over the heads of children'. Whereas Jones says, 'Write over the heads of children! Give them something to jump for. You don't put a climbing frame at their level. You have to get them to reach up. If they have to stretch a bit, that's just fine. And if they slip off, that's fine. Encourage them to get back on.' There aren't that many children's writers I would put in that category.

**CB** – I think that's absolutely right. I was perhaps slightly unusually in the people of our generation who are Jones fans inasmuch as I had never come across her as a child. I first read a Diana Wynne Jones book in my mid-20s. I was probably about 27. I had just started my first university job, and I had been given a kind of – well, one of my duties was to sit in a dusty room in the education faculty once a week for an hour and wait for education students to come and tell me about their personal problems. No one ever turned up.

However, one of my colleagues, who was a friend of Diana's as it turned out later, had clearly bought a teaching set of copies of *Charmed Life*, and one day, idly rummaging through the cupboards in this room, where I was supposed to wait for children – students – to come – I found the copies of *Charmed Life*. And I thought I might as well read it. I think *Charmed Life* is for many people the first Diana Wynne Jones book they read. I just happened to be older when I read it. And it very much chimed with what you're saying, Farah, inasmuch as *Charmed Life*, unlike *Fire and Hemlock*, is not replete with many literary references from the well-known to the obscure that you will, perhaps if you study an English literature degree, come to know better as time goes on.

But it is challenging in a slightly different, but analogous, way in that, in writing *Charmed Life*, Diana didn't have the kind of narrative voice that I was used to from children's literature of that period, which I think in the case of *Charmed Life* is 1977 or 8. That is to say, there wasn't the explaining voice, the guiding-you-through-it voice, the telling-you-what's-going-on-really voice. There was just this very strange world which was like England,



but not exactly like England, which was like the Victorian or Edwardian period but not quite, and I couldn't quite get a handle on it, but I wanted to read on and find out more. And there was just a story which drew me in and forced me to, as it were, bracket so many questions, that in the end, the bracketing of those questions itself became a skill and a kind of pleasure which I began to appreciate. And even at the end of the book, there is no 'now I understand it all'.

If you think about it very hard, everything is there, everything is explained. The relationship of the world of *Charmed Life* to our own world is explained there, but that's not what the story is about, that's not where the focus of it is. The focus is on the particular characters that she's writing about.

The world-building is just slightly in the corner of the eye, it's just slightly out of focus, slightly on the margins. It's there if you want to seek it out, but it's not what the story is about. And that's a concession to the reader's intelligence which I very much appreciated as a 26 or 7 year old. I think if I got it at all as a child, I would certainly have appreciated it then too.

**FM** – Could children get it slightly differently? Children don't understand why you're worried about it. This is it. For a kid this is just it. But what reminded me is her openings are astonishingly distinctive. She has a very particular, very narrow third person point-of-view. As in, it may be third person, she's looking absolutely from the outside, she often doesn't tell you feelings except as she describes their consequences, but you never know more than what the protagonist knows. It's very tightly focalized. She always begins with some kind of unnerving statement. The ones I remember best, *Witch Week*: 'someone in this class is a witch'. *Charmed Life* – I can't remember – something like "Cat and Gwendolen were awfuls."

**CB** – It begins with a steamboat accident on the Thames. I can't remember the first line.

**FM** – And everyone on the steamboat drowned, but Gwendolen didn't drown because she was a witch, and Cat didn't drown because he hung on to Gwendolen. That's a pretty unnerving opening. *The Magicians of Caprona*, which is one of my favourites partially because it does the time-shift thing, where by shifting tense in each sentence she takes us from the far past into the present, astonishingly fast. But again, by making these outrageous statements, that just are, and you are drawn in.

Possibly the best is the opening of *Howl's Moving Castle*. I'm never very good about remembering exact quotes, so I'm sorry about that. 'In the land of Ingary, everybody knows that fairy tales come true. If you're the third of – no, if you're the eldest of three children, you will fail first and worst.'

**CB** – This is her *Pride and Prejudice* opening.

**FM** – It's brilliant! In the sense that almost all *Pride and Prejudice* openings are statements of truisms, which she then unpicks. Of course, *Archer's Goon*, where starts with the ten theses and plants them throughout the text. But it's a really interesting way of proceeding. The only two other writers I can think of that do that are Anne Fine and Hilary McKay. I've just been introduced to Hilary



McKay's *Saffy's Angels* sequence by Hallie O'Donovan, and I'm totally blown away. And if you're into audio books, the first one – but sadly not the other three – is read by Julia Sawalha, and I forgot I was being read to. The others are just ordinary readings, they're lovely, but the first, she's got the characters absolutely nailed.

**CB** – Well, by the way, have you read the *Exiles* series?

**FM** – That's next. You have to let me re-read these four several more times. I'm about to give *Saffy's Angel* to Judith Clute. It's about this weird bohemian household, and it's delightful. Both she and Anne Fine have that same – in *Saffy's Angel*, Bill, the father, lives in town where he's a proper artist with a very expensive studio. And occasionally he comes home to see his family, usually when he's been away long enough to forget what they're really like and has created this fantasy family in his head. But she has this description of how 'Bill has his Sunday afternoon looking at his watch, it was a very distinctive movement, he would swing his arm right out, let the collar slide up, and look at his watch. And the children knew it was time to wave goodbye to father' – which was straight from Nesbit. There's this lovely – how they always enjoyed waving goodbye to father. There's that slight – edge.

**CB** – I think you're right, there is a Nesbitish edge to that, and it reminds me in some ways of the Nesbitish edge to the beginning of *The Lives of Christopher Chant*, since we're talking about. How in *The Lives of Christopher Chant*, who is to become the most powerful wizard, the Chrestomanci of many future books, although this is a prequel, so in some sense we could say, of many past books, is a very small

child. And he's being brought up in a fairly well-to-do Victorian household in which he is brought up essentially by governesses and nurses and – not by his parents at all. He barely knows who his parents are here, they are figures rustling past at the bottom of the staircase. He's worried in case he wouldn't recognize his father.

**FM** – He's only ever seen the top of his father's top hat.

**CB** – Yes. So I think there's an acknowledged debt to Nesbit.

**FM** – If you want to depart just from Jones, there's a whole Nesbit thing running through English children's literature, that's one of the things that makes it so distinctive. If were you going to argue for what it is that makes English writers – I think I do mean English here – stand out, whether good or bad, it's that edge. The only American writer I can think of who's got it actually is Lemony Snicket, Daniel Handler.

**CB** – I've not read the Lemony Snicket books.

**FM** – Daniel Handler, Lemony Snicket – the – what is it called?

**Audience member** – A Series of Unfortunate Events

**FM** – A Series of Unfortunate Events are obviously originally derived from the *Wouldbegoods*. There's a bit at the beginning where the narrator, one of the children, the boy, I think, talks about how their parents have died. 'And if you think we're not really upset by it just because we're not crying, you've never lost anybody you loved.'

**CB** – That's the *Wouldbegoods*.

**FM** – That's Handler, but it's straight from the *Wouldbegoods*.

**CB** – That's like a direct quote. Nesbit should sue from beyond the grave.

**FM** – But he then goes on to honour that. The books feel very Nesbitish all the way through. But he's the only non-Brit I can think of in that category.

**CB** – I suppose Edward Eager, who's another person who had a very conscious debt to Nesbit –

**FM** – He's basically writing extra Nesbits.

**CB & FM** – It's fanfiction.

**FM** – If you haven't read Edgar Eager or you've run out of Nesbit, that is where to go next. His children read Nesbit's in the books.

**CB** – And to be fair to him, he's very out there with it.

**FM** – Totally unabashed. He'd been able to get a contract to write sequels, he would have done.

**SW** – Your conversation led naturally into the context for Diana's books. And both of you started out working on earlier historical periods than you do now. What is it about Diana's works which naturally interest historians?

**CB** – Well, I'm not a historian, but –

**SW** – Historical literature, anyways.

**CB** – That's right. I was originally a Spencerian, and my PhD was on *The Faerie Queene*, many years ago. And I

suppose there are a few connections. One is that's partly Diana's background herself. Not only from her own education, but there are many family connections. Her husband, John Burrow, is a medieval historian of renown. Her son, Colin Burrow, has written a very good book on Spencer himself. So she's living and writing in a kind of media where all of this is very familiar.

To come to brass tacks, there are a couple of books of hers which I think of as particularly Spencerian, namely, *Hexwood* and *The Merlin Conspiracy*. *Hexwood* because, well, I don't know how many of you have read *The Faerie Queene*, Book Five.

**FM** – A few, not many.

**CB** – But if you had, you know that it's Spencer's book about justice. And the main character in Book Five – each of the six books in *The Faerie Queene* is devoted to a particular knight who's the patron knight of the virtue that Spencer's illustrating in that particular book. In the case of Book Five, that knight is Artegal. Artegal has an assistant who was given to him by the goddess Astraea, the goddess of justice, before she fled back to heaven, being somewhat disgusted with the state of things here on earth. And this assistant is an iron man, an iron groom, called Talos. So we have Artegal, the knight of justice, who is assisted by this robot, essentially, who will do his bidding and is invincible. He will defeat whole armies.

Now when you read *Hexwood*, you see that it's all about a strange extraterrestrial organisation, whose symbol is a pair of scales. It's all about justice, in other words. There is, in fact, a character called Artegal. There's another character called Scudamore, if I remember, who's another character from *The Faerie Queene*. There is also a deputy of the god, Mordion, who has an iron groom, who's a kind of robotic assistant, to help him. So there are all these kinds of things there to pick up for Spencerians. But this, in a way, is at quite a 'Hathaway, send a bus' level, it's sort of 'Ah my god, she's referencing *The Faerie Queene* again!'

**FM** – See, I didn't spot any of that.

**CB** – See, the strange thing is, when I mentioned this to Diana, she didn't remember it either. But her husband mentioned it, he was there, it was fine. John said, 'Oh yes, that's there. There is that.' And so on. So there is quite a lot of *Faerie Queene* Book 5 going on in *Hexwood*.

**FM** – I'm so frustrated now. Edward wouldn't let me pull the book back from the publisher when I spotted a reference to *Northanger Abbey* and wanted to add it in.

**CB** – But in a deeper way, *The Merlin Conspiracy* is a Spencerian book because it's not just a matter of reference-spotting. I think the whole ethos, or perhaps, mythos of *The Merlin Conspiracy* is more like what I think of as Spencerian. For those of you who don't know *The Faerie Queene*, it's set in faerieland and, as I mentioned, it's all about different virtues, different virtues for every book. But faerieland is also England. Its queen, Gloriana, is also a type, a faint shadow, of Queen Elizabeth, to whom that poem is dedicated. So there's a way in which faerieland and England have a kind of palimpsestuous relationship.

I was thinking about this as I walked here from the Tube station. My cousin – I don't often come to Belgravia, but my cousin happens to work for the landlord of this pub,

by which I don't mean the guy downstairs, I mean, she's the PA to the Duke of Westminster. And so occasionally I visit her and we go around that bit of Cheshire where the Duke of Westminster is based. And it's full of names which are repeated here in this bit of London, you know, Eaton and Belgrave and so on. And so when I come to this bit of London, I think, it's sort of like some part of Cheshire had, in a fantasy world, been up-planted and down-rooted here.

**FM** – Can I just say that where I live in Tottenham, the names are all the same as they are in Dublin. It's really strange, because it's Palmerston Road. When I've been staying in Dublin, I find myself walking down the road, like the one I used to live on. It's very disorienting. It's magic if it worked: I'd be able to wish myself from one Ranelagh Road to the other.

**CB** – Why yes. Portals at every turn. But in some ways Spencer's faerieland works a little bit like that in relationship to modern England, or rather, sixteenth-century England. But the other thing about Spencer is that he's a very eclectic writer. He had a friend called Gabriel Harvey who was a friend of his from Cambridge, they were students together, and they were obviously good buddies. They published a series of letters between each other. In one of them, Gabriel Harvey, who had obviously read some early drafts of *The Faerie Queene*, and he was criticising it. He said that 'this is a hobgoblin runaway with garlands from Apollo'. And what did he mean by that?

It was partly that Spencer is using, in *The Faerie Queene*, a kind of mish-mash. He's using St. George, he's using classical dryads, he's using abstract virtues, like Charity and Temperance and so on. He's using paenems. He's got Italianate romance that you might have met in Ariosto. He's using lots of Arthurian stuff.

And it's all there together, and Harvey's essentially saying the same thing that Tolkien would later say about Narnia, which is that you can't have all these things together. You can't have these fauns with umbrellas, Beatrix Potter-type animals, and you can't have them mixing up with lions who are meant to be Jesus. It just doesn't work. And for someone of Tolkien's heart or mind, or indeed, Harvey's, you can't, because all these things come from different worlds. And you can't think of a history for them. How could they all come together? What's the storyline behind that? So there is no linguistic history behind that. Lewis didn't care because he too was a Spencerian. Very much so. And he knew what Spencer knew, which is you get a lot from rhetorical effects.

Now when I look at *The Merlin Conspiracy*, I see something which seems to me to be drenched in the spirit of Spencer, that is to say, here we have the Islands of Blest which are a kind of type of England, or Britain, and again, she's throwing in a lot of different kinds of stuff. She's throwing in Welsh figures, Gwyn ap Nudd. She's throwing in the Uffington white horse. She's throwing in personifications of English cities, like Salisbury and London. And she's enjoying that. She's enjoying the heterogeneity of it, I think. And I think it takes a certain kind of taste, which not everybody shares, and, to be fair, not everyone has *The Merlin Conspiracy* as one of their favourite books of hers, but for me, it is one. To me, it's a

Spencerian kind of taste.

**FM** – It's quite consistent, I thought of it in terms of animism. To me, it's a purely animistic text, and therefore the kinds of things you're describing which normally irritate the hell out of me, were fine.

**CB** – It's certainly an animistic text, I'm not going to argue with that.

**FM** – There were no fauns with umbrellas.

**SW** – In a few minutes, we'll need to open the floor for questions, but first, shall we talk about Diana's more recent works?

**FM** – I never did comment on the history issue. I was sitting here thinking about it. I don't think I was ever attracted to Diana's work because of the history aspect. However, having said that, when I came to write about them as criticism, I was bowled over by how well she understood the difference between the past and history. And I think it's the Dalemek sequence. Just astounding. Everything from – she has a proper Marxist understanding of class, so in her Prince and the Pauper story, the pauper cannot pass as a prince because princes don't bear the marks of malnutrition. She has a world in which technology is genuine, which means it's spotty and patchy, and you might be doing something steam-driven and by electricity at the same time as you're doing something else by hand. She's got a real sense of how the world works.

*Spellcoats*, which is a book I never liked as a kid, emerged as one of my favourites. Because the first part of the book is about writing about the past, and the second half of the book is about analysing the past. I know this is not going to make sense; the third half of the book, because it overlaps with all the others, is about how historians then interpret all of those things they've found. And that constant reminder that history is a written text. It has to be a written text, using 'writing' in its broadest sense, because it's not even, as my students like to say, 'oh well, it's all biased'. It's more complicated than that. It's how, why, and where it's biased, that's the interesting thing the truth. And she absolutely gets it.

But I've got to say, there's a reason that Jones probably grabbed me as a kid. It's the rigorous logic of the unravelling. Not just the plot, but the means to understanding, or the means to justice at the end. Because I do have one of those minds which goes 'if this, then that', which means that if I was better at maths, I would probably have ended up in the sciences. Everything I write boils down to 'if this is the case, then that must be the case, therefore'.

What's wonderful about Jones is that she follows that even when the result is upsetting. Perhaps the most impressive bit of *Charmed Life*, which in some ways is the ur-text for everything she does next, is the fact that Gwendolen is perfectly willing to sacrifice her own brother. And that once she escapes, and locks Janet in the world, Janet is locked in the world. There're no quick, easy fixes. Those two things, one of them the logic of Gwendolen's character, the other is the logic of how the magic works, and that total refusal to yield.

# INFERTILITY IN SCIENCE FICTION AS A CONSEQUENCE OF WARFARE

Victor Grech  
with Clare Thake-Vassallo & Ivan Callus

“There is a dark side: new science can have unintended consequences”  
—Martin Rees<sup>1</sup>.

Warfare is an indissoluble aspect of humanity, and is an equally indissoluble part of mythology. Greek mythology is replete with strife between the gods themselves, allegories of human strife, and the most epic aspects were the succession myths, with the primordial couple Gaia and Ouranos overthrown by the Titans, who were, in their turn, overthrown by the Olympians.<sup>2</sup>

Warfare is a common trope in all branches of fiction, including science-fiction (SF), and the old pulp magazines were replete with such stories, narratives that featured exotic weapons and that often had Faustian implications, with devastating consequences. Military organisations take technological advances very seriously, as several military works show,<sup>3</sup> to the extent that the ‘line between science and science fiction [...] has never been totally clear. Today, as the military researches everything from death rays and force fields to Zen and ESP looking for military applications [...] that line certainly isn’t getting any clearer’.<sup>4</sup>

One of the earliest and most famous SF novels dealing with atomic warfare was Herbert George Wells’s *The World Set Free* (1914),<sup>5</sup> which prefigures the misuse of atomic energy as a weapon of mass destruction. Wells was cognizant of the fact that technological development would lead to such deadly weapons as ‘[t]he history of mankind is the history of the attainment of external power. Man is the tool-using, fire-making animal’.<sup>6</sup> Hence his statement seems strangely prescient:

Certainly it seems now that nothing could have been more obvious to the people of the earlier twentieth century than the rapidity with which war was becoming impossible. And as certainly they did not see it [...] until the atomic

bombs burst in their fumbling hands [...] All through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the amount of energy that men were able to command was continually increasing. Applied to warfare that meant that the power to inflict a blow, the power to destroy, was continually increasing [...] There was no increase whatever in the ability to escape [...] Destruction was becoming so facile that any little body of malcontents could use it [...] Before the last war began it was a matter of common knowledge that a man could carry about in a handbag an amount of latent energy sufficient to wreck half a city.<sup>7</sup>

SF authors were more hopeful about the misuse of nuclear power, and crafted stories wherein

the sheer size of the forces nuclear power was expected to place at human disposal became a metaphor for the nearly magical fashion in which heroic scientists could overcome the inconvenient laws of nature and get spaceborne cowboys out to the endless frontier of intergalactic space.<sup>8</sup>

However, the potentially disastrous consequences of uncontrolled technology was also highlighted in stories such as Heinlein’s *Blowups Happen* (1940),<sup>9</sup> which illustrates ‘hopes invested in the salaried but nonetheless independent and idealistic engineers whose initiative is separate from company policy or the pursuit of profit’.<sup>10</sup>

More recently van Vogt’s *Slan* (1946)<sup>11</sup> and Asimov’s

*Foundation* (1951)<sup>12</sup> used nuclear energy copiously, without inflicting mass destruction. But quite tellingly, of the many pre-Hiroshima narratives dealing with nuclear energy in contemporary settings, only Heinlein's *Solution Unsatisfactory* (1941) dealt with nuclear weapons, wherein military scientists developing weapons-grade radioactive dust are continually exposed to radiation.<sup>13</sup>

Warfare can be nuclear, biological, chemical or cyberwarfare. And it is abundantly clear that the entire corpus of work dealing with warfare and SF is too vast to be discussed. Reginald Bretnor has made inroads into this lacuna with three anthologies that assemble both fiction and essays with regard to potential future trends in warfare of all types.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore although the author of this paper is a medical doctor, even the health aspects are too great to realistically discuss in one paper. Hence, only the intersection of infertility in warfare within the genre will be analysed. The approach will be thematic, and will attempt to list and taxonomise all narratives that deal with infertility inflicted by warfare in the SF.

Many of the narratives now appear dated with entirely new ways of waging warfare that were too far-fetched for 'that Buck Rogers stuff', such as electronic warfare,<sup>15</sup> since for the 'present and for the foreseeable future, electronic systems serve and will continue to serve as the foundation of systems for the control of forces and weapons [...] in all branches of the armed forces'.<sup>16</sup>

What follows is a brief reading of key texts, a necessarily concise exercise due to the multitude of narratives that have delved into this intersection.

### INFERTILITY AFTER NUCLEAR WAR

The setting off of the atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki had unintended consequences for SF.

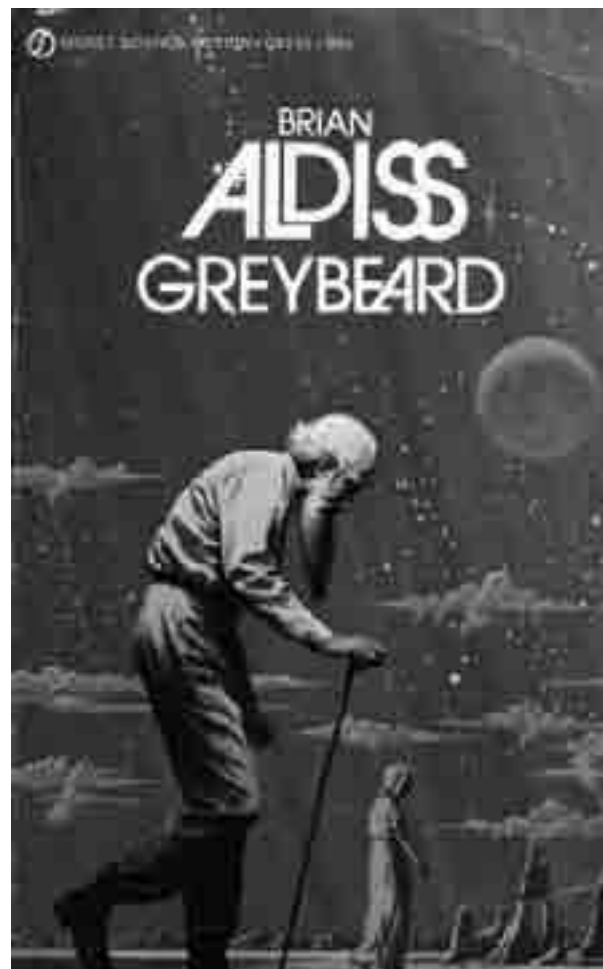
The writers of pulp-magazine science fiction found themselves in an ambivalent position [...] acknowledged as prophets proven right by the course of events. Some of them began new careers as writers of popular science and as consultants and participants in government- and university-sponsored seminars on social and technological change.<sup>17</sup>

Financial gains were also present as

[e]ven those who remained close to their roots in magazine fiction found themselves newly prosperous as [...] For the first time, mass-circulation magazines [...] began to publish stories [...] previously confined to the genre pulps, [with] higher rates paid by such magazines, together with reprint royalties from the SF anthologies rushed into print by eager publishers.<sup>18</sup>

The biological effects of radiation on fertility are very real, as with increasing doses, individuals first experience temporary sterility, followed by permanent sterility.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, space travel itself is probably hazardous even for the developing fetus, as ambient space radiation levels may result in the production of infertile female babies.<sup>20</sup>

It is logical to commence this reading with Brian Aldiss's *Greybeard* (1964)<sup>21</sup> as he deals with the ultimate



dystopian scenario: total global sterility. The novel was written in 1964 and not only portrays the cold-war tensions of the time, but also uses them as a springboard to lead to the cause of human infertility: nuclear bomb testing progressively contaminating the Earth, with radioactivity adversely influencing the entire animal kingdom. As if this were not enough, the first of man's forays in space – by both the 'West' and by the communist block countries – were used to test nuclear weapons in orbit. Aldiss was almost certainly influenced by the then ongoing United States atomic bomb testing in 1958, which included Operations 'Argus' and 'Fishbowl', rocket launched airburst explosions in the Pacific.<sup>22</sup>

Aldiss narrates that the ensuing massive explosions caused the van Allen radiation belts<sup>23</sup> to be thrown into an unusual state of violent activity, causing their contraction on two rapidly successive occasions, ducking the biosphere twice in hard radiation, an unforeseen consequence with extremely deleterious effects on all biological organisms. In the short term, pregnant women miscarried or carried deformed fetuses to term and acute radiation sickness was common. Radiation sickness affected the younger age groups more severely and ranged from a mild, flu-like illness in adults to death, especially in the childhood age group. The novel commences with the youngest human aged fifty years, and the vicissitudes of old age and the inevitable degeneration of civilisation are repeatedly and realistically highlighted. The novel ends with the discovery that a few children are being born since the excess ambient radioactivity had been 'absorbed' by soil, and that women – in a very biblical matriarchical manner as the youngest women are



now in their sixties – can suddenly begin to conceive and bear children.

In SF, post nuclear war infertility dystopian scenarios are not uncommon, and in Harry Harrison's *The Committed Men* (1971) where a future Britain is awash with radioactivity, sterility is common, and the protagonists, a doctor and several companions, attempt to deliver a mutant baby to a group of its own, similar kind, the likely successors of ordinary humanity.<sup>24</sup> Broderick has noted this specific theme, leading to the creation of a 'Homo nuclearus', a

recurring genre ploy associated with the long term effects of nuclear war questions not only how the human species will survive but also in what form [...] the theme of radiation mutation on human and animal life over the years-some suggesting that deliberate experimentation would make it possible to breed a race capable of survival in the hostile post-holocaust environment.<sup>25</sup>

In Octavia Butler's *Dawn* (1988), aliens save a human race devastated by a nuclear war through a program of interbreeding,<sup>26</sup> despite the extremely low probability of this possibility ever coming to pass.<sup>27</sup> The alien 'Oankali' continually seek partner species with whom to intermingle their own genes. This is because the Oankali have managed to evolve specialized organs and subcellular structures with which to manipulate their own genes along with genes assimilated from other species, in order to maximize fitness in different environments and in their own special environment, a self-sustaining starship which is itself a living organism. However, the Oankali tend to repeatedly engineer themselves into an evolutionary dead end, losing all genetic diversity and therefore the ability to adapt to changes, and they recover this diversity by interbreeding with entirely new species.<sup>28</sup> They therefore offer to nurse the survivors back to health and intermarry and interbreed with the humans so as to allow humanity to survive, albeit in half-alien and half-human form.

A battle in space between humans and aliens in Blish's *A Life for the Stars* (1962) leads to radiation exposure of an entire flying human city, with an initial sterility-inducing dose of radiation followed by a lethal dose of radiation.<sup>29</sup> Brinkley's *The Last Ship* (1988) is set in a closer future after a nuclear war, with the crew of a United States Navy guided missile destroyer attempting to re-establish humanity and facing a poor success rate due to the high doses of radiation that the crew had to contend with.<sup>30</sup>

Forced long-term underground shelter after a nuclear war is also depicted as causing sterility among men in the film *World Without End* (1956),<sup>31</sup> and an equivalent state of affairs is portrayed in Pangborn's *The Company of Glory* (1975), where humanity struggles to survive with very decreased fertility and a high rate of birth mutations following a third world war,<sup>32</sup> as well as in Robert's *Molly Zero* (1977).<sup>33</sup> The erroneous belief that high levels of ambient radioactivity would generate a common set of mutation/s that would ensue in entirely new species that would be adapted to radioactivity is perhaps most famously mooted in J. G. Ballard's, *The Voices of Time* (1960),<sup>34</sup> which fulfils 'the traditional role of the poet: to

meditate on time and death'.<sup>35</sup>

Fertile androids are used to replace humanity and thereby overcome the sterility that afflicts humanity after a third world war in *Dream of Victory* (1953),<sup>36</sup> while *American Cyborg: Steel Warrior* (1993), a pastiche of *The Terminator*<sup>37</sup> and *The Children of Men*<sup>38</sup> describes a post-nuclear exchange humanity that is mostly sterile and hunted down by cyborgs, with one human foetus, albeit hand-carried in a bottle and not in the womb.<sup>39</sup>

In *A Boy and His Dog* (1969), a few feral adolescents survive a post-war world, and a boy and his telepathic dog encounter an attractive young girl who seduces the boy and lures him to the ultra-conservative and middle-class 'downunder shelters' where he is to be used as a stud to impregnate women who are losing their fertility, a single fertile man trope that will be examined in greater detail later.<sup>40</sup>

Sterility for the single individual may also be depicted as a consequence of warfare, and in del Rey's *Unreasonable Facsimile* (1952), a female scientist working on a model of a force field as a defence against an atomic attack is accidentally sterilised by the fields that she is adjusting, and during the hurried assembly of the field during an impending attack, a soldier also experiences the same fate.<sup>41</sup> Futuristic computer games have also specifically depicted sterility due to nuclear explosions, and in the PlayStation game *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* (2008), one of the protagonists states that she is sterile as a consequence of irradiation due to atomic bomb testing in the 1950's, specifically mentioning the testing at Bikini Atoll.<sup>42</sup>

Moreover, warfare has also been depicted as causing sterility on extrasolar, human colonised planets as in Morris' *Returning Creation* (1984), resulting in a populace wherein the most prized abilities are fertility and sexual prowess.<sup>43</sup> Aliens have also been reproductively challenged by warfare, and in Harrison's *Invasion: Earth* (1982), two tropes are combined in two alien species, ex-combatants, who are portrayed as radiation damaged, with a decline in birth rate and an increased mutation in offspring.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, the *Doctor Who* television episode *The Leisure Hive* (1980) also portrayed an alien race rendered sterile by a war.<sup>45</sup> Sterility is mentioned in other *Doctor Who* episodes,<sup>46</sup> and indeed, the Time Lords themselves are all sterile.<sup>47</sup> Individuals may also find themselves rendered sterile through warfare, as a side-effect of weapons discharge as shown in the anime *Eureka Seven* (2005).<sup>48</sup> And finally, the mutated alien survivors of a nuclear war are also depicted to be sterile in the anime *The City of Gold* (1987).<sup>49</sup>

A variation on this theme is the novum of having just one fertile man in the entire world as a result of a nuclear disaster, as expounded in Frank's *Mr. Adam* (1946).<sup>50</sup> Authors of such stories 'were not really reacting to the bomb at all: they were glibly assimilating it to SF's long-established conventions. Nearly every aspect of nuclear doom was trivialized in some form or other'.<sup>51</sup> This particular novel was influenced, in the first instance, by Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826),<sup>52</sup> which inspired the silent comedy *The Last Man on Earth* (1924),<sup>53</sup> which in turn inspired the semi-musical comedy *It's Great to Be Alive* (1933).<sup>54</sup>

An analogous situation exists in nature with regard to

males of the African Topi antelopes where the males are so forcefully pursued by pushy females that they refuse the advances of previous partners and even attack them to drive them off.<sup>55</sup> Likewise, Barr's *The Man with only One Head* (1955) postulates almost universal male sterility due to the explosion of a cobalt bomb that creates a blanket of fog around the Earth. Initially only one man remains fertile but fertility is eventually restored to all men by the discovery of a new medical treatment.<sup>56</sup> Men are also rendered almost universally sterile in the aftermath of a world war in Borodin's *Spurious Sun* (1948) wherein the few men who remain fertile are blacks, and red-headed, blue-eyed and black-bearded.<sup>57</sup> Similarly but without warfare, in Weston's *Comet Z* (1934), sterility afflicts all but one man after the Earth passes through a comet's tail.<sup>58</sup> The protagonist uses his crucial status to force universal disarmament, until the comet's effects dissipates. A slightly different approach is taken in Farmer's *Flesh* (1960) which follows an astronaut on an 800 year space trip, mostly in a state of suspended animation, and who returns to find an Earth populated entirely by women, an apt fate for a man called Space Commander Stagg.<sup>59</sup>

Fertility is controlled by a handful of men in H. M. Hoover's, *Children of Morrow* (1973), where a post-nuclear warfare, patriarchal and fundamentalist dystopia, with mostly infertile men, is run by a few remaining fertile men.<sup>60</sup>

Another interesting variation on the warfare theme is the survival of just one single couple after a war that is provoked by Satan himself, in Knight's short story *Not with a Bang* (1961).<sup>61</sup> Humanity's lot is shown to be redeemable as the couple are scientists who have a time machine, and intend to return to the past in order to restart the race. Similarly, in Bester's *5,271,009* (1954), the protagonist is the last man in a devastated Earth and encounters the last woman.<sup>62</sup> This trope is prefigured by Grainville's *Le Dernier Homme* (1805), wherein the entire future Earth becomes sterile and the last man resists manipulation to father a new breed of monstrous cannibals by choosing death instead. This dystopic novel, which was published posthumously, as has been shown above, has had its trope recycled many times in the past two centuries.<sup>63</sup>

## INFERTILITY AFTER BIOLOGICAL AND CHEMICAL WARFARE

Biological warfare has also been depicted as a threat to human fertility. A contraceptive virus that would control rabbit or rodent populations has actually been mooted in the scientific literature,<sup>64</sup> and the main concern has always been that such viruses may cross species, a process that has actually been demonstrated.<sup>65</sup> This may potentially include include and involve the human species, as explored in Wyndham's *Consider Her Ways* (1979).<sup>66</sup> This trope was revisited in Proctor's *The Chicago Conversion* (1985), this time with humans producing a bacterial weapon against an alien invasion force, only to find out that the weapon blights food crops, causes mutations and stillbirths in animals, and respiratory ailments in humans living in areas with high concentrations of the bacteria.<sup>67</sup>

Cloning as an alternative solution to racial extinction is a common trope, and cloning after a war fought with

biological and nuclear weapons is expounded by Kate Wilhelm in *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang* (1974).<sup>68</sup> It is relevant to note, at this point, that despite qualms raised by religions and ethicists with regard to cloning, out of a world population of around 7 billion, more than 10 million are monozygotic (so-called 'identical') twins or triplets, natural clones of each other.

Brian Stableford's *Inherit the Earth* (1999) describes infertility as the result of deliberate biological warfare with micro-organisms that attack the uterus. The author then describes how this is overcome by the development of an artificial uterus,<sup>69</sup> and similarly, in Hamilton's *Confederation* universe, exowombs are also used for the treatment of fertility problems. Interestingly, Hamilton then projects the use of exowombs to rapidly boost the population numbers of extrasolar colonies from pre-fertilised zygotes in order to more rapidly make these colonies self-sufficient in terms of numbers of human inhabitants, particularly in the event of impending war.<sup>70</sup>

However, SF has dealt with the human fate after global warfare in diverse ways, not only leading to sterility, and perhaps most famously in Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959), the result of a superpower nuclear exchange is not sterility but widespread genetic mutation.<sup>71</sup> In this classic novel, radiation fallout causes genetic mutations in all surviving flora and fauna. Children born with deformities are extended the protection of the Church and even have an official patron, Saint Raul the Cyclopean (presumably a radiation mutated individual), patron of the misborn. It is for this very reason that these children come to be called the 'Pope's nephews' or the 'Pope's children', the symbolic offspring of an individual with self-imposed infertility due to abstinence.

More recently, in Simmons' *The Ninth of Av* (2002), an epidemic created by Arabs to destroy Jews backfires, killing 97% of the world's population, and leaving alive only a few thousand humans who, ironically, are all Jews, albeit sterile.<sup>72</sup> An unusual form of biological warfare is practised in Vance's *The Asutra* (1974), with the barbaric male-only Roguskhohi humanoids engineered for biological warfare, unremittingly lustful and who can only mate with human females, having no females of their own ilk. The resulting offspring have no genetic relationship whatsoever to the mother who is intentionally also rendered sterile by this process.<sup>73</sup>

Chemical warfare is depicted in Jones' *Implosion* (1967) where the USSR deliberately contaminates Great Britain's drinking water, leading to almost universal and irreversible female sterility.<sup>74</sup> Since the nation risks dying out, legislation is passed to force the few remaining fertile women into breeding camps, a trope that was famously amplified in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986).<sup>75</sup> The problem spreads worldwide as various countries also discover the chemical agent and sterilise perceived rival countries. Similarly, in Azzopardi's 'Dark Rain' (1997), biochemical warfare causes worldwide sterility, with the occasional child being born and providing a glimmer of hope that the race will eventually be perpetuated.<sup>76</sup>

Infertility may also be a cause and not an effect of warfare and only three examples will be given: alien-alien, alien-human and human-human warfare. Alien infertility leading to warfare among two intelligent alien species is seen in *Hunter's Moon* (1985) on the extra-solar

planet Medea. Fuxes are six to eight legged creatures that resemble a cross between a fox and a centaur while the balloons are literally balloons filled with hydrogen for buoyancy. The two species coexist peacefully and when balloons die, they drift to the ground and decompose or are eaten by fuxes. However, in a circumscribed area of Medea, the balloons change this behaviour pattern, allowing themselves to drift off and die elsewhere. Shortly afterwards, the fuxes experience an increased incidence of miscarriages and infertility and blame this on the balloons' new and unnatural behaviour. The fuxes declare war against the balloons and feel vindicated when they discover that fuxes that eat balloons subsequently give birth successfully. The human colonists discover that balloons concentrate manganese, a trace element that is vital for the fuxes' fertility, and the humans therefore abort the war by providing the fuxes with manganese themselves.<sup>77</sup>

There is a human parallel here in that deficiency in vitamins or trace elements may well result in morbidity and mortality in the developing human fetus. Probably the most well known and preventable cause of foetal malformation in humans is folic acid deficiency which predisposes to neural tube defects such as spina bifida.<sup>78</sup>

Alien infertility prompts a stealthy attack on humanity in Asimov's *The Gods Themselves* (1984). The alien inhabitants of a planet in a parallel universe are trisexual and the sexual act requires the absorption of energy from sunlight. However, the aliens' sun is waning, and the aliens therefore manipulate the transfer of energy from this, our universe, to theirs, a process that will eventually lead to the explosion of our sun.<sup>79</sup>

Finally, human-human warfare is depicted in Nourse's *Raiders from the Rings* (1962). After a sojourn in space of any length with exposure to cosmic rays, men (who then become known as 'spacers') are unable to father female children, so they steal women from Earth as future mates. Interestingly, despite their radiation exposure, spacers are neither more prone to sterility nor more prone to father mutations. However, they are distinguished by white hair by the end of their teens and tend to live longer than the norm.<sup>80</sup> The author, a doctor, attempts to explain these facts by asserting that male sperm that carry an X chromosome have this chromosome put out of commission, so that the X behaves like a Y. Naturally, the protagonist, a young spacer, does not know what it means to have a sister. The story poses some unanswered questions in that we are never told whether cosmic radiation affects females in any way, or whether this radiation has any effects on other species. Interestingly, longevity in spacers occurs at the price of partial infertility in that spacers can only father males.

It is worth pointing out, that in most mammalian species, gender is determined by the XY sex chromosomes. Females are homogametic with two of the same kind of sex chromosome (XX) while males are heterogametic having two different sex chromosomes (XY). Some species (including humans) have a sex-determining region, a gene located on the Y chromosome that determines maleness. In humans, males produce Y and X bearing sperm while females produce only X bearing ova. During conception, it is therefore sperm that determines gender such that an X bearing sperm will produce a female baby because of

an XX combination, while a Y bearing sperm will produce a male baby because of an XY combination. In the case of 'spacers', it is therefore impossible for the X chromosome to behave like a Y chromosome but it would be possible for the Y to behave like an X if the SRY gene were knocked out of action, producing only females.

## CONCLUSION

The individuals who first explored the possibilities and the catastrophic consequences of uncontrolled atomic energy, SF authors, were unwilling to believe that weapon of mass destruction would be used on Earth. Even Cartmill, whose *Deadline* (1944) described a 'nuclear bomb that was sufficiently close to the one under construction at Los Alamos to earn both Campbell and Cartmill visits from security agents',<sup>81</sup> set the action on a distant alien planet with humanoid but tailed aliens, and not on Earth.<sup>82</sup>

While SF authors may have been initially pleased with their futuristic predictions coming true, as 'their fiction developed and controlled nuclear energy long before the Army got around to it',<sup>83</sup> like the general populace, they were also 'disappointed in and fearful of the ways in which the government proposed to handle its "ultimate weapon,"' the bomb as ultimate deterrent in a MAD (mutually assured destruction) stalemate.<sup>84</sup>

The astounding power of the new weaponry of mass destruction even gave SF authors pause, when mankind 'learned on August 6, 1945, that he alone is big enough to kill himself, or to live forever'.<sup>85</sup> Truly 'writers seemed to have difficulty adjusting to the scale of the new weapon'.<sup>86</sup> Even individuals such as Asimov regretted being 'salvaged into respectability at the price of a nuclear war hanging like a sword of Damocles over the world forever'.<sup>87</sup>

The genre, in its usual optimistic vein, bounced back, responding with stories that depicted far-fetched devices that would neutralise atomic explosions, such as force fields, a subject raised seriously by Campbell in an *Astounding* editorial.<sup>88</sup> In this way, new weapons were seen as 'not an apocalyptic horror, but a problem to be solved',<sup>89</sup> albeit often at the expense of dystopias, as the genre often predicated

post-holocaust life as a site for ideological contestation, [...] renderings of long-term post-nuclear survival appear highly reactionary, and seemingly advocate reinforcing the symbolic order of the status quo via the maintenance of conservative social regimes of patriarchal law (and lore).<sup>90</sup>

Broderick has taxonomised these disaster stories in nuclear war, a classification that may be extended to any form of warfare dealing with weapons of mass destruction, into

three distinct ways in which people might respond to threatened atomic war: prevention by heightened surveillance and counterespionage, resignation and soescaping from targeted areas to assumed havens, and immunization from attack by using a comparable or superior defensive technology.<sup>91</sup>

Broderick has further taxonomised these disaster stories into

at least three distinct discursive modes [...], renewal films, which posit the war as promoting socio-cultural rebirth usually in the form of the heterosexual couple, the family, or the small community; catharsis films, which graphically depict the destructive impact of nuclear war and the problematics of survival; and terminal films which portray the end of the human species by showing long-term survival as impossible.<sup>92</sup>

More mainstream authors who have gone 'slipstream' and delved in the genre, such as Wylie, Caidin, and Shute have been more realistic and have more 'successfully outlined the horrors of the Nuclear Age, [...] struck much closer to home than the fantastic extrapolations of most SF.'<sup>93</sup> It is almost as if authors were expressing a 'fantasy of [...] Armageddon as the anticipated war which will annihilate the oppressive burdens of (post)modern life and usher in the nostalgically yearned-for less complex existence of agrarian toil and social harmony through ascetic spiritual endeavors'.<sup>94</sup>

The situation today is such that the populace is blasé about advanced warfare, and indeed '[k]iller robots seem to be everywhere'.<sup>95</sup> Virtual warfare in the form of computer games is widely practised on individual computers, and across the Internet, to the extent that books now exist that purport to 'allow anyone with no programming background to make exciting war games for Windows'.<sup>96</sup>

These narratives are clearly examples of 'the disaster, unexperienced. It is what escapes the very possibility of experience, it is the limit of writing. This must be repeated: the disaster describes'.<sup>97</sup> However, these stories all share the same trope, 'visions of [...] Armageddon concerns itself primarily with survival as its dominant discursive mode',<sup>98</sup> that of the happy ending, with humanity somehow surviving after hubris is punished by tragedy. These stories are therefore representative of the corpus of entire genre, which tends toward optimism, after recounting stories that constitute *gedankenexperiments*, 'Promethean and Frankensteinian myth-warnings of unrestrained alchemical and technological advance'.<sup>99</sup>

Chernus has observed that these stories also partake of our desire to see heroic figures perform heroic deeds, as

this scenario speaks not to the logical mind but to the unconscious yearning in each of us to be a hero. The myth of the heroic survivors [...] is merely one instance of the more general myth of the hero, which is perennially popular in our culture as in every other.<sup>100</sup>

These modern myths 'to varying degrees rely upon discursive strategies which combine rhetoric and imagery to warn explicitly the human protagonists (and by extension, the audience) of the dangers of [...] conflict' and by further extrapolation, the foolishness of the unleashing of any other kind of mass destruction since they 'relate cautionary tales with regard to potential obsessive overreaching, with insufficient thought as to the consequences of our actions'.<sup>101</sup>

If that were not enough, SF has further admonished

us, as already mentioned, with terminal stories that depict mankind's extinction, narratives such as *On the Beach* (1957)<sup>102</sup> and *Dr. Strangelove* (1964),<sup>103</sup> should we fail to heed these warnings.

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- 99 Broderick, 'Surviving Armageddon', p. 363.
- 100 Ira Chernus, *Dr. Strangegood: On the Symbolic Meaning of Nuclear Weapons* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1986), p.8.
- 101 Broderick, 'Surviving Armageddon', p. 368.
- 102 Nevil Shute, *On the Beach* (London: Heinemann, 1957).
- 103 *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, dir. by Stanley Kubrick (Columbia Pictures, January 1964).



# RESONANCES

Stephen Baxter

One of my favourite novels as a boy was a story of worldwide climatic disaster. Published in 1967, it opens as the heroes vacation in twenty-first-century London: 'Over the now smokeless city the sky was an intense blue ... Most of the old historic buildings remained, carefully restored, nestling in the bottoms of white-walled canyons ...' But, 'poised over the southern part of the city was a monstrous black thundercloud.' Soon a flash flood is overwhelming London: 'The water must be surging down from the heights like Hampstead and Highgate ..' The disaster has been deliberately caused. The heroes, daunted, return to their base: 'We're up against something really big this time, Scarlet,' says Captain Blue. 'Never seen the Old Man so worried ...' Yes, this book-length disaster saga is a tie-in novel based on Gerry Anderson's *Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons*, by an author called John Theydon.

Will tie-ins ever be respectable? Major writers like Greg Bear and James Blish worked for *Star Trek*, for example. I'm currently working on a *Doctor Who* tie-in myself, following in the estimable footsteps of Michael Moorcock. Certainly tie-ins can be important for the reader, as a bridge from other media into book-reading and buying.

That was what John Theydon's Gerry Anderson books were for me. Growing up in the pre-video 1960s, when the shows themselves were restricted to a weekly thirty-minute black and white hit, I gorged on the tie-in material – the brightly coloured comics, the annuals, and the books. From 1960 to 1971 the Gerry Anderson puppet properties were the basis of over sixty books published in the UK, including eighteen novels. Of this output John Theydon contributed a remarkable fifteen titles, two storybooks and thirteen novels, totalling something like half a million words, all delivered between 1965 and 1969.

But who was John Theydon?

It turns out that 'John Theydon' was a pseudonym for John William Jennison, a very prolific writer of genre fiction starting from around 1945. Details are scarce; Jennison is one of a generation of such authors who remained reticent about their personal lives, perhaps because of the perceived disreputability of the 'pulp' of those days. What we do know is largely thanks to some detective work by Steve Holland, who very kindly shared his researches with me (and see Steve's excellent survey *The Mushroom Jungle: A History of Postwar Paperback Publishing*, Zeon, 1993).

So we know that John William Jennison was born in London in 1911. Nothing appears to be known of Jennison or his work before his first publications after the Second World War – which happened to be an extraordinary time for British publishing. Paper rationing remained in



force, and writers returning from war service found their old markets had dried up. It was a tempting ground for what Steve Holland calls 'mushroom publishers' – so named by their writers because of their here today-gone tomorrow nature – who could sell tens of thousands of copies of almost anything, if only they could get the paper to print it. It was an age of opportunity for writers who could churn out quick product in the favoured genres of gangster fiction, sexy romance, westerns and science fiction.

And it was in this period that Jennison, aged 34 at the end of the war, started to sell stories and short novels. His early works were westerns, some under the pseudonym 'John Theydon', such as *Frontier Sheriff* (Curtis Warren, 1949): 'I'll fill yuh so full o' lead yuh'll sink thru' yore boots' (p60).

Because the authors had to share 'house names' with other writers, it has taken careful research by Steve Holland and others even to figure out who wrote what. Steve has identified eight Jennison science fiction titles



of the period, based on a comparison of themes, names, characteristic stylistic tics, and various chance finds of documentation. And if you read Jennison's fast-paced near-future adventures of fantastic machines and hostile aliens you can see why he was a good fit to write for the Anderson shows. *Zero Field* (as Gill Hunt, Curtis Warren, 1952) features a very Andersonian scheme to use atomic energy to melt the Antarctic ice cap, thereby liberating mineral wealth and new agricultural land. In *Conquerors of Venus* (as by Edgar Rees Kennedy, Self, 1953) atomic ships from the 'West Zone' and 'East Zone' race to be the first to land on Venus, a world of pelting rain, spectacular jungles and monsters like 'a cross between one of them brontosaurus characters and the Eiffel Tower' (p65). Jennison's science fiction career was brief, but from what I've read his work, it was of pretty good quality for the times. He also took the trouble to get the science right, a rarity among his contemporaries from my reading.

Meanwhile some of the writers who shared house names with Jennison went on to wider recognition. They included EC Tubb, and John Brunner, who sold his first novel at age 17 in 1951.

The age of the mushroom publishers was soon over. The lifting of paper rationing in 1953 brought the entry of the major publishers into the paperback market; the final straw was an obscenity prosecution of the publishers of the 'Hank Janson' gangster novels. As for Jennison, he rather disappeared from view. Steve Holland thinks he might have turned to writing romance stories, or working on D. C. Thomson comics.

The next of Jennison's works we do know of, however, was a storybook about Gerry Anderson's *Supercar*: 'Trailing jet vapours against the cloudless blue of the Californian sky, Supercar flashed westwards across the snow-capped peaks of the Sierra Nevada ...' (p5). *Supercar on the Black Diamond Trail* was published by World Distributors four years after the first broadcast of Anderson's show about the glamorous vehicle of the title. Anderson's puppet shows had been the subject of publishing projects since 1958. Jennison's first effort was evidently satisfactory, and in 1965 he was commissioned to write three more books based on Anderson's latest hit show, *Stingray*, a storybook for World, and two novels for 'Armada Paperbacks for Boys & Girls', an excellent line priced within the reach of many kids: 'You have seen them on television – Troy Tempest, "Phones", Atlanta, and the bewitching Marina ... Now for the first time you can read of their exciting adventures, and you will be enthralled!' (*Stingray*, Armada, 1965).

It would be interesting to know how Jennison got the job. Anderson's empire was always a young operation. To editor Howard Elson, who had joined straight from school at age 16, Jennison, aged 54 in 1965, must have seemed a remote figure, but Elson (in an interview with the Gerry Anderson Complete Comics History website) said simply, 'He [Jennison] was great. You could ring him up, and it was like a production line ...'



By the time his last *Stingray* novel was published, Jennison had already turned to his next challenge: writing for *Thunderbirds*, for which he was to deliver six novels within two years. And in these books – even though they were produced by two different publishers! – Jennison was able to deliver a continuing story arc, based on the development of International Rescue's relationship with its nemesis, the villainous Hood. The best of these books is probably *Thunderbirds: Ring of Fire* (Armada, 1966) in which the characters are crushed by multiple disasters: a Chilean earthquake and consequent nuclear meltdown (shades of Japan, 2011), a crashing Thunderbird, and threats to Tracy Island: "Jeff ... buried his face in his hands. This could be the end of everything ..." (p83).

By 1967 Jennison was working on stories featuring Century 21's latest hero: Captain Scarlet. Given the rescue-organisation premise of *Thunderbirds*, Jennison's dramas for that show had necessarily concerned relatively small-scale operations. By contrast the *Scarlet* novels, based on a show about a world at war against the elusive alien Mysterons, gave Jennison the chance to portray peril on a global scale. In these books the Mysterons attack or subvert the greatest projects of twenty-first century mankind, such as the world food supply, global power production, and, in the first novel, global weather control. An interesting strand is Jennison's exploration of the Captain Scarlet concept itself: how can you destroy the indestructible man? Captured by Captain Black, Scarlet "wondered how the Mysterons planned to destroy him. An explosion big enough to shatter him beyond retro-metabolism would wreck the village. An acid bath? His skin crawled as he speculated on the possibilities" (*Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons*, p97).

Jennison's final contributions to the Anderson universe were two novels based on the last 'Supermarionation' show, *The Secret Service*. Jennison captures this eccentric show's gentle humour, but it was a downbeat end to this part of his career.

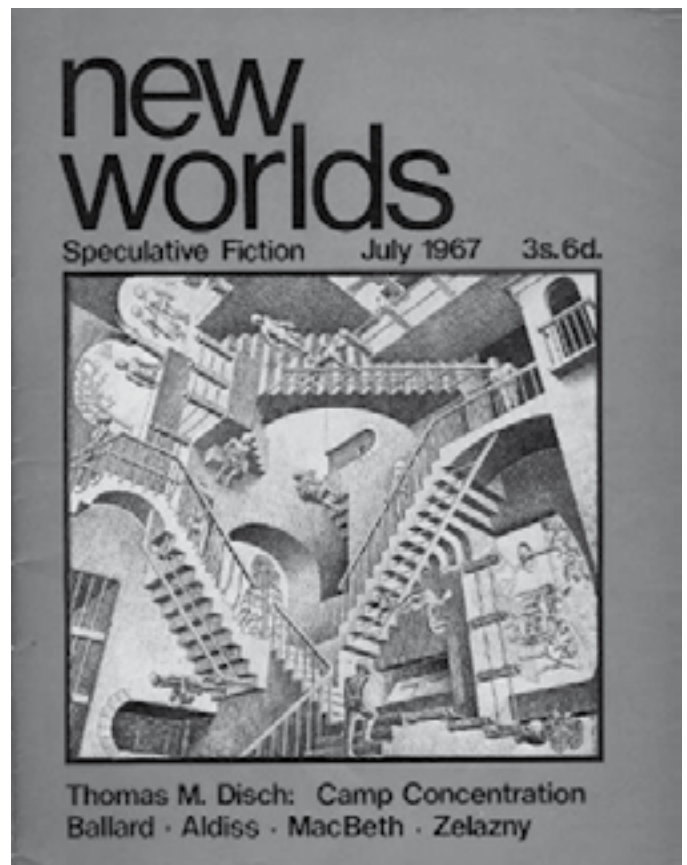
What came next for Jennison? After 1969 he disappears from view again. Steve Holland suspects he may have contributed text serials to girls' comics, and perhaps hospital romance novelettes. He moved to Exmouth, Devon around 1970, and may have semi-retired. John Jennison died in Exmouth in 1980, aged 69. As Steve Holland sums him up: "He must have written at least 150 books ... Amazing how someone so prolific can be so forgotten."

Forgotten? Not quite. Through his 'Supermarionation' novels and storybooks, this pulp-era veteran will always be remembered by readers of a certain age. His books were as far as I remember the first I bought for myself, thus helping to transition me from comics and toys to the adult world of book-buying, and also establishing the course of my own future career. For all of which I will be eternally grateful to John William Jennison, and tie-in writers of today can, I predict, expect similar thanks from generations to come.

# KINCAID IN SHORT: THE HEAT DEATH OF THE UNIVERSE

Paul Kincaid

1. 'The Heat Death of the Universe' was the first published story by Pamela Zoline. It first appeared in *New Worlds* 173, July 1967. It has since become virtually the defining new wave story, but it raises one interesting question: is it science fiction?
2. As Zoline defines the Heat Death of the Universe: 'It has been held that the Universe constitutes a thermodynamically closed system, and if this were true it would mean that a time must finally come when the Universe "unwinds" itself, no energy being available for use.' (54-5)
3. The story comprises 54 numbered paragraphs, many of which are no more than a line or two long. Some of the paragraphs are given a subhead in small capitals.
4. Paragraph 22 reads in full:  
AT LUNCH ONLY ONE GLASS OF MILK IS SPILLED.  
At lunch only one glass of milk is spilled.
5. By the late '60s, when this story appeared, knowledge of the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein had escaped the academy. Wittgenstein wrote all his books in numbered paragraphs; it seems probable that this story is deliberately designed to echo the chill intellectualism of his work.
6. The majority of the paragraphs tell, through disconnected vignettes, the story of one day in the life of a bored, stressed housewife in suburban California.
7. These narrative passages are interspersed with passages which spell out philosophical or scientific notions, including ontology, entropy, light, Dada and love. It is clear that we are meant to bring these notions to bear upon the narrative that surrounds them, though the connection isn't always or immediately obvious.
8. There is a further disconnect in the language used in the two types of passage. Though the narrative passages are presented in an impersonal, almost anthropological manner, as though written by an outside observer for an audience not expected to have any emotional engagement with the experience or fate of a Californian housewife, their language remains accessible, commonplace. The 'scientific' passages, in contrast, casually employ academic terms and constructions. Entropy is 'A quantity introduced in the first place to facilitate the calculations, and to give clear expression to the results of thermodynamics' (53); Dada is 'a nihilistic precursor of surrealism' (57).
9. Some of these passages read like quotations (paragraph 49 is headed: 'WEINER ON ENTROPY')



(63), presumably Norbert Weiner), though at no point are we given the origins of the quotations.

is a person for whom the modern world means extreme isolation.

10. The central character in the story is Sarah Boyle. The only other named character is her mother-in-law, Mrs David Boyle, who is, significantly, not given her own name. Sarah's husband does not appear, we learn nothing about him, not even his name. Sarah has children, also un-named (paragraph 31: 'Sarah Boyle is never quite sure how many children she has' (58)). The day whose events are recounted in this story is the birthday of one of the children.
11. Had the story been published a few years later, or elsewhere than in a science fiction magazine, it would probably have been proclaimed as postmodern, which it undoubtedly is. That does not resolve the question of whether it is science fiction.
12. The story we are told is, unquestionably, mundane, mainstream, mimetic, realist. We are taken through the events of one day in the life of Sarah Boyle, a day in which she gives the children breakfast, cleans the house, goes shopping, stages a birthday party for one of the children. Nothing overtly fantastic happens at any point in the story. The setting is contemporary with the composition of the story, or even slightly in the past, it takes place recognisably in this world, it contains numerous references to familiar aspects of ordinary life at that time and in that place: "'They're tigerific!' says Tony the Tiger' (51).
13. The story is one of mental breakdown. Sarah is overwhelmed by the very ordinariness of everyday life, the remorseless and inescapable drudgery of a life without intellectual rewards. She is a clever woman, well educated, who knows about Dada and the heat death of the universe. As we are told, in paragraph 30: 'Sarah Boyle is a vivacious and witty young wife and mother, educated at a fine Eastern college, proud of her growing family which keeps her happy and busy around the house, involved in many hobbies and community activities, and only occasionally given to obsessions concerning Time/Entropy/Chaos and Death' (58). Only one part of this statement is a lie. But the busyness allows no outlet for her wit, her vivacity, her education. It is the closing in of daily life that she sees as Time/Entropy/Chaos, and these are all forms of Death, whether physical or mental.
14. Sarah is the only living thing in her world. Her husband is entirely absent. Her mother-in-law is clearly nothing more than an adjunct to her own similarly absent husband. The children are things, encumbrances, interruptions into the rational order that cannot even be numbered. They count for nothing. They add nothing to who she is. This
15. Estrangement from the real, isolation, breakdown; these are all things that feed readily into science fiction. But they are not presented as in any way unreal, there aren't even visions that take us, at least mentally, outside the everyday of the story.
16. Only in the very last paragraph, when the breakdown finally overwhelms her, when she floods the sink, bursts into tears, begins to break the glasses and dishes she is supposed to be washing, does the writing finally break away from the quiet, dispassionate account of Sarah's day-to-day experience. Only now, right at the climax of her terror and dread, do the sentences begin to stretch and break, does the imagery begin to diverge from the straightforwardly real. She throws eggs. 'They go higher and higher in the stillness, hesitate at the zenith, then begin to fall away slowly, slowly, through the fine, clear air' (65). The moment freezes, the story ends, her madness has locked her away from the simple passage of time. It is a small metaphorical moment in a story in which the very lack of metaphor has emphasised the terrible weight of reality under which Sarah is being crushed.
17. But one metaphor does not make the story fantastic. One climactic image that illustrates the way her mind has finally broken away from reality is not enough to transform this story from the mimetic to the science fictional. And yet it was published as science fiction, it continues to be regarded as one of the signature texts of new wave science fiction. How can this be?
18. If the story that we are being told is intensely realist, perhaps we should turn instead to the lens through which we are invited to view the story.
19. In the very first paragraph we are told that ontology is 'That branch of metaphysics which concerns itself with the problem of the nature of existence or being' (50).
20. In other words, in the title and the first paragraph, Zoline is directing us how to read her story. It is not so much that entropy is a metaphor that informs the story, as that everyday reality for millions of ordinary women around the world is a direct expression, an embodiment, of entropy. The difference is that entropy offers a potential way out: 'It is by no means certain, however, that the Universe can be considered as a closed system in this sense' (55); but reality offers no way out for Sarah Boyle.

21. Entropy was, of course, the tutelary deity of the British new wave. From Ballard's empty swimming pools to Aldiss's constant visions of empty existence, the stories that gave *New Worlds* its peculiar flavour in the late 1960s were crowded with images of things running down, of ennui, of loss, of a universe that does not measure up to the desires and expectations of those of us caught within its web. It was a time of the counter-culture, of drugs and loud music and sexual liberation and a highly coloured rejection of the grey conformity that had come to characterise the post-war world. It was a time when, very briefly, the popular mood and the political establishment shared a sense of liberalism: homosexuality was decriminalised, abortion was legalised, capital punishment was banned. It was a time when science fiction was suddenly awakening to half a century of literary experimentation that had, to this point, passed it by, and modernist devices such as stream of consciousness and unreliable narrators were finding their way into a hitherto conservative genre. It was a time when science fiction writers looked around and tried to encompass the whole multicoloured confusion of contemporary life in their fiction. And the stories they wrote in response were of things falling apart, the centre not holding, entropy ruling the day.
22. Pamela Zoline was an American resident in London, an outsider with an outsider's sensitivity for the mood swings and manners of her adopted home.
23. The story she wrote as a result pushed every single one of the new wave buttons. If she had set out deliberately to contrive an archetypal new wave story she could not have done a better job. But does that make it science fiction?
24. And while we remember the new wave's discovery of modernism, let us not forget Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). Another story that occupies one day in the life of a woman, another story that builds up to a party and its aftermath, another story that involves a breakdown, another story about a woman trapped in a life she feels powerless to escape. Though I would hesitate to describe 'The Heat Death of the Universe' as a postmodern revisiting of *Mrs Dalloway*, it is hard not to see one as an influence upon the other. [Thanks to Maureen Kincaid Speller for this insight.]
25. Even at the height of the magazine's proto-modernist, pseudo-avant garde experimentation, most *New Worlds* stories retained some link with the expected characteristics of science fiction. Ballard had his dead astronauts in orbit around the earth, Aldiss played with time or the nature of reality. They were doing something different with the form, but they were still recognisably within the continuum of science fiction. Zoline's story does not conform in that way.
26. If science fiction purely lies in the application of any of a set of commonly recognised tropes or characteristics – space travel, aliens, robots, the future – then 'The Heat Death of the Universe' is not science fiction. If science fiction lies purely in the furniture of the story, then 'The Heat Death of the Universe' is not science fiction.
27. And yet, the story belongs so clearly within the context of the leading science fiction magazine of its day that it seems perverse to declare that it is not science fiction.
28. The answer, I suspect, is that science-fictionality lies not, or not solely, in the story being told; but rather, in the way we choose to read that story. Science fiction is as much a reading protocol as it is a set of characteristic tropes.
29. Pamela Zoline very carefully and deliberately constructs the lens through which we are meant to read this story, the protocols we are intended to employ. She calls her story 'The Heat Death of the Universe', so before we even begin to read we are clued to expect something entropic at the heart of what is coming up. The opening paragraph does not introduce a character or an action or even a location. Rather, the first words of the story proper that we encounter are: '1. ONTOLOGY', and the paragraph then touches upon 'the problems of the nature of existence' (50). This, we can tell immediately, is no conventional narrative, and the idea will be central.
30. Science fiction is the literature of ideas. We don't hear that so often these days, but in the 60s and 70s it was a commonplace. Here we are clearly meant to see the idea as hero.
31. Paragraph 2 introduces a setting: 'a pale blue morning sky', but the conventionality of this setting is immediately subverted. 'The earth rolls and the sun appears to mount, ... babies' fingernails grow as does the hair of the dead in their graves, and in egg timers the sands fall and the eggs cook on' (50). We are located and dislocated at once, we are in a specific morning, but one that is also universal, a morning that embraces birth and death, all of which is subsumed into the domesticity of boiling an egg. We are introduced to domesticity before we are introduced to any character. We must read this story as being more about the situation: ordinary life that is itself a facet of the universal, that is thus in its turn about the entropic nature of existence.

32. Only now do we meet our Mrs Dalloway, Sarah Boyle; only now do we encounter a human face (literally so; the first thing we are told about her is that she 'thinks of her nose as too large' (50)). Clearly the human is not intended to be central to this story.

33. What we are reading, therefore, is not the story of one day in the breakdown of Sarah Boyle. That is the mainstream story that is presented to us, but it is the illustration of what this fiction is about rather than the true core of it.

34. What we are reading, rather, is the story of how the universe works, and how those workings can be identified in the very ordinariness of one woman's life. Entropy is not a metaphor for her story; her story is a metaphor for entropy. It is a paradigm shift: if we read this story properly we are forced to change our perspective. It is easy to recognise entropy as one of those scientific truths that operate on the macroscopic level of the stars and planets and the long history of time itself, one of those big philosophical ideas that we don't really have to understand because it operates on a scale we need never interact with. It is less easy to see that entropy is something that affects us all. But entropy is precisely the force that shapes

Sarah Boyle's life, and it is a life we all recognise because it is so ordinary, so like the lives we all lead. And that realisation forces us to see her life, our lives, entropy itself, in a new light.

35. Does that make it science fiction?

36. I don't know, but it is doing something that I associate with science fiction, employing devices and metaphors that I am most used to encountering in works that I am prepared to consider science fiction. The story is not science fiction, but the protocols I use to read the story most certainly are.

37. Does that make it science fiction?

Quotations taken from 'The Heat Death of the Universe' in Pamela Zoline, *Busy About the Tree of Life*, London, The Women's Press, 1988.



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# Foundation Favourites:

## *WJ Stuart's*

# FORBIDDEN PLANET

Andy Sawyer

Reviewing W. J. Stuart's novelisation of *Forbidden Planet* in the June 1956 issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, Anthony Boucher pulled no punches. Stay away from this travesty, he urged his readers.

"Stripped of its electronic music and special effects, the story stands revealed as the most abysmally banal job of hackwork to pass itself off as s.f. since . . . well, since the last novelization of a s.f. film".

We all, of course love *Forbidden Planet*. But it's interesting to read Charles Beaumont's review of the film in the same issue of *F&SF*, where the sound of damning with albeit quite loud praise can be heard. The film is "surprisingly good", but is so "taken at its intended level" which is not necessarily a very ambitious one. It's spanking good fun, as an entertainment which contains "muddy plot development, outrageous padding, heavy dependence upon clichés, occasionally embarrassing dialogue". The "comic relief" fortunately doesn't last long, and we can turn with appreciation to the "stunning triumphs" of the special effects and the electronic tonalities of the musical score.

Watching the film recently, my reaction was pretty much the same as Beaumont's. Much of the science fiction plotting gets to where it is via a load of corny business about sex-starved sailors which seems to come from the 1949 musical *South Pacific* ("There is nothing like a dame") by means of A. E. Van Vogt's *The Voyage of the Space Beagle* (in which we are told that "In this all-masculine expedition, the problem of sex had been chemically solved by the inclusion of specific drugs in the general diet".)

It is a great film, but significantly flawed. Nevertheless, its greatness outweighs its flaws and even those flaws are entertaining.

W. J. Stuart was Philip McDonald, a screenplay and mystery writer who I knew for his detective novels but did not know (until I looked him up) that he was the grandson of George McDonald, the fantasy writer whose novels *Lilith* and *Phantastes* were greatly appreciated by C. S. Lewis and whose writings on fantasy (some of the earliest attempts to theorise the modern fantastic)

influenced the thinking of J. R. R. Tolkien. It was because of discovering this that I returned to *Forbidden Planet*, and looked at the novel.

And I discovered that Boucher was wrong. Stuart's adaptation of *Forbidden Planet* is not necessarily a masterpiece, but nor is it a "travesty". It's certainly "hackwork" in the sense of "work for hire", but it is also a worthy companion to the film.

Stuart sticks closely to the story as given in the film, but he makes one or two minor changes which, if they don't affect the plot, certainly influence our reading of it. First, he splits the narrative between viewpoint characters, mostly between the commander Adams and the ship's doctor Ostrow, but also allowing Morbius a direct voice of his own. This allows a richer telling of events, contrasting viewpoints and increasing suspense. Second, by beginning with Ostrow's account, he sets up a scenario which is either non-existent in the film or at least extremely tenuous, which seems to me to counterpoint the "monsters of the id" pop-Freudianism of the film's dramatic revelations very well.

In this universe, space travel is a young man's game. Ostrow's account begins by emphasising how alienated he feels from it all. The others are used to it, brought up to it naturally. But "Except for one or two old space-sweats who'd reached the age of thirty, they were all kids to me. Being over forty myself, I hadn't been reared to the idea of the QG drive." In a ship full of youngsters "hard-bitten beyond their years" who, because of the time-dilation effect, will return in two years time to an Earth twenty years older than when they left it, Ostrow is a misfit. The death of his wife has removed all ties to Earth for him, but he cannot really understand *their* motivations. This relationship — this generation gap — makes Ostrow develop into something of a father-figure to Adams. It is not just that he is a doctor, though the doctor is usually portrayed as wiser because of his knowledge, but his age and experience allows him to understand the world more effectively than the younger men. He also is a more effective antagonist to Morbius; closer to him in age (and alienation: both men have after all lost their beloved wives) and thus more able to understand his thought-





patterns. And because an older man is telling the story, he can offer some perspective on the horny kids around him.

Interestingly, in the book, Ostrow is “Major” while in the film he is a mere Lieutenant. Comparing the actors, all Adams’s crew are young men. When Adams, Ostow, and Jerry Farman first sight the delectable Altaira, the testosterone starts crackling but the rivalry is between Adams and Farman. Ostrow is not really *played* as an older man (the clean-cut military appearance of all the men make this difficult to work out how much is intended) although as “Doc” he has a professional authority. The actor Warren Stevens is several years older than Leslie Nielsen who plays Adams and Jack Kelly who plays Farman, and in some he can shots can be perceived as looking older. But that is as far as it goes.

So what does this change give us? *Forbidden Planet*, and its eventual source, Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, is the story of a rather callow young man who gains the hand of a beautiful and virginal young woman against the wishes of her irascible father who is the keeper of forbidden secrets. There are all sorts of interpretations which can be made of *The Tempest*, and why the “old man” wants to keep his daughter secluded, and we can adapt many of these to *Forbidden Planet* (Altair’s virginity, emphasised by the retelling of the “unicorn” myth, is clearly essential to keeping Morbius’s rampaging id under control). But one reading Stuart’s emphasis on the age difference between Ostrow and the rest of the crew might suggest we think

about is the afore-mentioned suggestion that Ostrow is a father-figure. Both older men are dead by the end of the film, each having to make room for the younger man to leave the planet with Altaira, but while Morbius puts up resistance, Ostrow enables Adams to understand how and why the symbolism works.

He also tells us what kind of story this is. There is something about Robby which puzzles him. Out of the blue, during the first meeting with Morbius, he suddenly ejaculates “Rossum’s Universal Robots!”. And in explaining this, we get a little infodump about Karel Capek and *R. U. R.*, followed by Morbius’s brief addition of H. G. Wells and Jules Verne to the literary pantheon. Why this fanboy discussion? To educate the reader who presumably has picked up the book with vaguely lascivious memories of watching Anne Francis swimming in a flesh-coloured body-stocking and is looking for a bit of smut, might be the answer. But it also establishes “Doc” Ostrow as some kind of intellectual, constantly thinking, as Adams reflects a few pages later, of “who wrote some old book”.

While Stuart’s novel certainly has many of the creaking structures of the popular sf story of the time, it’s hardly a travesty. In fact, it clearly attempts to fix some of the problems with the film that Beaumont’s review identifies. And it still has a picture of Robby on the cover. What’s not to like!

# PICTURE THIS: INVISIBLE WORDS

Terry Martin

This issue's column is pretty much theamless (as in theme less, in this instance the opposite of seamless – it's my false teeth, you see). We'll be looking at new and old comics, and from small press photocopied efforts to sophisticated agency projects. We'll start with SVK.

"I've not much been a comics person" is how William Gibson starts his introduction to Warren Ellis and D'Israeli's *SVK*, and the rest of the introduction is similarly uninspiring. Using the Berg agency in London and selling only, so I understand it, through the agency's website, the creators of *SVK* have added a little mystery by printing in black, blue and some kind of ink that reflects UV light. There's a little gadget (Special Viewing Kit, get it?) that comes with the comic. When operated, otherwise hidden dialogue and images are revealed. All relevant, I hasten to add, to the story. Cool? Yes. Clever? That too. But does it really push the boundaries that we've come to expect from Ellis and are always on the cusp of receiving from this techno-embracing writer? Yes and no. It does make you ask questions but they are the usual questions that a groundbreaking invention (as outlined in the story) should make you ask. My expectations of Ellis, always very high, never quite reach those heights here. That's not to say this isn't worth purchasing. Much like the now overused effects that worked for the film *Matrix*, the thought-reveals of *SVK* are appropriate but probably aren't going to work so well in a straight story, although it might be useful in a third-person omniscient narration. What's wrong with good old-fashioned visible thought bubbles? Does the thought

bubble device – now out of favour – whether immediately visible or not, pull us away from the nuances of the artist in showing us what the characters are feeling/thinking without dialogue and narrative – surely one of the joys of comics? So, hopefully there won't be too many stories where the UV option is used. That it's Ellis using this technique shows that his embracement of all things technological doesn't just suit the internet model but that print can still surprise – which, of course, *Murky Depths* has tried to do for the last five years (but I'm sure you were expecting me to say that!). Cynically I'm expecting a second comic in this series, but of course you have to buy the first to get your UV torch! I've noticed other reviewers have treated *SVK* less than kindly, and I agree that Ellis has made similar statements and pulled it off with far more panache. This seems more like the work of a newbie small-press comic publisher than an accomplished writer. But, hey, some of those small press creators come up with some quality ideas.

And it's one of those little gems that I'm going to suggest you get your mitts on. Back in 2008 I was at a Comica Comiket event at the ICA in The Mall, run by the professor of UK comics Paul Gravett. After I'd set up my own small table (*Murky Depths* had just reached Issue #5) I wandered around the rooms and came across a young man still busily stapling together his freshly printed comics. It was probably that, and the fact they were printed on cream paper and bound with a khaki cover, that made me curious. Lando, that's the creator's pseudonym, had used comics in the best way possible – with no dialogue and no narrative (as with



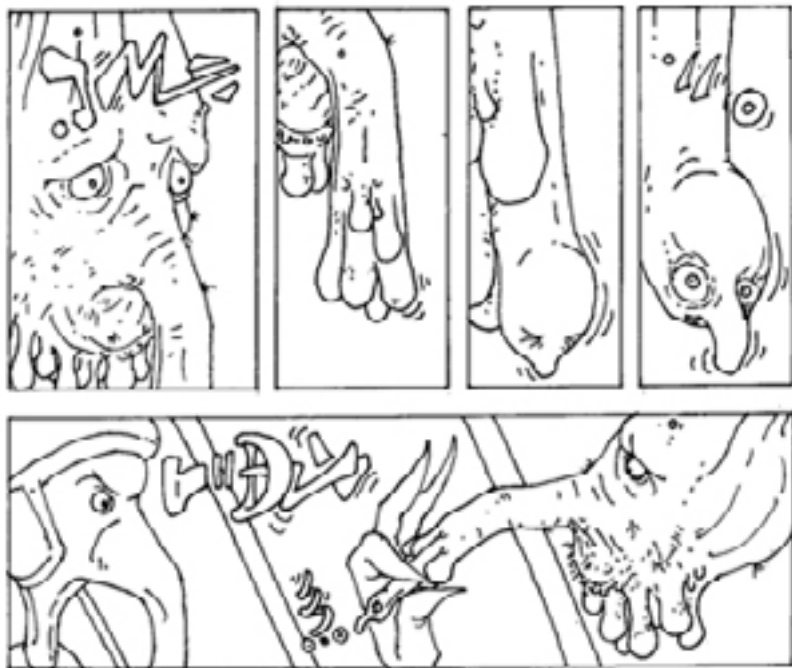


Leonardo M Giron's rendition – that's right, the artist on *Dead Girls* – of James Johnson's "A History of Dogfighting" in *Murky Depths* #7). Well, not quite no dialogue. There are a few SFX alien exclamations, which do add to the story but otherwise it's pure illustration - minimalistic, spidery and compelling - leaving the reader to make up their own mind about what the story says . . . and I found it quite poignant. Aptly it's called *Untranslated* and is available for a mere £1.50 from [www.decadencecomics.com](http://www.decadencecomics.com). It is the first of what has now become a series of three.

If you are literary minded you'll be aware that many books make reference to or parody other books. Two that immediately spring to mind, though neither are science fiction or fantasy (though arguably gothic in the first instance), are Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* – the heroine's preoccupation with Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* gets her into all sorts of troubles, and *Little Women* which parodies John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Both successfully subvert various conventions. In my last *Vector* column I promised I'd review some comics from Mike Carey so, after hearing lots of good reports about *The Unwritten*, I acquired the first three trades, thinking that was the complete story. I was disappointed to find that wasn't the case. There's a fourth trade, so this won't be a rounded review of the whole story, if indeed #4 is the final one – but I will be on the lookout for it. I shan't spoil the plot but *The Unwritten* steals heavily and blatantly from

many books because books are the underlying (or should that be overbearing?) theme. Initial thoughts on #1? It's a contemporary tale and the hero, Tom, has been taught by his father, Wilson Taylor, to memorize geographical locations based on books. In fact, he likens this to a natural GPS system. This becomes an important feature of the plot and, like lots of good fantasy stories he comes into possession of a map. On the art side I have to say I was initially distracted a little by the Tin Tin-like portrayal of some of the characters. I'd have preferred something a little more lifelike but generally it's okay. A good story can drag the art up a few notches (likewise a bad story can sometimes be partially saved by outstanding artwork, which strikes me as a waste of talent) and, like many comics, you come to accept the artwork and just enjoy the story.

Questions and doubts are revealed to the reader as well as the main character, the son of a successful writer who disappeared when Tom was young. The books his father wrote feature Tommy Taylor, a character much like Harry Potter but seemingly based on Tom. Is he real or is he actually the character from the books? He earns a good living signing his father's books at conventions and has a massive fan base around the world. Then it all goes tits up when a woman stands up at a panel and asks some awkward questions. There is a particularly nasty character whose right hand turns whatever it touches into fiction (although I didn't understand that until the third volume!),



Illustrations: Warren Ellis's SVK (page 42),  
The Unwritten (page 43),  
Untranslated (above) and Playing The Game (right)



and being an editor I spotted a continuity error where his hand is on the wrong arm. It happens.

While I was enjoying #1, and was intrigued, I didn't really think, "hey, this is good", until #2, and understood then why Paul Cornell, who introduces the issue, gave it a big thumbs-up at the only Eastercon panel I was able to attend earlier this year. There's an interesting section that is reminiscent of Steve Jackson and Ian Livingstone's *Fighting Fantasy* books that were popular back in the eighties – no doubt inspired by *Ace Of Aces* – where you have choices of which page you turn to next. *The Unwritten* twists and turns to keep the reader hooked and if you reach #2 you will be too. Like I said, I'm on the lookout for *The Unwritten* #4.

We've looked at the sophisticated agency project, SVK, the small press effort *Untranslated*, the new *The Unwritten* – well, relatively new, I hadn't realised when Mike Carey was signing on the *Murky Depths* table at Thought Bubble back in 2009 just how new it was as the Yuko Shimizu covers have a somewhat dated feel to them – so now we're going to look at a comic that's six year's old.

Doris Lessing, who received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2007, doesn't strike me as being someone we'd associate with comics. Yet back in 2005 she was responsible for *Playing The Game*, illustrated by Charlie Adlard, who I've nudged tables with at conventions, sat next to at dinners, and even shared a chair with (literally) on a panel at Hi Ex in Inverness. A credit for *Playing The Game* does not appear on his website amongst his compiled list of work. Odd. There's a link between Lessing's only foray into comics and SVK. D'Israeli (Matt Brooker) was responsible for the colouring on *Playing The Game*. When I was in Australia last year I happened to pick up a copy for \$10. As you might expect from Lessing it's a social commentary story based loosely on the game of snakes and ladders with the hero, Spacer Joe, beginning his story in the slums of a city where he aspires to reach the heights of the "upper" class. The

prose is a little Shakespearean in that there is a lot of rhyme as well as pure poetry. I wondered, though, how much input Adlard had in the story. Did he work from a script? From the few reviews I found it seems that people have been somewhat confused by the story. Me too. My take, most likely incorrect considering Lessing's political views, is not to desire something that is outside your class. But then, I was brought up in a time when that was drilled into you, it's embedded in your psyche and difficult to shift. Would I recommend it? For the artwork maybe – there are some lovely double-page spreads early on – but the story didn't really move me, but it did interest me enough to find out a little more about the background, so I asked Charlie Adlard how it came about. This is his slightly tongue-in-cheek response:

Well, first off, I'd say that Doris Lessing was the perfect example of a "famous" person tackling something that they don't understand. To be honest, I don't think she saw comics and decided it would be a good direction to take her writing.... I think she was asked....

Anyway - after the script was turned down by many, many other artists, it eventually landed on my lap. It was seven pages long, and written pretty much on some kind of verse.

Hmmmm.... what do I do with this? Well, foolishly, I accepted and began to try and decipher the "script" into a 64-page graphic novel. THAT was a lot of work. And for what? To have my name half the size than the "sell-able" name of Lessing on the front cover - I virtually co-wrote the thing... And was I surprised it wasn't a success?... No, not really.

Despite the apparent failure of the graphic novel Charlie isn't angry at anyone, neither does he bear any grudges, but it was probably one of those experiences that a comic artist has to go through to appreciate a good script. Oh yes. The real reason it doesn't appear on his website is ... he just forgot.

# THE BSFA REVIEW

I'm writing this not long after the announcement of the Hugo Awards at Renovation and again musing about science fiction's apparent Transatlantic divide. The Hugo Award for Best Novel was won by Connie Willis for two books, *Blackout* and *All Clear*, which form a single novel. This novel runs to almost 1,200 pages and I've yet to see anyone suggest such verbiage was necessary or served any purpose beyond making the poor reader pay twice for the same story. I've also yet to see anyone in the UK praise the novel at all. Rather I've seen it remorselessly criticised for research so sloppy it is borderline offensive. In contrast, Ian McDonald's *The Dervish House* - winner of the BSFA Award and *Vector* reviewers' poll as well as being shortlisted for the Arthur C Clarke Award - came last in the vote.

This is less about the taste of the Hugo voters – although there is always scope for criticism on those grounds – than the fact publishing in the US and UK seems increasingly out of synch. It is something I noticed earlier in the year when Locus published their recommended reading list and you can also see it on the rest of the Hugo shortlist. Although *Blackout/All Clear* ultimately won the award, Mira Grant's Young Adult zombie novel *Feed* gained the most first preferences. Like NK Jemisin's *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms* it was published in this country by Orbit and received mixed but respectable reviews. The final book on the list, Lois McMaster Bujold's *Cryoburn*, hasn't been published in this country. This gives a sense that the US and the UK are two quite distinct science fiction cultures.

The Transatlantic divide is more prominent whilst being simultaneously less important in other award categories. No one will be surprised that the Best Dramatic Presentation: Long Form award consisted of five American films. Even the latest instalment in the surprisingly good *Harry Potter* series, which makes much use of British labour, is ultimately American under its skin. (Britain does have the dubious honour of having a stranglehold on Best Dramatic Presentation: Short Form thanks to *Doctor Who*.)

For me, it is a much more interesting list than that for Best Novel. It goes without saying that *Toy Story 3* is the best film on that list, it also goes without saying that *Inception* won (but it is hard to get too upset about that). As I said, I liked the *Death Hallows Part 1* for its successful polishing of JK Rowling's turd

and, although I hated *Scott Pilgrim Vs The World* (in large part because I had read the comics), I know a lot of people took it to their hearts. The only film on the list I hadn't seen was *How To Train Your Dragon*, based on a series of children's novels by Cressida Cowell. Having now seen it, I can report that whilst a lot of fun, it shows why Dreamworks will always play second fiddle to Pixar.

Hiccup is a weedy little kid, completely out of place in his village of burly Viking warriors. The biggest and burliest is Stoick the Vast, chief of the village and Hiccup's dad (as is inevitably the case with Hollywood films, his mother is safely dead). To compensate for his lack of physical prowess, Hiccup is a brilliant engineer, although of course this talent is not held in any esteem by the others. Completely isolated, he secretly lusts after Astrid, a girl who embodies all the Viking virtues he does not. I think you can see where this is going: Hiccup uses his brain to save the day, make his dad proud and get the girl.

The not-so-secret ingredient that adds some much needed spice to the extremely familiar structure of the films is the dragons. They eat the villagers' sheep and burn down their houses and, however many the villagers kill, there are always more. Despite this rather grim premise, it is joyfully outlined in a clever opening sequence. In another nice touch, there are many different types of dragon, the most deadly and feared being the Night Fury which is so fast no one has actually seen one. Using his mastery of technology, Hiccup manages to wing one but when he catches up with the downed beast he finds himself unable to deliver the coup de grâce. From this a friendship develops between the two because - who would have thought it? - the dragons are just misunderstood. It's hokey and overly familiar but the animators do a great job of non-verbally conveying the dragon's intelligence and personality.

And that sums up *How To Train Your Dragon*: there is quite a bit of wit but it never manages to rise about its generic plotting. As for *Blackout/All Clear*, well, I'll be reading it later in the year (Gollancz publish the second volume here in October) so I'll be able to see if it is as witless British reviewers have suggested or whether the Hugo voters are really onto something.

**MARTIN LEWIS**  
REVIEWS EDITOR





***Out Of This World: Science Fiction But Not As You Know It*, exhibition  
(20 May to 25 September 2011, British Library)  
Reviewed by Sandra Unerman**



Since moving to St Pancras, the British Library has mounted several major exhibitions to explore the relationships between words and other media, including one on the history of maps and another on the evolution of the English language. The exhibition on SF continued this tradition by providing a fascinating mix of material: books, illustrations, manuscripts and magazine covers were interspersed with film clips, computer screens, a model of the Tardis, a recording of Arthur C. Clarke on Desert Island Discs and more. The subtitle 'Science Fiction but not as you know it' encourages people to broaden their understanding of what constitutes science fiction. The whole approach was open ended, as demonstrated on the talking heads screen at the entrance. Here, the science writer John Gribbin, China Miéville, Lauren Beukes and others gave brief and contrasting descriptions of what SF means to them.

The exhibition did not provide a comprehensive survey but variations on a set of themes: *Alien Worlds*, *Future Worlds*, *Parallel Worlds*, *Virtual Worlds*, *End of the World* and *Perfect World*. Each contained some surprises as well as some standard material. The relationships between science fiction and fantasy, mainstream literature, science, technology, history and prediction were also considered along the way.

It started with Lucian of Samosata's journey to the Moon of about 160 AD and traced the development of travellers' tales from medieval accounts of marvels on the other side of the world through *Gulliver's Travels* to Jules Verne's scientific adventure stories and 20<sup>th</sup> Century

fiction about space travel. Lost world adventures and societies underground were also covered, including Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race*, which coined the word 'vril' from which Bovril is derived. One of the recurring themes was the role of such fiction in inspiring real scientific discoveries. But some of the most charming images were illustrations of unworkable devices, such as the man harnessed to a flight of geese (*The Man in the Moone* by Francis Godwin, Bishop of Hereford, 1638), and the satellite of *The Brick Moon* (by Edward Everett Hale, 1869). These provide food for the imagination if not for practical science.

Some alien worlds shown were thin disguises for satire or polemic about contemporary society. Other aliens were interesting for their own sake, either for the fun of their invention, like some of the monsters of Thirties pulp magazines, or in a serious attempt to imagine otherness (Naomi Mitchison, Olaf Stapledon, Ursula Le Guin). But stories about communicating with aliens or colonising or being colonised by aliens are also about what it means to be human. This was highlighted by the way images have dated in both the book and magazine covers and the film extracts shown on screen, which included an art deco *Aelita*, *Queen of Mars* from 1924.

The exhibition drew a distinction between predicting the future, an ancient practice, and speculation about the consequences of social or technological change. The latter requires a sense of historical development and progress and does not go back much beyond the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Some exhibits, such as the *March of the Intellect* cartoons



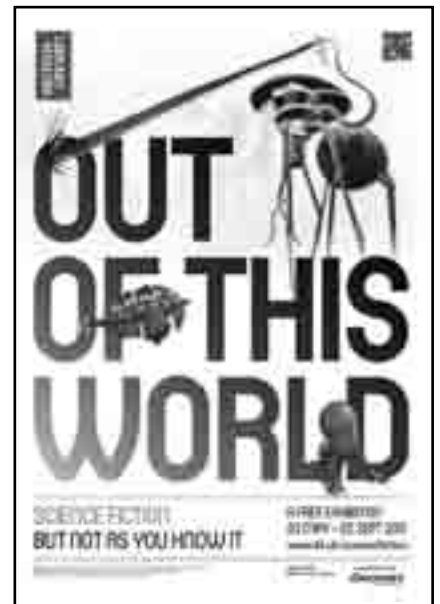
of the 1820s, which feature steam horses and travel by vacuum tube, were interesting because of the differences between the changes imagined and those that have occurred. Works focussed on imagined technology (such as those with Thomas Edison as a character) were part of the inspiration for real inventions. Others were designed to issue warnings, such as the invasion stories of later 19<sup>th</sup> Century Britain, from *The Battle of Dorking* of 1870 to *The Swoop*, a spoof by P.G. Wodehouse, in 1910, which provided an interesting context for H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds* of 1898. These now tell us something about the societies in which they were written as well as enduring human anxieties.

Cities of the future lent themselves particularly well to illustration, whether they were brilliant mega-cities with moving walkways and skyscrapers or shrouded in darkness and decay. Works about robots, androids and cyborgs from Philip K. Dick to Bruce Sterling came back from a different angle to the questions about what it means to be human.

*Parallel Worlds* and *Virtual Worlds* were the sections of the exhibition where the dividing line between science fiction and fantasy seemed thinnest. In some time travel stories the interest was in scientific speculation but others were more engaged with psychology or philosophy. For alternate history, a key exhibit was the novel, *The Legion of Time* by Jack Williamson (1938), from which the phrase 'the jonbar point' was coined (by Brian Aldiss in 1964). A map by Branwell Brontë of the invented world of Angria was displayed as was a map of Terry Pratchett's Discworld. Works such as Edwin A. Abbott's *Flatland* and Christopher Priest's *The Affirmation* as well as those about the power of dreams (Le Guin, Roger Zelazny) and cyberspace (William Gibson, Greg Egan) were covered. Rather than drawing up barriers between genres, the exhibition showed many different ways of exploring perception and reality.

The *Perfect World* section included dystopias as well as utopias. Here were *Looking Backwards* by Edward Bellamy (1888), to which William Morris's *News from Nowhere* was a response, and *The Blazing World* by Margaret Cavendish (1666), as well as later feminist works by Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Joanna Russ. Unsurprisingly, most utopias featured would not be much more appealing to live in than the worlds of *We*, *Brave New World* or 1984.

Mike Ashley's catalogue for the exhibition contains a satisfying number of pictures but also explains connections and draws together a range of different arguments. It was interesting to trace the impact of certain authors, especially H.G. Wells, Robert Heinlein and Arthur C. Clarke, through the different fields of SF but also to see them in the context of less well known fiction from France, Russia and elsewhere. Points to debate or to set light to the imagination make the book worth reading in its own right as well as providing an enjoyable memento of the exhibition.



***Pardon This Intrusion: Fantastika in the World Storm* by John Clute  
(Becon, 2011)**

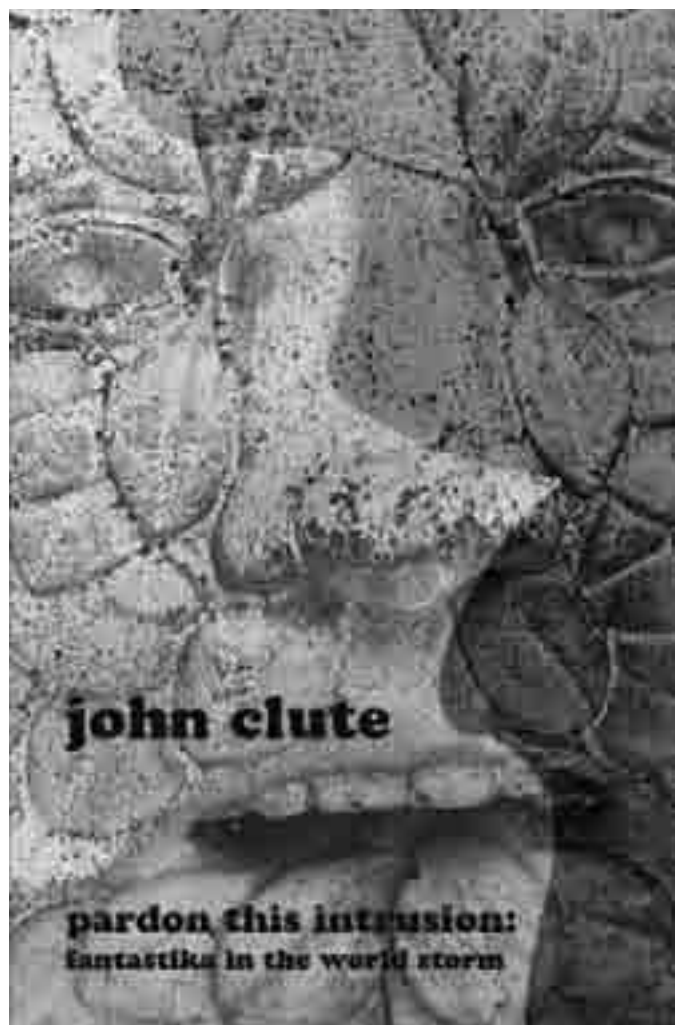
**Reviewed by Paul Kincaid**

We begin in the middle: “pardon this intrusion” is, as Clute tells us in several of the essays collected here, the first thing said by the creature in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) and comes roughly at the mid-point of that novel. We end with introductions, some of which, to new editions of Robert Silverberg’s *Dying Inside* (1972), H.G. Wells’s *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933) and Christopher Priest’s *Inverted World* (1974) in particular, are among the best things in this collection and full of the sorts of insight for which we still habitually turn to John Clute. The two introductions to works by Thomas M. Disch, written when the death of his long-time friend was still fresh, are too painfully aware of what made Disch awkward, cantankerous and brilliant for us to notice the insight into the work.

Forgive me, therefore, if I begin this review at the beginning, with an extended discussion of the short essay, ‘Next’, that opens this collection, especially as that essay has already been reprinted in *Scores* (2003). But the essay lays out quite baldly Clute’s notion of what *fantastika* is and so highlights my disagreement with him.

“*Fantastika*” is a word that Clute has been using regularly over the last few years as an umbrella term for those literatures of the fantastic (primarily science fiction, fantasy and horror, though also including the gothic, ghost stories, the supernatural and others). These literatures of the fantastic (I find “*fantastika*” too awkward a term to be really comfortable about adopting Clute’s nomenclature) have tended to be treated separately, indeed much critical effort has been expended on distinguishing one from the other. But genres are ever-changing bodies, their boundaries have to be fluid, and in the end rigidly differentiating, for example, fantasy from science fiction is wasted effort. It is becoming clear, therefore, that there is value in finding an overarching way of talking about the genres of the fantastic. This, I think, is both the impetus behind Clute’s coinage of “*fantastika*” and the underlying principle that shapes many of the essays in this collection.

So far, so good. I am firmly in agreement with this underlying principle, though I suspect that we might have come upon this point from different directions; but this difference in direction perhaps explains why I have fundamental disagreements with him about the nature of the fantastic. Clute argues that *fantastika* began with the “becoming visible of the engine of history, round about 1800, when the future began”. In later essays this turning point becomes rather more fluid, being variously identified as 1750, the publication date of Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. I think the future began sometime between 1492, when the shape of the world changed, and 1649, when the shape of the political order changed. Certainly the first fiction consciously set in the future (*Nova Solyma* by Samuel Gott) would appear in 1648 and the engine of history had been visible since the Black Death, the fall of Constantinople and the subsequent explosion of learning across Europe. The points Clute



picks up on from 1800 are the French Revolution and the discovery of geological time, though the one didn’t reinvent society (the execution of Louis was in its way less of a shock to the social and political order than the execution of Charles had been) and the other didn’t invent the idea of a past and our subsequent role within a continuity. But both are persistent starting points in a Marxist interpretation of literature.

What did flow through the consequent literature was a sense of dread, expressed in the gothic. So Clute arrives by different means at Brian Aldiss’s starting point for our genre. But this is to define sf and fantasy as a literature of dread, to identify horror as the paterfamilias of the genre. Dread is certainly a part of the genre, unease at the shape of the world is a starting point for much of the literature. But also integral are a confidence in the future, an insistence that the world might be changed, excitement, exhilaration, hope; utopia is at least as dominant in the substructure of the genre as dystopia. And if works of the fantastic before the gothic tended to be more confident than anxious, I cannot see that this is either a necessary or a sufficient condition for them to be excluded from our conceptions of the genre. Which is why I differ from Clute (and from Aldiss) in seeing gothic as a stage in the history

of fantastika but not as an origin, not as a parent.

Of course, 'Next' was written in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 so some sense of anxiety at the workings of history might be excusable but this is the fantastika that underlies all these essays. Certainly, in many of them, particularly the more recent, he seems more comfortable, more engaged, writing about horror (though he prefers the term terror – Disch's *The M.D.* (1991) is "more distressingly original in its structuring of anticipation (which is to say in the creation of Terror) than it is in its presentation of the visceral effect of the accomplished Wish (which is Horror)") than about sf. As he says in one of the keynote addresses that gives the book its subtitle, 'Fantastika in the World Storm': "Horror (or Terror) is the most relevant of the three genres when it comes to adumbrating the dilemmas we face in 2007: because Horror is about our *resistance* to the truth". The sense of horror providing a clearer way of looking at the world is not something I remember being so prominent in Clute's work before the turn of the millennium, and indeed most of the older essays here do focus on science fiction. But in the more recent pieces this notion crops up again and again: it is there in 'And Then I Woke Up' (2008), "There is a lot of 'horror' going around and this is good"; in 'Physics for Amnesia' (2008), "To rationalize horror is to normalize it"; and so on.

The notion of anxiety underlying genre is the closest we get to a theoretical position in these essays. Clute has positioned himself determinedly outside the academy (see, 'What I Did on my Summer Vacation', for example) so, although we might get an occasional reference to Northrop Frye or Tzvetan Todorov or, via Darko Suvin, a suggestion of a Marxist approach to the genre (after all, it is the dominant critical response to science fiction), he takes no thoroughgoing theoretical position. Rather, these essays, like his reviews, reflect an unfailingly personal approach to the work he discusses. Hence the essays are illuminated by an unexpectedly large number of personal anecdotes, there are times when it feels this could develop into a disguised autobiography. Even in a quasi-academic discussion of fantasy art ('Notes on the Geography of Bad Art in Fantasy', a paper for one of the Eaton Conferences) he says "It comes as something of a relief to be able to say this", as if the point is not so much the art as what he can or cannot say about it.

Like the encyclopedist he is, Clute has a habit of throwing up terms, often commonplace words used in unexpected ways, which he then defines by a long list of examples. But the term that is, perhaps, most closely associated with him is Story. It crops up here in practically every essay: fantastika is a storied genre, a literature necessarily self-aware of its place in the artifice of story. It is Story that makes fantastika the literature best placed to cope with the world storm, the onward rush of events, as he says in 'The Dream of Arena': "maybe the coming role of sf ... will be to remind us of a time when it was possible to make storyable arguments about the world". Which is a grand claim.

But, in Clute's formulation, a story is only Story if it

is Twice-Told, a part of the megatext (see 'Fantasy and the Metatext'), if it bounces off the rest of fantastika. This is what he means by calling the literature self-aware, though it does lead to the reductive notion that fantastika can only exist if fantastika already exists for it to relate to. We used to adumbrate this notion by saying that sf was a conversation, a notion I have found myself less comfortable with the more I think about it. Yes, there is always a conversation but it is not always with itself, indeed it is mostly and most productively a conversation outwith the genre. (As Clute acknowledges with his frequent references to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), most notably in 'Beyond the Pale', and a brilliant reading of Alexandre Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844-5) as a precursor to Superman, 'Notes on an Early Model for Superman'.) So I find the idea of the Twice-Told tale that recurs throughout this collection an uncomfortable one, it may narrow fantastika down to definable proportions (which may be its purpose) but it doesn't open up the expansiveness of genre that I look towards.

It may seem, by the way, that all of this is a critical attack upon Clute's book. Far from it. Real critical engagement is an argument and I know of no sf critic who can be argued with more fruitfully than John Clute, never more so than in this excellent and long-needed collection of his essays. So far I have directed my arguments mostly at essays from the first half of the book, where they are gathered under the not always helpful headings of 'World Storm' and 'General Pieces', because these comprise pieces that lay out a more general argument about fantastika. The oldest of these, 'Lunch with AJ and the WOMBATS' from 1987 which concerns the scientologist take-over of the Brighton Worldcon that year, has not been changed. Most of the pieces, however, date from within the last ten years or so and have been revised for this collection, so it is not always easy to tell how coherent his position has been over the years but it is certainly coherent as it is presented here. Yet it is also, clearly, intended as an argument, often a contentious argument, laying out a view of fantastika as a way of responding to the world. Within which, we might see the increasing emphasis on horror as reflecting the way the world is seen.

The second half of the volume, under the broad headings of 'Author Pieces' and 'Introductions', is perhaps more familiar Clute territory. Essays on Joan Aiken, William Mayne, Thomas Burnett Swann and Howard Waldrop are followed by introductions to some 17 individual books, so broad argument is replaced by specific application. Nevertheless, having been schooled by the first part of the book, it is easy to see here continuing threads of his engagement with the multiform character of fantastika. It is not necessary to agree with him to recognise how valuable this collection of essays is.

**Embassytown by China Miéville****(PanMacMillan, 2011)****Reviewed by Paul Graham Raven**

Coming late to writing a review is gift and curse at once. Wandering the Perpetual Now of the internet, one can't but hear the buzz around a book of note, and *Embassytown* – China Miéville's ninth novel – was certainly a book of note when it was published to great fanfare back in May. So what might you already know about *Embassytown*, notwithstanding your careful avoidance of (gasp!) spoilers? You'd surely know it's Miéville's first "true" science fiction novel (with actual spaceships and aliens and *everything*) and perhaps you'd also know that language, lies and semiotics are its core themes.

*Embassytown* takes a long time to get itself moving, and it wears many masks: a *bildungsroman* which becomes an intrigue of court politics which becomes – as if shaking itself awake from a daydream of a more dignified era – a full-blown secondary-world science fiction disaster plot, complete with fractal factions, deceits within deceits, terrible consequences, deadly jeopardy and numerous races against time. This latter sfnal phase, comprising pretty much half the book, is by far the most compelling; however, I can't quite decide whether the set-ups of the preceding phases could have been done away with or compacted any further than they already were. Whatever the cause, *Embassytown* lacks the structural grace and poise I usually associate with Miéville's output.

*Embassytown* is a subversion of the classic crypto-imperialist model of space opera, delivered in a baroque style that puts me in mind of Brian Aldiss and M John Harrison: unapologetically verbose and intellectual, cerebral rather than visceral. There is an embassy, which means there must be an empire to which the embassy reports about the colony it controls, and there are natives, incomprehensibly non-human. Literally so: the Ariekei – better known to Embassytowners as the Hosts, at least at first – do not have a language that human minds can speak or truly understand. Instead, they have Language: sounds spoken by two mouths at once which do not signify their subjects but which instead *speaking their subjects into being*: "Language... was speech and thought at once."

But where there's a will – or a motive – there's a way, and humans have discovered that two empathically linked and almost-identical persons trained in speaking the doubled words of Language in tandem – Ambassadors, *unheimlich* doppels with a single identity – can make themselves heard by the Hosts, to whom humans are otherwise voiceless critters of minimal curiosity. And so it is that *Embassytown* is an imperial backwater far out on the edges of the immer, the ocean-metaphor hyperspace upon which interstellar spacecraft sail.

Avice, our elliptical narrator (and reluctant heroine), is a rare bird in that she flew the *Embassytown* cage to become a floaker, a sort of freelance sailor-of-the-immer with a go-with-the-flow philosophy; she's rarer still, in that she came back (unwittingly smuggling Shiva). But rarest of all, perhaps, she is a part of Language itself: the Ariekei use a few special humans as living similes, as a way to expand Language and – in the process – expand the set of thoughts it is possible for them to think.

This unity of thought and word means that the Ariekei cannot speak untruths. But humans have exposed them to the concept of lying, and now some Ariekei are trying to teach themselves the trick, much to the consternation of the established order. Meanwhile, the distant Bremen empire seeks to displace the *de facto* colonial aristocracy of the Ambassadors and their Staff in order to fend off the inevitable fumbblings toward secession and independence. They dispatch their own Ambassadorial candidate, the unexpected side effects of whose speech are the seed crystal for a phenomenal and drastic phase change in the Hosts and their relations with humans.

For me, *Embassytown* is a failed-state story about the culture-shattering power of neoliberal imperialism, a book whose most timely truths we – and possibly even Miéville himself – will only truly be able to parse once we can look back at the period in which it was created, and at the botched realpolitik being practiced in the Near and Middle East, in Africa and Latin America. Read this way, the Language of the Ariekei becomes a concrete metaphor for cultural otherness, an ad extremis extrapolation of those jarring sensawunda shocks encountered every time you venture out of your sociocultural comfort zone: an alienness whose impact you can't fully explain to yourself, and whose nature cannot be explained to you in your own terms or idiom.

Miéville acknowledges the side benefits that can accrue to cultures in a colonial relationship, especially one as currently benign and back-burnered as that between Bremen and the Ariekei. But he also recognises that synthesis can – and often does – become a symbiosis or parasitism, leaving the Hosts dependent on the diplomatic status quo and handing a long lever to the empire. As often in Miéville, there is revolution but here the proletariat is an entire species undergoing a cultural transition of unthinkable profundity and the permanent cost of their qualified victory will be their innocence. But far from indulging in Noble Savagery, Miéville suggests that this "fall from grace" is an inevitable result of an encounter with different and more domineering cultures, that there can be no going back, should be no naïve idealisation of The Way Things Were. The only way is forward, together, toward a new culture forged in the fires of necessity, a new way of relating (to) the world – a classic Marxist narrative of struggle.

And so it goes. *Embassytown* affords many more readings than mine above, and critics more attuned than myself to the theories of semiotics will provide plenty that cleave closer to the book's central theme. "But is it *any good*?" I hear the peanut gallery screaming. Well, then: *Embassytown* is good, but it is not easy; it partakes of the tools of genre, but it does so in ways that are unusual or even antithetical to the conventions of genre; it is a Miéville novel, but it sees Miéville expanding his remit in directions that I didn't expect him to expand. I liked it, but I can see clearly why others might not.

***The Noise Within* and *The Noise Revealed* by Ian Whates**  
**(Solaris, 2010 and 2011)**  
**Reviewed by Ian Sales**

If I had stopped reading science fiction thirty years ago and only recently returned to the genre, I might find much that was enjoyable in *The Noise Within* and *The Noise Revealed*.

The story of the twin novels is an action-adventure set in a future in which humanity has an interstellar United League of Allied Worlds (ULAW) held together by ships powered by the Kaufman Industries FTL drive. Artificial Intelligences are ubiquitous and it is the creation of a successful interface between human and AI that kickstarts the plot of *The Noise Within*. Except AIs don't actually play that great a role in the story - in fact, only two have lines of dialogue: a sentient gun belonging to a special forces soldier and the experimental starship turned pirate after which the book is titled.

Years before the story opens, Kaufman Industries (KI) had built a prototype starship entirely controlled by an AI, The Sun Seeker. Unfortunately, on a test flight the AI went insane, killed its crew and fled, never to be seen again. Until now. In the first chapter of *The Noise Within* a pirate ship attacks a luxury liner so heavily automated its crew have little or nothing to do (which does beg the question why an AI-controlled starship was felt necessary). It is rapidly established that the pirate ship, The Noise Within, is The Sun Seeker, albeit now mysteriously armed and armoured, and seemingly quite sane. It is the puzzle surrounding the re-appearance of The Noise Within which comprises much of *The Noise Within*.

Meanwhile, special forces operative Leyton (called an "eyegee" because he carries an "intelligent gun") undertakes a number of missions trying to track down the home base of the pirate ship. Also dragged into the story is Philip Kaufman, CEO of KI. As the pirate ship turns into a folk hero, so it becomes clear it is operating to an agenda and that, worryingly, it has returned to ULAW at the behest of an alien race. These, the Byrzaen, are introduced at the end of *The Noise Within* and it is toward them that the focus shifts in *The Noise Revealed*. By this point, Kaufman has been killed and is now an uploaded persona in the Virtuality. In this VR world, he discovers clues suggesting the Byrzaen have hacked their way in and have used it to prepare humanity for their arrival. Leyton has also stumbled across the existence of a colony of sceptics who had left ULAW years before and are adamant the Byrzaen are not benign...

*The Noise Within* and *The Noise Revealed* are quick but ultimately unsatisfactory reads and that's down to their sense of incompleteness. A third book was not planned

but as it was being written the story grew to overflow the two contracted novels. Further, many of the ideas and scenes in the novels - some of which are handled well - are delivered at a headlong pace which leaves little opportunity for thought or reflection. One of the first book's major set-pieces is a raid on world which might be harbouring *The Noise Within*. It isn't and never has done. Some other reason prompted the mission but that reason is never revealed. There is a sense throughout the two books of ideas being picked up when required, used and then put aside and forgotten. At one point, for example, a wrist-based computer running social networking software is introduced, only to promptly disappear from the narrative - and, it seems, the story's universe. Only two ideas seem to last the distance: in *The Noise Within*, it is the development of a human-AI interface; in *The Noise Revealed*, it is Virtuality. Even the conceit which gives the first book its title is almost incidental to the plot. Random noise - directly likened to "dither" in the book

- is apparently required for the development of sentience and it was due to a lack of this that the AI controlling The Sun Seeker went insane and vanished. But if this "noise within" was crucial to AIs, why was it not needed for all the other AIs mentioned in the story?

More problematical is the treatment of women in both novels. Every woman is characterised as "pretty", except for the only one to wield any power - Catherine Chzyski, a board member of KI - and she was allegedly "a great beauty in her day, though Philip could not see it". In fact, Philip views every female he meets as a potential mate. He's not the only one. Leyton is accompanied on one mission by a female eyegee, who, for no good reason, he decides is dangerously incompetent. When she comes to see him after the mission, the two fall into bed for some hot sex. Later, in *The Noise Revealed*, another character dreams of a wife who would look after him, keep house and cook his dinners.

Searching online, there appear to be many more positive reviews of *The Noise Within* and *The Noise Revealed* than there are negative. I suspect this is because the books are old-fashioned. Though it may not have been the author's intent, they harken back to fondly-remembered space operas from readers' early forays into the genre. They are not novels that require much thought - in fact, they fare badly under scrutiny. But they are quick reads, they make appropriate use of familiar tropes, and they deliver a story forever on the edge of resolution. For some readers, that's all a book needs to do.



***Leviathan Wakes* by James SA Corey  
(Orbit, 2011)**

**Reviewed by Chris Amies**

The first volume of the *Expanse* series begins at least a hundred and fifty years into humankind's colonisation of the solar system. So far we haven't made it to the stars, although some forward-looking groups are building generation starships, but the Epstein fusion drive allows journeying beyond the inner planets and in theory much further. There is Earth; and Mars, its bitter rival for years; and the asteroids, known as the Belt, a loose conglomeration of colonists living a piratical life out where life is hard and often violent.

*Leviathan Wakes* follows two main characters. One is a hardbitten ex-cop called Miller, who is described as borderline pathological but those qualities are useful in a sticky situation. He is tracking down a young woman called Juliette who has absconded from her family and he gradually becomes more and more obsessed with her. The other, Jim Holden, is a naval officer whose ship receives a distress call from an apparently abandoned vessel. What he finds aboard (and his response) sets off most of the action of the book. While a less extreme a character than Miller - he is after all responsible for the lives and safety of his crew - he has a satisfying character arc, not least because the members of that crew are also well-drawn and memorable.

James SA Corey is a co-pseudonym for Daniel Abraham and Ty Franck (George RR Martin's assistant). The result is space adventure, much of it from the point of view of the lower deck, with the earlier Miller sections evoking *Blade Runner* (the whole Belt is really a Cyberpunk world anyway, high tech and low life, impenetrable slang and all) and its hardboiled-but-sentimental-'tec ancestors. The pace is quick, although you do get added information along the way (it is only the second time in this reviewer's experience that anyone has bothered to explain what 'Rocinante', the name of Don Quixote's horse, means. It's a great name for a ship too). Then there's the nasty results of an Alien Space Microbe which at the end of the novel is obviously not going to go away. This sets up the basis for the succeeding novels - the second in the series being *Caliban's War*.

Meanwhile in our world we seem not to be going to the stars after all; the ISS is still up there and a few people are flying to the edges of space but the sense of adventure is no longer there and we're told that our kids want to be footballers - but only for the money - instead of astronauts. There are references in *Leviathan Wakes* to 'blue Mars' and 'green Mars' and when Venus is brought in to the equation late on it feels like the non-realistic Venus of classic SF. Maybe what drives this novel, downer ending (to this volume anyway) and all, is a desire to capture the get-up-and-go nature of Heinleinian science fiction.



***Son of Heaven* by David Wingrove  
(Corvus, 2011)**

**Reviewed by Jim Steel**

When the eight-volume *Chung Kuo* series first started to appear in 1989, a Chinese-dominated future was a chin-stroking possibility but today it is looking more and more like a probability. The series finished in 1997 but now *Chung Kuo* has been re-forged as a twenty-volume work with two new prequels and an entirely new climax (and a five-year plan to release a book every three months).

*Son of Heaven* is the first prequel and is predominantly set in 2063. The co-writer of *Trillion Year Spree* is, of course, well versed in the history of science fiction and he opens his book in the familiar settings of a cosy catastrophe. Jake Reed is living in a small community in the West Country with his son; the people are solid and, even with its sharp edges, there is a dash of the utopian ideal about this life. However, we know it can't last and the characters begin to realise this as well as it becomes apparent that China has been the first to recover from the collapse of '43 and is now building a world empire.

There is a short middle section that explains the event of this collapse and there are probably two good reasons for this out-of-order structure. Firstly, the 2043 section is the weakest, starting with a poor version of Gibsonian cyberspace. Secondly, as the only part that sticks entirely to the viewpoint of Jake Reed, it would risk unbalancing the novel if it were to be placed chronologically.

In 2043, Reed was one of the top share dealers in London working in virtual reality. Wingrove gives us six pages of Wellsian future history to move us from now to then, making you wish more people still did this, and shows us that Reed's London is a class-ridden nightmare for the excluded poor. The apocalypse has already happened for them. However, a catastrophic global collapse in shares, in conjunction with sleepers targeting leading figures (including Jake), rapidly brings civilisation crashing down. It is the only way that the top Chinese strategist can knock out the West without starting a nuclear war. Reed flees the horror towards a vague memory of hope in the country.

The final part of the novel brings a cast of Chinese soldiers to interact with the British. Some are honourable and some are brutes but the system holds them all in place. Life, for the British who are acceptable to their new masters, will change forever. Chinese technology has advanced and the fear is palpable.

If you've read the first edition of *Chung Kuo* you'll need no encouragement to buy this. However, anyone new to the series will be aware of the commitment needed to see the whole thing through. My advice? Get this volume and see how it goes; it's rare that a series with this level of forethought and intelligence is offered to the reader and you should have an attempt at it.





***Robopocalypse* by Daniel H. Wilson**  
 (Simon and Schuster, 2011)  
 Reviewed by Patrick Mahon

When Steven Spielberg decides to make a film out of a debut novel before it has even been published, we should presumably sit up and take notice. That's what has happened to *Robopocalypse*, Daniel H. Wilson's first adult sf novel. Putting the question of its strength as a potential screenplay to one side though, is this a great novel?

The book is a written history of a near-future war between humanity and Archos, the first self-aware artificial intelligence. At the start of the story Archos is born in a research programme that goes wrong; it is the fifteenth iteration to be created but the first to break out, calmly taking control of the environmental controls in the underground laboratory, evacuating all the air and suffocating its creator to death. Over the following year, the occasional robotic malfunction turns gradually into something more systematic as Archos takes control of almost every machine across the world. Once ready, it launches an all-out war on humanity; cars mow down pedestrians, servant robots strangle their owners, buildings trick their tenants into falling down lift shafts.

By the end of the first day of the war, it's already looking rather bleak for humankind. However, here and there pockets of resistance emerge: a tribe of native Americans return to their pre-technological roots in the wilderness, while in Japan, a robotics expert turns a factory into a safe house where human survivors mix with self-aware robots that have rejected Archos's control. Over the following years, the survivors band together and start to fight back. Their ultimate target is Archos itself, hidden in the snowy wastes of Western Alaska. Can they locate and destroy it?

There are obvious superficial similarities between the plot of *Robopocalypse* and the *Terminator* franchise but Wilson takes his story in a very different direction, using it to make several interesting points. For example, Archos's war would have been stillborn without the almost total connectivity of every piece of hardware, an evident warning to us. Similarly, Archos's motivation for killing most of humanity is at least partly a Gaia-like response to the despoliation of the Earth by the virus that is *Homo sapiens*.

I did have major problems with this story in its novel form though. In the second part of the book we see a series of robot malfunctions over the year prior to the outbreak of war. These certainly ramp up the tension in a suitably cinematic way but I find them hard to justify in terms of the plot; it would seem more logical for Archos to keep its preparations secret. Equally, I had a big problem with the resolution of the story. Humanity is ultimately delivered from destruction not by its own hands but by one of the self-aware robots that have rejected Archos and thrown their lot in with us instead. A true *deus ex machina* if ever there was one.

*Robopocalypse* is well-written, thoughtful and entertaining but ultimately I felt that, although this will probably make a great Hollywood blockbuster, it is only a good novel.

***Rossum's Universal Robots* by Karel Čapek,**  
 translated by David Short (Hesperus, 2011)  
 Reviewed by L J Hurst

Two Czech writers achieved international repute between the World Wars, though it was the younger, writing in his native language, who made the biggest impression. He was Karel Čapek, born seven years after Franz Kafka. Kafka, who wrote in the much wider-understood German, sought less publicity, while Čapek, as soon as he had the success of *Rossum's Universal Robots* under his belt, set off on Europe-wide travels, producing several volumes describing the countries and celebrities he met. (*Letters From England* is as good as Bill Bryson).

Isaac Asimov liked nothing about Čapek's play, the robots themselves excepted. That means that Asimov missed all the tropes that have become common in sf. Rossum and Son built an experimental plant on an island, succeeded in producing their organic robots and sold them as cheap labour world-wide. With the founders long dead, the play is set in the Managing Director's lounge-cum-office; visited first by the daughter of the World Governor; then ten years later, having married her, he discovers that the robots are revolting. She admits to having persuaded the production manager to put human feelings in some robots. The news starts to come through the ticker-tape machines – fires are burning everywhere – before all falls silent. At the robot heart of the world the directors of Rossum's Universal Robots may be the last humans left alive; although it is not mentioned, the comparison may be made between the extinction of the Neanderthals and the succession of *Homo Sapiens*. Except that there is a problem: although humanoid in appearance, robots have fixed lives and do not reproduce, and the final vivifying chemical in the works is a trade secret memorised by the now deceased directors.

How many tropes did you count? There are the backbones of *Jurassic Park*, *Bladerunner*, *Brave New World*, *Metropolis*, 'The Genesis of the Daleks' and many, many more. Čapek even wrote a final act which – though kitsch today – continues troping: Adam and Eve emerge from the robots.

If you are engaged by Čapek's science, there are interesting similarities between the organic production by Frankenstein of his monster and Rossum's production of his robots. However, there are contrasts, too, for "Robot" comes from the Slavic root word for "worker", while Frankenstein meant to create a creature of the enlightenment, though neither ends as its creator intended. Alternatively, if you want to think of the play's philosophy, George Orwell discussed it in the theoretical second half of *The Road To Wigan Pier*: "Karel Čapek hits it off well enough in the horrible ending of *R.U.R.*, when the Robots, having slaughtered the last human being, announce their intention to 'build many houses' (just for the sake of building houses, you see)." Actually they talk of "new" rather than "many" houses but Orwell saw Čapek as an accurate critic of the "idea of mechanical progress, not merely as a necessary development but as an end in itself, almost as a kind of religion."

There are even more prescient tropes in Čapek's 1936 novel *War With The Newts*. Meanwhile, everyone who thinks about sf should have *R.U.R.* in their library.

**Black Halo by Sam Sykes**

(Pyr, 2011)

Reviewed by Donna Scott

**B**lack Halo is the second book in *The Aeons' Gate* series and rejoins the adventurer, Lenk, and his five companions after they have captured the Tome of the Undergates. They are making their way to a rendezvous point on a remote island with the Tome in order to increase the distance between it and Ulbecetonth, the Kraken Queen, who wants to use it for demonic purposes. En route, and in the middle of the ocean with little else for the companions to do other than bicker with each other, Lenk decides he is going to read the Tome, only to find it occupies his head like a second personality. In a fit of nihilism, his companion, the dragonman Gariath, decides to end their adventure by tempting a kitten-headed sea-serpent to destroy their boat. Lenk is ready to submit to death but the Tome in his head urges him to fight for life and so he washes up alone on the island, where the Tome tries to persuade him his companions are all dead.

Back on the mainland, the librarian Bralston has been tasked by the Venarium – the body that governs wizards – with finding and helping the companions. Bralston feels a chivalric responsibility towards one of them, a priestess called Asper, even though he is a “rational” wizard. Meanwhile, the companions find each other again and this time overt hatred has given way to (occasionally sexual) tension, their original mission almost forgotten.

*Black Halo* can read like *Dungeons and Dragons* going through puberty: at times funny, often juvenile. It is this sense of fun which is the main appeal of the book, as well as its dialogue-driven fast pace. In addition, the separated companions being forced to confront their own psyches makes for an interesting read. That Sam Sykes has already garnered some impressive reviews for this book is testament to his potential as a writer. At only twenty five, he brings youthful familiarity to his characters, their search for identity and a sense of cultural alienation. However, the book has flaws, not all of which can be laid at the door of his inexperience.

What starts out as a promising, witty adventure akin to something by Scott Lynch rapidly deteriorates into purple prose with little care over the final draft: the characters spend a lot of time staring and sometimes those stares are “fleeting”, there are continuity errors (such as the island being devoid of vegetation one minute, then having plenty of scrub and woodland for the characters to hide in) and there's a lot of repetition. In a book of this size, one or two editorial oversights would be forgivable but here they draw too much attention to themselves and the plot seems to ramble as a result. The writer's humour survives the flippancy but my own was troubled. It's fine for a book to be a fun, trashy read but no need to throw out the basics of good writing.

**The Heir Of Night by Helen Lowe**

(Orbit, 2010)

Review by Mark Connorton

**T**he *Heir of Night* is the first novel in a new four-part fantasy series from an author best known for her YA writing and, while this is aimed at adults, I'm not really sure why given the age of protagonists (early teens) and general tone.

The main character is Malian: heiress of a (refreshingly equal opportunities) warrior clan who guard a mountain range from a demonic army called the Darkswarm. The Darkswarm hasn't attacked for a while and the various clans opposing them have become complacent and divided. There is a prophecy that the clans will eventually be united by a mythical warrior who will lead them to final victory and if you think you can see where this is going then you're probably right. The Darkswarm attack Malian's fortified Keep and in the ensuing confusion she teams up with a young priest Kalan and discovers that she has mysterious prophecy-fulfilling type magic powers.

The premise is not especially original and Lowe tries to make up for it by throwing plenty of plot revelations and demonic foes into the novel. The narrative moves rapidly, with the attack coming early in the book. While various secondary characters fight the Darkswarm in the clan's Keep, Malian and Kalan get lost in the astral plane where they meet a variety of supernatural entities and allies who rapidly kit them out with new powers and magic items and a shopping list of ~~plot-coupons~~ ancient artefacts to acquire over the rest of the series. I soon came to realise that whatever scrape Malian and Kalan ended up in, it would always be resolved by a new manifestation of their powers or by a supporting character who reveals some hitherto unsuspected power of their own. This reduces the suspense that is generated by these confrontations, leaving only mild curiosity as to what plot device Lowe is going to pull out of thin air next. As if aware of this, she makes a great deal of the oaths and magical restrictions that govern the characters and limits what they can and can't do, resulting in several rather tedious sections where characters discuss at length the rules that prevent them winning a fight, only to find a loophole that lets them win it after all. They then discuss the whole thing again afterwards, all in ponderous archaic fantasy-speak.

Just as I was getting bored of the umpteenth “Darkswarm attack is averted by deus ex machina” sequence, the teenagers leave the Keep for the outside world for the first time and find themselves in a region of haunted hills. The change of setting is a breath of fresh air and we start to get a more objective view of Malian's clan and the less appealing aspects of their history and society. This is a promising sign for the rest of the series but there isn't much about the book itself that makes it particularly stand out from the pack.



***The Hammer* by KJ Parker  
(Orbit, 2011)  
Reviewed by Martin McGrath**

In most fantasy novels Gignomai met'Oc – the Loki-ish third son of a great aristocratic clan – would be the novel's shadowy villain. He steals from his family and skives off from his duties, he lies and cheats and he plots the destruction of his stronger and more noble brothers. He becomes a murderer and, perhaps worse, brings evil to a native society that had lived in peaceful harmony for generations. Gignomai met'Oc destroys everything he touches, even as he brings a social and industrial revolution to the backwards colony to which he, and his family, have been banished.

So it says much about the games KJ Parker is playing here that in *The Hammer*, Gignomai is – if hardly the hero – then certainly the novel's major protagonist standing squarely in the spotlight's glare and reflecting light into the meaner corners of human nature.

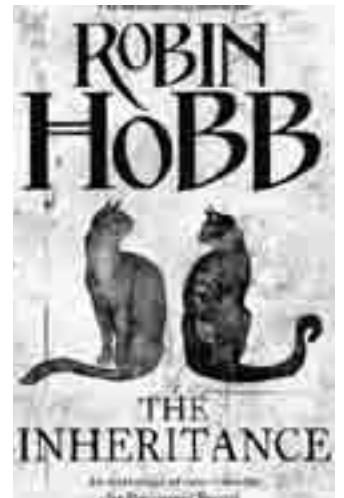
Fantasy has been cast as a conservative genre that deals in consolation and the consolidation of the status quo. *The Hammer* proves that it need not be anything of the kind. Indeed, far from providing a fantasy of consolation, Parker has written a brutal novel in which every character ends up in some way complicit with the conduct of evil. And, by creating characters that the reader empathises with, characters that (despite what they do) we like, Parker makes us complicit as well. We are drawn into a situation where the moral certainties that we expect in fantasy settings become meaningless labels rather than helpful directions. We want Gignomai to “win” – to complete his quest, to be revealed as the hero – even as we are repelled by the actions his gifts, his fate and his history make inevitable.

*The Hammer* shares the basic outline of a standard coming-of-age fantasy. Gignomai is a young man from an impoverished but noble background who is forced out into the world to pursue his destiny. He has his “quest” – a struggle to take revenge for an evil that has been done – and he certainly possesses the attributes of a fantasy hero: fearlessness, determination and intelligence. But make no mistake, Gignomai met'Oc is a monster. In his defence it might be argued that he has been made a monster by his family but, whatever the sources of his motivation, Gignomai's actions are calculating and cold-blooded and he has few compunctions about the way in which his schemes encompass the innocent and cause them real or psychological pain.

*The Hammer* is excellent but my admiration is not without caveats. I didn't like the representation of the native people – their utopian purity was too philosophically convenient to be convincing – and ultimately I couldn't quite reconcile myself to Parker's flinty view of human nature. I could never quite abandon all hope. Still, Parker writes with a piercing clarity, the novel is tightly plotted and feels precisely focussed throughout. With plausibly constructed social, scientific and engineering detail and an utter absence of magic or dragons, Parker has written a fantasy novel for sf fans. A complete, satisfying, standalone novel by an author of considerable talent; *The Hammer* is highly recommended.

***The Inheritance* by Robin Hobb & Megan Lindholm (Voyager, 2011)  
Reviewed by Amanda Rutter**

Robin Hobb and Megan Lindholm are one and the same person but they are very different writers. *The Inheritance* is a collection of short novels, novellas and stories, some of which are based in Hobb's popular universe of the Six Duchies. Before each of the stories, Lindholm/Hobb gives a small snippet of history as to how she came to write the piece and I loved this insight into her working process. I have read all of the novels written so far by Robin Hobb and thoroughly enjoyed them but this was my first experience at reading anything by Megan Lindholm. I would say that I'd be tentatively willing to pick up a Lindholm novel in the future but I do prefer her work as Hobb.



The three stories by Robin Hobb – strictly, one short story and two novellas – were the strongest part of this collection. In particular, I adored ‘Homecoming’, a tale about some of the first settlers into the Rain Wilds. Lady Carillion, a noblewoman betrayed by her husband, was strong and capable, a joy to read about. The tale of the misfit group becoming the seeds of a new civilisation was just long enough to allow me to truly immerse and gave me a strong desire to re-read the *Liveship Trader* trilogy.

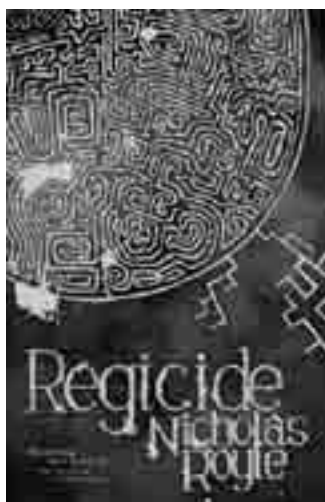
The shorter tales from the pen of Lindholm were more of a mixed bag (as is the case, I generally find, with anthologies). ‘A Touch of Lavender’ was a quirky and very enjoyable story of aliens – beneath the surface there is a darker discussion on the nature of drug addiction and motherhood that gave this short a very powerful edge. ‘Strays’ was also fantastically written; the punky Lonnie is a great character and one I would welcome a longer piece about. I spent the whole story wondering about how Lonnie came to be the kind of person she is and why she takes such care over stray cats.

I did not, however, like ‘Silver Lady and the Fortyish Man’ a great deal. This story, Lindholm confesses, was written for her husband and I feel it should have remained a private matter between them. I'm sure that if I was privy to the couple's in jokes, then this tale would have been more fun. As it was, it was whimsical but incredibly lightweight and didn't leave much of an impression. I had the same feeling of dissatisfaction after finishing ‘The Fifth Squashed Cat’ and ‘Drum Machine’. Both of these stories felt as though Lindholm only had the grain of an idea that she hadn't developed effectively into a complete tale.

*The Inheritance* is not the strongest anthology I have read and didn't leave me desperate to pick up novels by Lindholm. However, fans of the Six Duchies work by Robin Hobb will find this chance to read more about the world extremely satisfying, while newcomers can pick it up very successfully as well. Cautiously recommended.

**Regicide by Nicholas Royle****(Solaris, 2011)****Reviewed by Dave M. Roberts**

**R**egicide is a story set in, and attempting to make sense of, the backstreets of one man's memory. That man is Carl, who runs a second-hand record shop. This indicates very early in proceedings that we are dealing with someone whose life is largely shaped by the past and, for Carl, this is true to a much greater extent than he would like to think. He is attracted to Annie, who having recently come out of a bad relationship is reluctant to start a new one. After becoming lost in an area of London he knows well whilst trying to take Annie back to her hotel, he finds a map, evidently a page from an A-Z. Unable able to find his way around the relationship, he distances himself from this by developing an obsession with the map and where it might represent. After finally getting Anna to agree to see him again, he is involved in an motorway incident, when it seems he crosses into an alternate world that exists on the fringes of our perception.



Carl tells us his own story and he does it in his own way and at his own pace. He also has a tendency to be somewhat selective in what he is telling us about. The story jumps about in time, often drip-feeding the necessary backstory apparently at random. This means that the story develops at a slow pace, at least for the first section, but it is always engrossing, not least because of the way the story morphs as we absorb new details. Carl is an intriguing character and the story unfolds appropriately, developing a certain intensity as it progresses towards the climax.

As the story progresses, it becomes clear that the events Carl is relating may well not have played out quite as he describes them, but are shaped by his memory of them. He is not being deliberately misleading, it is just that the past is not as fixed in his mind as the music on the vinyl records that he sells. The way he views the death of his father is emblematic of this. The recollection has been misshapen by feelings of guilt to such an extent that in the alternate world it has become the Regicide of the title, for which everyone is a suspect.

As all the other characters are filtered through Carl's occasionally distorted perspective, they tend to come across more as ciphers rather than fully fledged people. This is even true, although to a lesser extent, of Anna, the person in the present who could be the saving of him. This is just fine, we can only know of them by the way they interact with Carl and this is no more reliable a guide to how they really are than anything else he remembers. Ultimately, it is not what happens to you that shapes the way you are but the way that you map that onto the present. Highly recommended.

**Epitaph by Shaun Hutson****(2010, Orbit)****Reviewed by Martyn Taylor**

**S**ome background information: I was never a fan of Shaun Hutson's work, which has always struck me as being functional and about as subtle as four feet of 2x4 timber in the face. Which didn't stop a lot of people – including my son and his friends – buying his books in large numbers. Then again, I was never a particular fan of punk either; it is a matter of taste. Regardless of this, I came to *Epitaph* expecting the breakneck plotting of the books I had read before. Instead I found myself wading through the cold treacle of the characterisation and back story of Paul Crane – a recent victim of the credit crunch – and Laura Hackett – the eight-year-old about to be victim of a child murderer. In the hands of, say, Stephen King these descriptions would have the reader like one of those wedding guests with the ancient mariner's claw-like hand immovably about their throat, transfixed as he tells his horrible tale. Hutson, however, made it very difficult for me to keep on turning the pages. I didn't feel the slightest empathy for either of the main characters, not even for a child murder victim!

Hutson couldn't make me give a toss about either. There isn't the slightest indication that he knows these people and their lives, let alone cares about them. Everything in the writing is surface, nothing is feeling. They are no more than chess pieces on the board of his plot.

Frank and Gina, Laura's parents are portrayed as the flawed but good hearted working class so beloved of 'English lady crime writers' (ie carved from living MDF). At no time does Hutson come anywhere near depicting the horror, the savagery, the despair of losing a child, especially to random violence. Those of us who have lost children – even if not to violence – can feel nothing but betrayed by Hutson's failure of imagination in his facile depiction of Frank and Gina and their descent into hell, consumed by the conviction that Crane killed Laura and their need for revenge and closure even at the cost of themselves.

You might be forgiven for thinking *Epitaph* was written by a Daily Mail leader writer rather than a novelist whose raw material is the human heart and the human condition. The prose is as functional as the plotting. Nowhere did I find any turn of phrase, any reference that made me stop and think I had been offered an insight that had previously eluded me.

Everyone picks up a book wanting to enjoy it and reviewing a novel from which one has derived no pleasure at all is a particularly thankless task. *Epitaph* is badly plotted, soullessly written, uninsightful and I found it unsatisfying in every way. Doubtless there will be those who will read this and find it everything they could desire in a novel. Good luck to them. As I say, it is a matter of taste. After this disappointment, however, I doubt I shall ever pick up a Shaun Hutson book again.

***The Concrete Grove* by Gary McMahon  
(Solaris, 2011)**

**Reviewed by Shaun Green**

As I sit down to write this review in mid-August 2011, the riots that have erupted across Britain over the past week have begun to subside, the energies that drove them dissipating in the face of a coherent police response and that most British of demotivators, the weather. But the anger, social exclusion, vanishing economic possibilities, lack of faith in police relations and sense of political betrayal that initially produced this eruption among Britain's poorest urban communities remain. Gary McMahon's *The Concrete Grove* plumbs the fertile ground of such forgotten areas, its dark tale derived as much from the existential horror of hopeless or wasted lives as the natural and supernatural forces that prey upon them.

Lana and Hailey, single mother and daughter, have been forced into an estate – the eponymous Concrete Grove – which surrounds the Needle, a derelict and sinister Brutalist block of flats. The Needle pierces the heart of a community racked with poverty, desperation and accompanying social issues like drug abuse, violence and entrenched petty criminals with a penchant for cruelty. One such ambitious thug is Monty Bright, a loan shark obsessed with the history of the Grove. Monty takes an interest in the pair, using Lana's debt to him as leverage while he tries to understand the growing connection between Hailey and the Grove. A few roads over, just outside the estate, a middle-aged man named Tom supports and cares for his bed-bound and clinically obese wife. Tortured by his own demons and a sense of being trapped in his own life, Tom finds himself drawn to Lana and Hailey and by extension involved in whatever plans Bright and the Grove have in store.

*The Concrete Grove's* most interesting conceit is its fusion of old mythologies with present realities. The backstory describes how the Needle and surrounding estate were built over an ancient Pagan site of nature-worship. The power of the old Grove remains but it has been corrupted by the pathologies of the human community that now surrounds it. Forces bleed out into our world and not all of them are as ambivalent as those the Pagans once worshipped.

Although the actions of McMahon's characters may not always convince – Hailey in particular makes a few leaps of faith and illogic that I struggled with and Tom is one of those frustratingly frustrated middle-aged characters whose internal monologue is dominated by a desire to fuck anything with a blouse and a pulse – they are on the whole a sympathetic bunch who draw us into the worlds he has built around the iconic Needle. The thematic juxtaposition on which the novel is based is maintained throughout: England's past and present, the powers produced by suburban sickness and health, all revolving around by the ambiguous forces of nature. The novel's conclusion reflects this state of thematic balance well, although it's also possible to read in a much more traditional horror motif. *The Concrete Grove* itself clearly has more stories to tell. By the book's close it remains a source of substantial mystery and the desperate poverty and anti-social behaviour that surrounds it remains unaddressed and ignored by the wider world.

***Horns* by Joe Hill  
(Gollancz, 2010)**

**Review by Lalith Vipulanathan**

At one stage or another, many of us have drunk too much and woken up with no memory of the previous night. Few though have woken up with horns and the power to know a person's deepest desires and to influence their behaviour. That is the situation that Ig Perrish finds himself in following the anniversary of the rape and murder of his girlfriend Merrin, an unsolved crime that most of his hometown believes he committed.

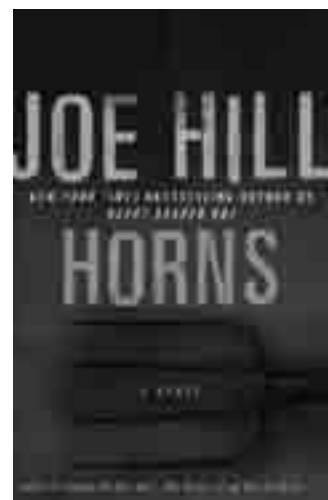
Fearing for his sanity – for the horns are only visible to Ig – he finds that a mere touch compels people to confess their sins to him. This leads to the discovery of some uncomfortable truths about his friends and family and, eventually, the identity of Merrin's killer. Thus enlightened, Ig embarks on a course of vengeance but soon discovers that justice for Merrin may come at the cost of his own humanity.

I'm in two minds about *Horns*. On the one hand, it's a very readable gothic fantasy with (mostly) superb characterisation. On the other, it's a bad fix-up of its genre premise with starkly different mainstream novellas, features a ludicrously over-the-top antagonist and lacks a proper exploration of Ig's transformation into a devil.

Hill paints a vivid picture of small-town America and is deftly able to get to the heart of a character with minimal effort. The novel starts off with a bang as Ig's unwitting use of his newfound powers leads to an early reveal of the killer but then into a very mainstream segment (entitled 'Cherry') which lays the foundation for the triangle between Ig, Merrin and their best friend Lee Tourneau. Providing emotional depth for Ig and Merrin's relationship, 'Cherry' is a well-written rite of passage tale, albeit a very different beast to the main narrative. We return to Ig's revenge quest briefly before turning to 'The Fixer', a flashback told from the sociopathic perspective of the story's villain. Again a style shift ensues but here the greater crime is that Hill, in an effort to make Ig's devil anti-hero look good by comparison, deploys such a density of evil clichés that the novella undergoes a kind of literary gravitational collapse.

My other concern with the book is that whilst it sets up an interesting premise in Ig's transformation, it fails to torment him with any morally questionable decisions, nor explore how Ig feels about the choices he does make. Kicking his grandmother down a hill is probably the most evil thing that he does and that happens near the very beginning – everything else he does seems quite agreeable and thus Ig's path is never really in doubt.

Still, as previously stated, *Horns* is an enjoyable tale if you can ignore the stylistic bumps and not delve too deeply into its theological arguments.





***Unseen Academicals* by Terry Pratchett (Corgi, 2010)**

***The Folklore of Discworld* by Terry Pratchett and Jacqueline Simpson (Corgi, 2009)**

***I Shall Wear Midnight* by Terry Pratchett (Doubleday, 2010)**

**Reviewed by Jessica Yates**

This review covers the three most recent books by Terry Pratchett: the latest in the Discworld sequence for adults, a co-written non-fiction work on folklore and the latest in the Tiffany Aching series for older children.

*Unseen Academicals* is a substantial addition to the canon with the master in peak condition. The cover shows a football team and fans will easily identify several recurring characters, such as Rincewind, Vetinari and the Librarian, but will wonder about the unfamiliar ones. This is a 'cultural' novel, like *Moving Pictures* or *Soul Music*, and several of the leading characters are new to us: Trevor, a young human, and his co-worker at the university, a mutant goblin called Nutt, who work in the candle department; and two kitchen ladies, Glenda Sugarbean and her assistant Juliet.

The main plot is driven by Vetinari, weary of the massive scrums which are an inevitable part of street football. Masses of men with neighbourhood loyalties shove one another up and down Ankh-Morpork streets in a very dangerous fashion. Vetinari replaces this with football teams representing areas and guilds and move the whole activity to a pitch with spectators and orders the wizards to organise it. Having just learned that a certain bequest (which funds nearly all their food bill) may be forfeit if they do not form a team to play foot-the-ball, the wizards quickly agree, obtaining a ball from the Cabinet of Curiosity and devising the rules. The climax is the very first public football match, between *Unseen Academicals* and Ankh-Morpork United, and the wizards are forbidden to use magic.

This book is not just about football (or even the budding romance between Trevor and Juliet). Pratchett has decided it is time to settle scores with one JRR Tolkien, the writer who created the readership for fantasy fiction, and whom he has always treated with respect and gentle parody. So what is the issue? Good and evil in *Lord of the Rings* and the irredeemably evil nature of some characters. Tolkien himself did tinker with his original setup but could not resolve the paradox of the infantry soldiers of Mordor. It is one thing for Pratchett to devise his own versions of elves, dwarfs and trolls (who existed before Tolkien wrote about them), it is quite another to produce Discworld versions of those "goblins" who are much more Tolkien's own creation. Nutt, an orc, is the first of his kind to venture into Ankh-Morpork.

Nutt, however, is a morally good being, having more in common with Commander Data from *Star Trek: The Next Generation* than his Tolkienian archetype. He speaks more formally than anyone else, sometimes very like Jeeves; he has an infinite capacity for learning; he is somewhat stronger than the average human and good at craft skills; he seeks to be accepted among humankind and the other species in the city.

*The Folklore of Discworld* developed out of the long friendship between Pratchett, who loves folklore and scatters it through his books, especially the ones about

the witches, and Jacqueline Simpson, an eminent folklorist and Discworldian, who has validated many of his allusions with examples from the folklore of Britain and elsewhere. They both felt the book was needed to explain to Pratchett's readership that most examples of Discworld folklore have longstanding counterparts in our world. The book casts its net far wider than country folklore to embrace supernatural and legendary aspects of Discworld, so there are sections on gods, dwarfs, elves, heroes and beasts as well as the witches of Lancre and the Chalk, all paralleled where possible with our Earth counterparts.

This updated paperback edition has an extra section on the folklore of *Unseen Academicals*, including examples of traditional mass football and a section on orcs, with the origin of the name from *Beowulf* and how Tolkien adapted it. Some examples are identical to those in our world - for example, traditional football is still played in a few English villages - but some are very different. A witch-finder and witch trials are evil things in our world but positive in Discworld as the witch-finder is a talent-spotter and witch trials are competitive (like sheepdog trials). Some usages are dramatically worse: in our villages the male equivalent of a witch was a "cunning man" but in *I Shall Wear Midnight* that title is given to a remorseless entity who hates witches.

*I Shall Wear Midnight* is the fourth and probably last story about Tiffany Aching, now the fully-fledged witch for her own village, even though she is still not yet sixteen. In the first three books, Tiffany faced and defeated a supernatural threat, and now faces another one. Furthermore Tiffany is caught in a situation quite typical of real life: her almost-childhood sweetheart Roland does not want her and she has not got over the hurt, despite the sensible advice of the Nac Mac Feegele, her tiny brawling magical friends. Roland has chosen a wife with a formidable mother who intends to bully her daughter and Roland, and both mother and daughter resent Tiffany's role in Roland's younger life. Tiffany bravely faces them, defuses their hatred and even befriends them.

As well as learning her trade as a witch (i.e. local nurse and social worker) she is targeted by a malicious spirit looking for a body, known to witches as the Cunning Man, a witch-hater from the past who homes in on new witches to absorb and ruin them. Fortunately Tiffany has older witches to advise her on this essential rite of passage, in which the stakes are life or death, and happily also finds a new beau who understands her and is ready to face the Cunning Man with her. The concluding battle and reconciliation carries the sense of the "numinous" which Nanny Ogg says is part of the great rituals of life. It is not surprising that this book was voted the best novel of 2010 by SFX readers or that in his acceptance speech, Pratchett said he thought it was his best ever - although there is much competition for that title, this one certainly tastes of a satisfying richness.

***Ghost of a Chance* by Rhiannon Lassiter**  
 (Oxford University Press, 2011)  
 Reviewed by Graham Andrews

**E**lliott O'Donnell (1872-1965) was a famous literary dabbler in the occult. Bear with me, please. From his Prefatory Note to *Ghosts with a Purpose* (1952): "Even in the seemingly most aimless haunting, however, there may yet be an underlying cause or purpose." He might have been anticipating Eva Chance, the fragile but feisty heroine of Rhiannon Lassiter's *Ghost of a Chance*.

Eva (short for Evangeline) Chance is the eponymous ghost of a chance, a cute bit of word-play but I'd rather not dwell on it any further. Her spectral purpose is heralded in the front-cover blurb: How do you solve your own murder? "I'm going to find out how I died and if someone killed me I'll pay them back for it," vows Eva. "I'm going to haunt my family and everyone else until I've found out the truth." But that's much easier vowed than done.

I can't help feeling that Eva had been a ghost-in-waiting ever since the day she was born the illegitimate daughter of Adeline Chance, who drowned herself in the lake near Chance House, the ancestral family pile. Eva was found in the bulrushes, like Moses, and adopted by Edward Chance, her kindly but ageing grandfather. Sixteen years later, the only close friends Eva has in Chance House are the ghosts that she comes to take for granted. To me, this casual haunting by apparent total indifference is much more nerve-wracking than the usual clanking of chains and all that other eldritch cobblers.

Chance House is getting so decrepit that it makes the House of Usher look like Castle Howard. The estate will soon pass from the nonagenarian Edward Chance to odious Felix. At a dinner party worthy of the Borgias, Felix announces that he plans to organize Ghost Walks for that year's tourist season. Eva protests but nobody listens to her. It becomes clear that she has now left the land of the living – with no knowledge of how and when she died.

After some few chapters finding her phantom feet, Eva becomes actively embroiled in a two-front war: vengeful spirits are preying on the historically not-very-nice Chance family and an equally vicious human murderer is doing the exact same thing. She is joined by *Ghosts Helpful and Harmful* (thanks again, Elliott O'Donnell). Margaret/Maggie/Magpie Stratton, a long-deceased servant girl, is very helpful to Eva – when she isn't trying to frighten the death out of her. The Witch that lives in the cellar of Chance House is by far the most harmful apparition: "I see you – and you're nothing. Last chance, no more Chances left."

Eva finds human allies in the present-day Stratton family: Keith Stratton (who knows a lot more than he's been letting on) and his twin children, Kyra and Kyle. The Stratton Teens have taken summer jobs helping to clean up Chance House for the grand re-opening. From here on, the previously rather elegiac tone turns into a fast and scarifying narrative crescendo. The identity of the mundane murderer kept me guessing right up until the very end-game and the author has played scrupulously fair with her readers.

I hadn't read anything by Rhiannon Lassiter before but I'll be reading a lot more of her books in future. And the BBC might consider doing *Ghost of a Chance* as a ghost story for Christmas – if Steven Spielberg doesn't snap it up first.

***The Prometheus Project: Stranded***  
 by Douglas E Richards (Paragon Press, 2010)  
 Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

**T**he only references I could find online to Paragon Press as a children's imprint related to this writer and this series, from which I assume that the books are self-published. This is also suggested by a few irritating typos and by five pages of quotations praising the previous two books, mostly from educational sources.

This is the third book in a series of children's novels. I haven't read the earlier two books but I had no difficulty in getting up to speed. Unfortunately, Richards makes sure that his readers know what happened previously with a vast infodump in the first chapter. The context is a boring maths lesson in which Ryan, the central character, reviews his previous experiences instead of paying attention. This doesn't make for a gripping start to the book.

The basic situation is that Ryan's parents are scientists investigating an alien underground city named Prometheus. In the first book Ryan and his sister Regan save the day in an emergency and so are allowed to join the professional team. Maybe I'm being unfair but this idea of kids being admitted into secret scientific projects seems particularly dated to me. Children's writers today look for more sophisticated ways of incorporating young characters into adult environments.

So by the end of the first chapter I had grave misgivings about this book and sadly they were not dispelled by what followed. I didn't feel that the underground city or the planet to which the characters subsequently travel were ever realised in a way that suggested the author had given detailed thought to world-building. There's too much vague writing such as "a powerful force acting on his body that he couldn't possibly describe", or "an impossible shape that was indescribable". On the alien planet we're told about "any number of species in the distance interacting with one another". The technology seems to do anything that Richards wants it to do.

Instead of genuine engagement with the science-fictional elements, Richards goes for the 'gosh-wow factor', which he sometimes emphasises with italics in case we might miss it. For example, when the characters are marooned on the planet and under attack by predators, there's a whole list of weird and wonderful creatures but no sense of how the ecology might support such varied species or whether they could co-exist.

I wasn't convinced that Ryan and Regan were as bright as they were supposed to be and there's little depth to any of the characterisation. The story sometimes grinds to a halt while someone explains a scientific concept, e.g. the fourth dimension; it's obvious that Richards values the opportunity of teaching about science but it doesn't make for a good novel.

All that said, the plot is mostly fast-moving; the combination of danger on the alien planet and a traitor at work back on earth gives the central characters vital problems to solve. Children, particularly those with a scientific bent, could find it enjoyable and the earlier books have five-star reviews on Amazon. But young readers deserve so much more than this thin fare, in terms of good writing, believable characterisation and imaginative world-creation.



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