



# Vector

**The Critical Journal of the British Science Fiction Association**

**The SF art of Dominic Harman**

**Genre-hopping with China Miéville**

**Mythology in Philip José Farmer's  
*The Unreasoning Mask***

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The Critical Journal of the British Science Fiction Association

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# Vector

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# Torque Control

## Êtes-vous Parisien?

The world's gaze has been fixed on Paris of late. The nation which gave us Louis Geoffroy (author of the first alternate history novel), Jules Verne, Georges Méliès, Gilles Thomas, Roland C. Wagner, Jacques Tardi, and so many others, has entranced us with alternating images of dystopia, and (if not-utopia) hope for something better.<sup>1</sup>

The attacks were assaults on normal people having a normal Friday night, they were designed to shake not just the French idea of security and normality, but that of citizens of nations throughout what we call the Western World. You know the details. Of course you do. The news was total in its coverage and penetration, and yet for all the horrific stories and images which would emerge there was a strong element of Jean Baudrillard (another Frenchman) and the simulacra about it. Through social media people expressed opinions, attacked other opinions, and defended hypotheticals. Events such as the Paris attacks expose just how much we've come to rely on social media not only for news or keeping in touch, but to express and process our emotional responses. This seems very science fictional to me.

If the Paris attacks and the quagmire-like war in Syria provoked feelings of dystopia in me, then some of the expressions of defiance that we saw on the streets in France brought something of a sniff of optimism for humanity. This was enhanced, perhaps naively on my part, by the massive climate summit that followed only two weeks later. That the event went ahead at all, and that so many thousands of normal people took to the streets (eventually, after some rather interesting 'absent protests' following an initial blanket ban on public gatherings), is itself remarkable. As my interview with David Mitchell last issue alluded to, the cataclysm of post-oil, coupled with climate change, are the biggest threats of civilization that we face, no matter what happens in the Middle East. That nearly 200 nations managed to agree on something which, even if too little too late, could really impact climate change, is astounding. As a child of Star Trek, this sort of diplomatic consensus seems very science fictional to me.

So I've been thinking a lot about France recently (I don't really follow the round-ball sport but I was happy to note Wales will join the two Irish teams and England at the European Cup next summer). I've been thinking about the romance

attributed to the place, and the steampunk cool we've often gifted it. I've been thinking about Woody Allen's time traveling *Midnight in Paris*, Gareth Powell's [BSFA Award-winning] *Ack-Ack Macaque*. Paris is a place which bewitches popular culture from Casablanca to China Miéville's forthcoming book, *The Last Days of Paris*.

There's plenty of Miéville in this issue as Rob O'Connor tackles the issue of genre classification and China's books. I've often heard it said that genre is just something bookshops create so that they can market (and organise) books. Even if this is true, don't think that booksellers themselves aren't just as annoyed at what gets into the science fiction section and what doesn't, Rob's article begins with just such a complaint and I too have smuggled extra copies of Atwood, Susannah Clarke, Chabon, Vonnegut and more, around the corner from general fiction to science fiction. Michael O'Brien's article tackles another genre-bending novel, although in different ways, as he reminds us of Philip José Farmer's *The Unreasoning Mask* and its blending of religious mythology with science fiction.

There's so much more in this issue of Vector that I think you'll enjoy but in the space left to me I want to highlight one of our regular columns: Laura Sneddon's article ventures onto the other topic I considered turning the bulk of my editorial over to, a certain film which is causing quite a stir. By the time this reaches print many of you will have seen *The Force Awakens*, no doubt, but just in case I'll avoid specifics. All I'll say is that it too gave me a reason for hope and optimism this month. It's not a perfect film, although a damn sight better than the prequels, but it gives me [A New?] hope for the future of Star Wars, and more importantly it excited me to see a confident blending of old and new arms of the franchise and the confident and self-assured steps forward taken by its leads: a young woman and a man of colour. Could it be that Hollywood has reached a maturity we could only talk about hypothetically not all that long ago? Hopefully, or perhaps that too should seem science fictional to me.

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**#sfVector**

**Anna McFarlane  
and Glyn Morgan**  
Co-Editors, Vector

1. On the topic of "so many others" – everyone knows France has a rich tradition of science fiction, but it astonishes me how little of it we know, or is even translated into English (how many winners of the Prix Rosny-Aîné can you name?). I suppose translation is expensive and the English language produces such a quantity of science fiction that publishers don't need to seek out French works. There are, after all, strong science fiction/fantasy traditions in other languages that we see just as little of in our Anglophone bubble, see our recent interviews on Latvian SF and more. If anyone wants to write some articles about French SF and send them to us then please do!

Cover art by Dominic Harman  
from Solaris's  
*The Best of SF & Fantasy Vol 9 (2015)*  
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# Dealing With Dragons: The Art of Dominic Harman

*An interview by Anna McFarlane*

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**T**he cover of Vector #282 has been kindly provided by artist Dominic Harman, and is also the cover of The Best Science Fiction and Fantasy of the Year Volume Nine from Solaris (2015, edited by Jonathan Strahan). He has designed artwork for Clive Barker's novels with HarperCollins and the Philip Pullman His Dark Materials box set among many, many others as well as working on album covers for bands like Insane Clown Posse. I spoke to Dominic about his artistic process, and how he came to the field of science fiction, fantasy, and horror.

**Anna McFarlane:** Hi Dominic, thanks for agreeing to speak to *Vector*, and thanks for letting us use your artwork on our cover for this issue.

**Dominic Harman:** First, let me say how happy I am to be interviewed by *Vector*! Many thanks to yourself and Donna Scott, I appreciate it very much! Well, regarding this month's cover, I was given the opportunity to illustrate the cover for Solaris' *Best of SF & Fantasy of the Year. Vol. 9*. I discussed ideas with the publishers and editors and we agreed that it was important to have a human element in there amongst all the vast, soaring technology. We went for a convoy of cruisers with the pilot of one of them sitting for a moment taking in the beautiful pastel panorama with gas giants and smaller satellites surrounding them in the heavens.

**AM:** It looks great: first let me ask you, what's your background and how did you begin illustrating professionally?

**DH:** As a child, like all children I guess, I was drawing and sketching. I remember seeing in my early teens the album covers of the rock band Iron Maiden, illustrated by Derek Riggs. I was so impressed by the intense energy of his artwork that I studied the covers corner to corner. He was my first major influence. Later, I discovered the works of Boris Vallejo with his stunning book, *Mirage*, and Frank Frazetta, through his 1960s *Conan* book covers for Lancer. Those artists were hugely influential on me and paved the way for my career in SF and Fantasy illustration.

My first professional sale was to *Interzone* magazine in 1997 and since then I have worked for all the major publishers, illustrating book covers and calendar pieces for authors and bands such as Terry Pratchett, Philip Pullman, Clive Barker, Ursula. LeGuin, Jack Finney, Frank Herbert,

Insane Clown Posse, Justina Robson, Ian Whates, Eric Brown, Naomi Novik, and H.G. Wells to name a few.

**AM:** What about the classical artistic tradition, do you find much inspiration there?

**DH:** I mentioned earlier my contemporary inspirations and influences but I was also inspired by the old masters such as Velazquez, Rembrandt, Rubens and Caravaggio. I remember going to the National Gallery in London and being in total awe of these masters, it was an experience I have never forgotten and when I go back its very much the same. I would suggest to people who haven't been there yet to go. Regardless of the subject matter, the sheer scale of some of them is quite something to behold. Some years back I went to Florence, Italy to study Caravaggio in a workshop with an Atelier Academy. It felt like a pilgrimage to walk in the footsteps of the masters and to study their techniques.

**AM:** And have these inspirations had an impact on your material practice as an artist, then?

**DH:** Well, I began painting in watercolour but I seriously got into using oil and graphite: I then started using an air brush with Acrylic when I was experimenting with new mediums, but when I first started getting into the business in the late 90s I saw that computers were quickly growing in popularity and the book cover market was rapidly turning to digital cover artwork. It was an agonising choice but I realised that the best way forward for me commercially was to embrace digital art and computers. I still paint and draw traditionally as it's a very important discipline a passion and balance to the professional illustration and all that comes with it.

**AM:** Can you describe a working day in your life for us?

**DH:** Well, preparing for a day's work at the computer (or easel) I always start with music as it's very important to create a good working environment. It's much easier to get the creative juices flowing with a beautiful score playing like Jerry Goldsmith (*Alien*), Basil Poledouris (*Conan the Barbarian*, *Robocop*), Vangelis (*Bladerunner*) and Tangerine Dream (*Phaedra*, *Legend*) and it's exciting to purchase film scores from films I haven't seen so I am not thinking of a specific scene from a film. Recently I have been enjoying



podcasts, everything from interviews with musicians, mainly from the 80s rock and metal genres, and crime documentaries, anything from Mafia to physiological to Andrew Graham-Dixon's fascinating art documentaries in which he examines various artists within their time and place and their styles.

**AM:** How do you begin designing artwork for a specific project, book/CD?

**DH:** I have developed two styles over the years, it differs a little. For example, the cover art for Patricia C. Wrede's *Dealing with Dragons*. I started with digital roughs in grayscale to compose and deal with lighting and designing the characters. Then I will colour it up by creating a palette that is suitable for the subject and mood. Colour is the last thing for the rough. Once a particular rough is chosen I will begin to work it up. Occasionally that may involve photo reference but as its cartoon-realism sometimes it will just be made up. For the cover of Jo Anderton's *Debris* for example, I created a rough in the same way as before but as this style is photorealistic I will book in a photoshoot and will use my photos directly along with my 3D and Photoshop skills to create the cover.

**AM:** And what information are you given in advance for such projects? Do you get early access to the text?

**DH:** On occasion I get to read the novel/short story and sometimes I get a brief, the latter is what happens mostly these days. I like to do both but often there isn't the time so I am given a specific scene. I am happy to do both.

**AM:** Is it easier when you have more information, or do you prefer having a free reign?

**DH:** It all depends; it's great to have free reign and other times I have a specific brief but I still enjoy illustrating a cover within those parameters. I think a balance is important in order to keep things fresh.

**AM:** What are you trying to achieve when you illustrate a story or an album? What do you feel your work adds to the experience of reading the literature or hearing the music?



**DH:** Good question. Well, something arresting and eye-catching of course – on the covers I did for Darren Shan, the monsters are literally jumping out at the reader to pummel them into submission! That approach really fitted the explosive, fast-paced style of Darren's superb writing. For the guitar virtuoso Borislav Mitic's album, *Electric Goddess*, it required a more understated approach, where the viewer is drawn in by the cover, a woman's face and head made out of mechanical parts with sensual undercurrents. In this case it's where the art and music weave a harmonious feeling. Both approaches are a lot of fun!

**AM:** Have you always been a fan of fantasy, science fiction, and horror?

**DH:** Yes, absolutely! I remember when I was a child seeing on TV the 1950s version of *Invaders from Mars* and that spooky picket fence on top of the hill! Also seeing John Carpenter's *The Thing*. That scared the life out of me but the interesting thing was I went back to watch the film



again and again, I was fascinated with how a film could have the power to really scare you so much but also the imaginative special effects which I had never seen anything like before. The 80s video nasties (I'm showing my age now!) had a huge effect on me with films like *Nightmare on Elm Street*, *From Beyond*, *Hellraiser* and *Evil Dead II* to name a few, but also fantasy movies like *The Never Ending Story* and *Legend*. However, I think the 1982 *Conan* movie has probably stayed with me the most; I think the director captured the essence of the books so perfectly with the gritty realism and the bombastic soundtrack, courtesy of Basil Poledouris.

I wasn't an avid reader when I was young but I did love the books by Robert. E. Howard with their nonstop action, exotic locations, magnificent monsters and alluring women (a perfect combination for a teenage lad!). Films and music were my main areas of interest and passion but I read more and more when I was older and when I started professionally illustrating I was reading all the time, mainly to illustrate the short stories for the much loved *Interzone* magazine that I was working for in my early career which was an amazing platform for me to hone my craft and also to get my work seen regularly, and then later book covers.

**AM:** How is designing a CD cover different from designing a book jacket? Is it more difficult when there isn't a coherent storyline or character descriptions?

**DH:** I've found designing CDs enjoyable as it's generally an idea that will convey a feeling of the music. For example, Insane Clown Posse have their own characters which are scary clowns, so I had an idea of a circus on fire and out of the smoke the main clown called The Ringmaster is emerging and reaching out towards the viewer with his terrifying claws!

**AM:** Do you ever work directly with novelists or musicians to figure out their vision for the work?

**DH:** Yes, I do and that is really exciting, it's great to hear their thoughts about the creation of their story or album.

**AM:** What work do you do beyond your book and record covers?

**DH:** I have done calendar pieces for Terry Pratchett and a science fiction calendar with huge, hulking space ships. I also oil paint and draw, as it was my first love. Over the years I have come back to it and it's a pleasure to be able to keep both going as they do help each other in many ways.

**AM:** You've been nominated for several awards now, and your cover for *The Best Science Fiction and Fantasy of the Year Volume 9* is eligible for the next round of awards: what impact, if any, do you find these award cycles have on your approach to your work, or your career more generally?

**DH:** I think it's an honour to be nominated and to win of course. I do get a sense of achievement when people like my work enough to vote for it and I'm very grateful to them. I don't think my approach has changed with regards to how I illustrate a cover, but it's such a lovely compliment and it makes me feel I must be doing something right for my efforts to be recognised.

**AM:** Do you have any thoughts on the field of illustration at large, particularly its future direction? Have ebooks, for example, had any impact on the kinds of covers publishers look for now?

**DH:** I think the business as a whole is shrinking for book cover illustrators, there is still work out there thankfully but what with the economy being the way it is, it's not easy. I think being versatile and able to adapt is more and more important these days. Looking ahead, will ebooks take over so we won't need the physical paperback anymore and will we all eventually be reading from a phone or a tablet? I am not











sure where our business will end up but I do hope that book cover illustration will still have a cherished place in our field.

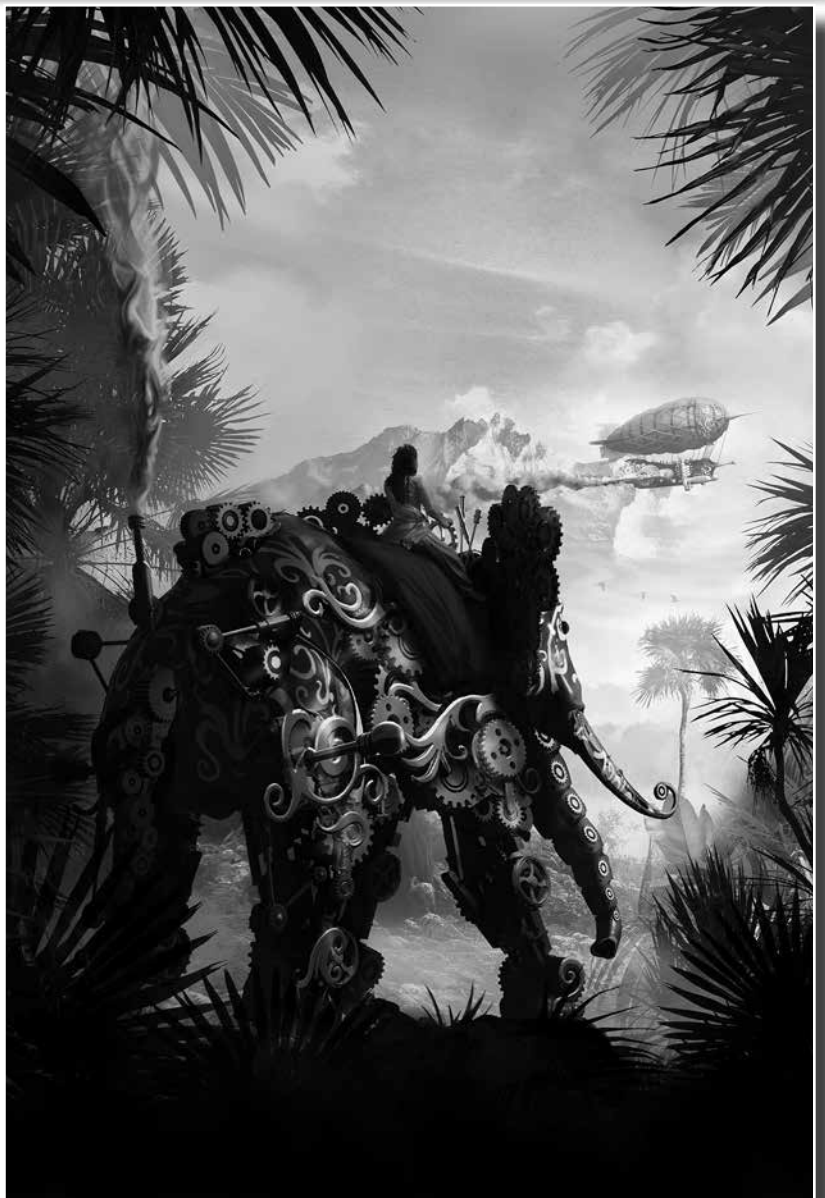
**AM:** Your new website looks set to be a home for your concept art, as well as your previous projects; what's your vision for the new website, what are you hoping to do with it?

**DH:** I am thrilled with my new website with great thanks to Claire Weaver who did a wonderful job designing it. I wanted a complete re-design and I also wanted to simplify it with less sub categories and have my best artwork in one category called the 'Gallery'. Some websites have many categories, splitting up the art into genres. I see why they would set their work out like that, but what I personally prefer to see is the best examples in one place. The only other section apart from the 'Store' and 'Info' is the 'Character Design' category. I initially called it 'Concept Art' but I felt like that word has been over-used and I wanted it to be more specific so I thought what I would love to see in this section was the characters I have created for book covers, calendars, and others that were just for fun so I thought I will give them a home.

**AM:** Have you got any interesting projects coming up, or anything that you'd like to do in the future?

**DH:** Looking ahead to the not so distant future I have an exciting cover assignment for the legendary Alastair Reynolds! I am looking forward to being able to create a dramatic panoramic space opera scene. Lots of oil paintings planned and some rest over the Holidays! Best Wishes to you all for 2016!

*You can view more of Dominic Harman's artwork on his website, [www.dominic-harman.com](http://www.dominic-harman.com).*



# A Novel In Every Genre: China Miéville and the problems of genre classification in the twenty-first century

by Rob O'Connor

---

**P**icture the scene. 2003. An excited bookseller - aka me - opens a box to discover the hardback copies of Margaret Atwood's latest novel *Oryx and Crake* (2003). As a fan of *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and its depiction of a dystopian society I was excited by Atwood's re-engagement with the field of science fiction. Imagine my horror then as the automatic inventory system categorised the novel as fiction. This was the moment when I realised that genre categories had become problematic.

Since the turn of the millennium genre fiction has been going through a radical evaluation. Contemporary authors are beginning to experiment with the boundaries of genre expectations. Of course writers have always explored the fantastic but historically there has been a conscious distancing between literary fiction and genre. However, in the past decade, literary authors are now using genre traits more openly, with novels such as *The Road* (2006) and *Never Let Me Go* (2005) gaining great acclaim whilst portraying themes that are traditionally the territory of genre novels. As a result, texts are now becoming problematic to classify and the once defined boundary between literature and genre is becoming indeterminate. China Miéville is one author leading the way in breaking down boundaries and exploring new forms of genre. In this paper I will show how Miéville is utilising the boundaries between genres by examining his work using two recognisable genre classifications, focusing firstly upon fantasy fiction and then science fiction. I hope to posit Miéville's theoretical standpoint regarding genre classification, demonstrating a need for these boundaries to be reassessed and broken down.

Squid-gods, quantum physics, cactus-people, dimension-jumping law-keepers, sentient machines, sea monsters, body-controlling parasites, golems: these are just a few of the things that you will find in the novels of China Miéville. The influence that genres play upon Miéville's work cannot be ignored. Miéville himself has been quoted as saying that he would like to write 'a novel in every genre', stating: 'at a basis I am interested in genre because that was formative for me, as a reader' and that one of his aims is to 'impinge on "traditional" pulp or generic plots' (Pistelli and Worden interview, 2005). Miéville's ability to shift seamlessly between many genre tropes deliberately reflects the confusion over how to categorise genre in the early twenty-first century.

Miéville's trilogy of books set in the world of Bas-Lag - although coalesced by their fantasy, secondary-world, setting - actually contain tropes from a wide variety of genres: *Perdido Street Station* (2000), with the mind-eating slake-moths, is a monster-orientated horror novel; *The Scar* (2002), with its floating pirate-city and colossal sea monsters, conjures up comparisons with the maritime quest-narratives of Jules Verne; whereas *Iron Council* (2004) contains the key elements of the western genre, with dusty plains-travellers, railroads and gunfights. With all of these themes and ideas appearing together, it is no wonder that classifying Miéville's work proves so difficult. However, this is what Miéville is trying to achieve - to create debate over the classification seen in fiction and to challenge the hierarchal snobbery of literary over genre fiction. His work is constantly stretching the barriers between genres to raise the question of what genre actually means in the twenty-first century.

It is clear that certain tropes are recognisable as belonging to certain genres. Therefore, a basic interpretation of genre *must* focus upon classification. Many genre theorists agree with this initial analysis. John Frow describes genre as 'a matter of discrimination and taxonomy: of organising things into recognisable classes' (51). The important word in Frow's initial definition is 'recognisable' and this is the key element of genre: the audience is able to identify which genre a text belongs to with little difficulty due to the traits it possesses and the themes it is discussing. In other words, particular genres are about particular subjects or, as the well-known genre theorist Tzvetan Todorov claims: 'a genre, whether literary or not, is nothing more than the codification of discursive properties' (17-18). The act of genrification is the act of identifying characteristics within a text.

It is this that makes genre such an important issue. In the era of commercialism and retail, the ability to classify something is vital in order to sell it to the correct market. This has led to a saturation of genres and subgenres in recent years, resulting in a confusing interpretation of the terminology involved in genre classification, especially regarding science fiction. However, this confusion does allow writers, such as Miéville, to experiment with crossing the boundaries and creating something fresh and

exciting. Genre does not have to be restricted by its own defining character, but should, in fact, embrace its multiplicity. Miéville's multiplicity and its connection to classification issues are best illustrated by looking at his work through the lens of science fiction and fantasy.

Miéville is influenced equally by his attraction in his younger years to role-playing games and to the more 'classic' literary novels embraced by academia. This attraction to both genre and literary texts places Miéville in an interesting

position. He is able to *cross-inhabit* these landscapes: put simply, he is able to slip back and forth between different genres of fiction at will. He has an intimate understanding and love for multiple forms, blurring boundaries and moulding them together into something new.

This cross-inhabitation is clear in his work, with literary self-consciousness and linguistic experimentation intertwined with traits of genre and the fantastic. However, Miéville is more interested in genre ideas than literary stylistics; his novels all examine particular social, scientific and political themes through fantastical settings in an attempt to explore the '[usually] unexamined political assumptions of genre' (Pistelli and Warden interview, 2005). Miéville attempts to show that genre can be political and social; that it is just as capable as literary fiction of exploring real-life issues.

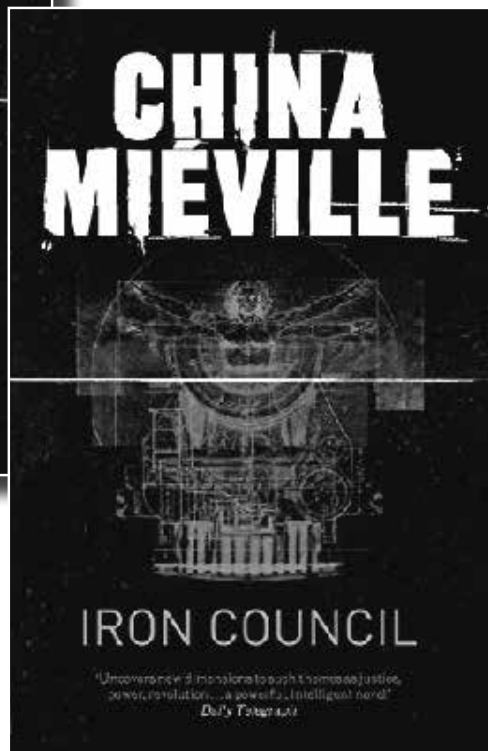
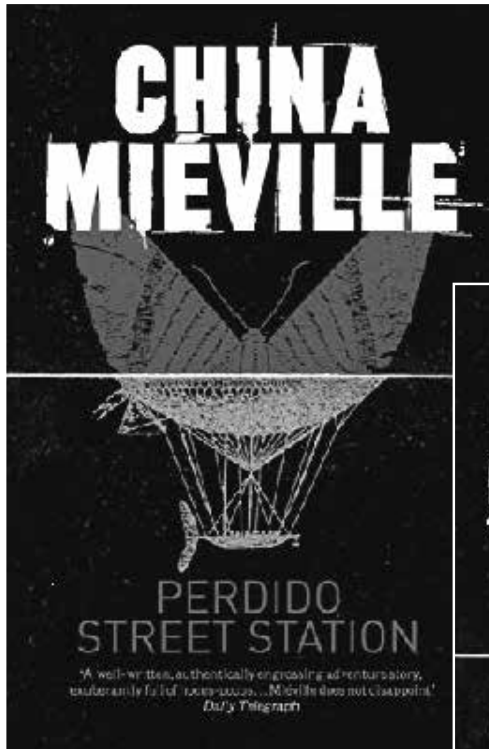
At first glance, Miéville's Bas-Lag books appear to be fantasy. Their secondary world setting and fantastical races stand alongside fantasy novels like those of C.S. Lewis or J.R.R. Tolkien. Yet what we are talking about here is popular fantasy - stories of faery, swords, and heroes. This is definitely not what Miéville's work is about. Instead, we need to consider fantasy in another way. Rosemary Jackson defines fantasy as 'the "real" under scrutiny', that it is representative of a 're-placed and dis-located' version of the world which 'is neither entirely "real" (object), nor entirely "unreal" (image), but is located somewhere indeterminately between the two' (19). As Jackson points out, even the etymological roots of the word 'fantastic' highlight a glaring ambiguity; the Latin word *phantasticus*, meaning to make visible or manifest (13). To 'make visible' suggests a transition - a deliberate movement between the

unreal and the real, therefore highlighting the ability of fantasy fiction to inhabit both spaces. This connection to the unreal also explains the inherent attraction towards the supernatural and 'otherness' that is seen in fantasy. Stories examining ghosts, the afterlife and the uncanny create a feeling of foreboding and uncertainty manifested by our unconscious wariness of anything unnatural. In Jackson's mind, fantasy relates to these kinds of narratives, rather than stories about dragons and elves.

Brian Attebery has also worked upon a definition of fantasy. In *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992), he attempts to unpick the characteristics of the genre, concluding that 'it is a form that makes use of both the fantastic mode, to produce the impossibilities, and the mimetic, to reproduce the familiar' (16). Successful fantasy uses this element of the unreal to help us see our own world in a new way. This objective is similar to that of literary fiction, which,

according to Jonathan Culler, considers 'complexities without a rush to judgement, engaging the mind in ethical issues, inducing readers to examine conduct (including their own)' (2011: 38). In other words, both forms - fantasy and literary fiction - ultimately aim to make us examine our own lives and our position within the world around us. However, where Jackson and Attebery differ is that Jackson's defini-

tion of fantasy - as texts that explore the unreal and the forbidden - excludes and limits texts that, in contemporary times, are strongly associated with the fantasy genre. Jackson concludes that such authors as Tolkien and Le Guin 'belong to that realm of fantasy which is more properly defined as faery or romance literature' (9). Attebery's definition of fantasy is more understanding of the diverse nature of the genre. He proposes that we view fantasy as a collective of texts that share common narrative and thematic tropes, focused around the unreal or the fantastic. In the centre are the seminal texts of the unreal - Jackson's much-loved texts of the nineteenth and early twentieth century; what she refers to as 'La Litterature Fantastique'. Importantly, what Attebery's model allows, thanks to its outer fringes, are those texts which contain popularised motifs of fantasy fiction (represented most effectively by Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* [1954-55]) to be categorised alongside more 'literary' examples of fantasy, such as Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). What Attebery





is applying here is an example of 'fuzzy-set' theory, which suggests that genres are 'defined not by boundaries but by a centre' (12). Describing genres in this manner, with seminal texts at the centre of a decreasingly-formulaic outer zone, is a useful tool when it comes to defining texts, allowing them to be compared and contrasted easily and for problematic texts with blurred genre traits to be brought into the collective.

Miéville can undoubtedly be classed as a fantasy writer. His work fits into both Jackson and Attebery's definitions of the genre. It strikes the correct balance between the real and the unreal – either through the addition of unreal elements to a real-life recognisable setting or the transference of real world politics and social issues onto a secondary world setting. His own personal examinations of contemporary fantasy align themselves more closely with Jackson's appreciation. For example, although an admirer of Tolkien's world creation – and the way he made it central to the project of fantasy literature – Miéville has been critical of Tolkien's influence upon fantasy literature and the development of his theory that the highest function in fantasy is a consolatory happy ending. Miéville perceives Tolkien's view as being problematic, resulting in 'a theory of fantasy in which consolation is a matter of *policy*' (Newsinger interview, 2000). To Miéville, Tolkien's influence is that 'he's *defined* fantasy as literature which mollicoddles the reader rather than challenging them' (Newsinger interview, 2000). Bas-Lag, therefore, is a world that is in direct opposition to Middle Earth. In fact, Miéville's objective is clearly to immerse the reader in a revolutionary world that forces them to consider their own politics and social beliefs. His work directly challenges Tolkien's theory of consolation; it is as if his work is deliberately highlighting that modern fantasy is capable of branching away from Tolkienesque values by consistently challenging the reader. Miéville is more aligned with the work of Mervyn Peake, author of the *Gormenghast* trilogy (1946-1959), who like Miéville, bent genre expectations to create social and political commentary. Miéville admires Peake's ability as a writer who is both political and fantastical at the same time, who 'doesn't fit neatly into the [fantasy] genre - though he's revered by fantasy fans - and didn't have the sense of writing in genre tradition, unlike most fantasy writers. He's inside and outside fantasy at the same time' (Newsinger interview, 2000). Miéville relates to and strives to emulate this himself. It is this emulation of Peake that aligns Miéville with Attebery's view of fantasy. Some of Miéville's work is more overtly fantasy than others, yet they all contain elements of the unreal central to the fantasy debate. However, Miéville is more concerned with the outer reaches of Attebery's fuzzy set of fantasy texts. For him, the boundaries of fantasy are fluid and easily broken down.

Miéville's work is actually more effectively categorised by Farah Mendlesohn's mode of immersive fantasy. In *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2009) she describes how immersive fantasy 'presents the fantastic without comment as the norm for the protagonist and for the reader: we sit on the protagonist's shoulder and while we have access to his eyes and ears, we are not provided with an explanatory narrative' (xx). In all of Miéville's novels we are introduced

to his world with little or no explanation. Insect-headed humanoids and gigantic cactus-men exist side-by-side with more 'normal' races in *Perdido Street Station*, *The Scar* and *Iron Council*. The bizarre concept of 'unseeing' in *The City and the City* (2011) is introduced in a matter-of-fact manner, making it stand out as being strange:

*Immediately and flustered I looked away, and she did the same, with the same speed... When after some seconds I looked back up, unnoticing the old woman stepping heavily away, I looked carefully instead of at her in her foreign street at the facades of the nearby and local GunterStrász, that depressed zone. (14)*

The inclusion of the word 'unnoticing' here is what produces the sense of otherness in this passage. Something is not quite right, yet the reader is able to still associate with the scene. These elements work due to the immersive quality of the fantasy Miéville deploys. The real world is presented to us through the slightly-warped lens of genre. This is why Miéville's work is successful fantasy - we do not enter it, but are assumed to be a part of it. He is able to produce a feeling of what we could call 'familiar otherness'; the capacity to view what would be strange to us as normal and matter-of-fact.

Despite this, we are still unable to avoid the sword-and-sorcery connotations associated with fantasy fiction in the second half of the twentieth century. The massive growth of Tolkienesque quest narratives – seen as an ideal serialisation opportunity by the publishing industry – has undoubtedly affected the genre as a whole. Miéville's work definitely does not sit side-by-side with sword-and-sorcery tales and therefore, solely classifying it as fantasy in the current climate becomes problematic despite the immersive elements that his work possesses.

It may also be difficult to categorise Miéville as a science fiction writer. Out of all of his novels only one deals with space travel and other archetypal science fiction motifs. *Embassytown* (2012) examines a planet on the edge of the known universe where human ambassadors attempt to communicate with the indigenous alien species, who we label The Hosts. However, it soon becomes clear that this science fiction world is actually secondary to the novel as a whole, which is more concerned with the idea of language than examining science fiction motifs. This does not mean that we cannot explore Miéville's work in the context of science fiction; in fact, I would posit that all of Miéville's work can be seen through the lens of science fiction, as he embraces steam technology, physics and the role of hard sciences in thaumaturgy as a means of producing the fantastical elements within his novels.

I would suggest that science fiction reflects a recent redefinition of 'genre' as an all-encompassing 'umbrella-term' for a whole selection of different modes of storytelling. Science fiction is a genre that is under constant reinvention and reinterpretation and this is a problem when considering classification of texts. Its name alludes to this: as science itself expands and develops then so do new sub-genres of science fiction. For example, the growth of computer technology and cyber-culture gave birth to

cyberpunk in the 1980s. Out of all the genres that exist, science fiction is the one that can be most easily sub-categorised. This is what makes the genre such an appealing one for writers such as Miéville to explore.

Technology is not the defining characteristic of science fiction; it is merely a conduit through which what Darko Suvin labelled 'cognitive estrangement' successfully happens. Suvin's argument is that science fiction has existed in the form of myth and fantasy since the classical era, that 'although it shares with myth, fantasy, fairy tale, and pastoral an opposition to naturalistic or empiricist literary genres, it differs very significantly in approach and social function...I will argue for an understanding of SF as the *literature of cognitive estrangement*' (3-4). For Suvin, science fiction texts seek rational understanding for the mysteries of the world and make their subject matter recognizable by using the seemingly unfamiliar or future projection as motifs to explore these themes. Science fiction is actually a form that wants to explore the development of the human condition, just like literary fiction.

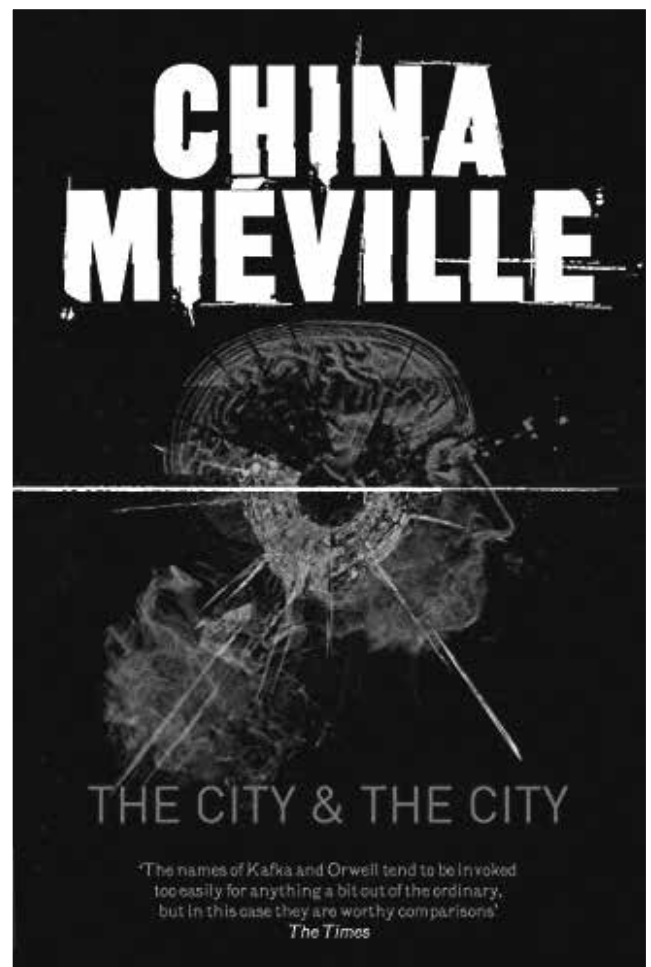
The creation of new genres is something that Miéville's work naturally encourages. For example, terms such as 'new weird' and 'salvage-punk' - both deriving from existing genre classifications - have both been used in reference to his work. For readers of genre fiction, this deliberate pushing of boundaries and the expectations that they bring can be a fine line between reader satisfaction and annoyance. This, however, is a challenge that Miéville embraces claiming that 'in an ideal world you'd hope you're pushing readers enjoyably out of their comfort zones with all sorts of things' (SkellieScar interview, 2012). What Miéville is highlighting here is how genre is able to shape and influence the thoughts of writers and readers. People engaged with genre are ruled by the traditions, history and development of that genre: expectation plays an important role. As Robert Eaglestone declares: 'a science fiction novel *without one aspect* of science fiction is...just a novel' (2013: 36, original emphasis). This viewpoint separates genre fiction from literary fiction: genre becomes restricted by the very thing that people like

**Miéville appears to be enjoying the act of deliberately questioning genre classification. His novels are playing with preconceived ideas of what a science fiction or fantasy novel should be.**

Miéville's novels do create a sense of cognitive estrangement. They are focused upon ideas and philosophies that, at first glance, appear fantastical but upon closer examination reveal something fundamentally important about our own society. For example, The Construct Council from *Perdido Street Station* – a sentient machine created from discarded automata and steam technology, which uses a human cadaver to communicate – highlights how our development of robotic engineering may lead to confrontations with our own creations. The concept of 'unseeing' in *The City and the City* – the indoctrinated, conscious, sensory avoidance of a twin population – reflects contemporary border control and social issues within modern urban environments. Good science fiction extrapolates ideas and then allows the reader to digest them, process them, and apply them to their own surroundings.

There is also another consideration. The expansion of both technology and the publishing industry in the last half century has resulted in a diverse range of science fiction texts, therefore diluting the understanding and definition of the genre. This saturation and confusion is something that Tzvetan Todorov is keen to highlight about the history of genre: confusion over genres leads to the creation of new ones:

*A new genre is always the transformation of an earlier one, or of several: by inversion, by displacement, by combination...there has never been a literature without genres; it is a system in constant transformation. (15)*

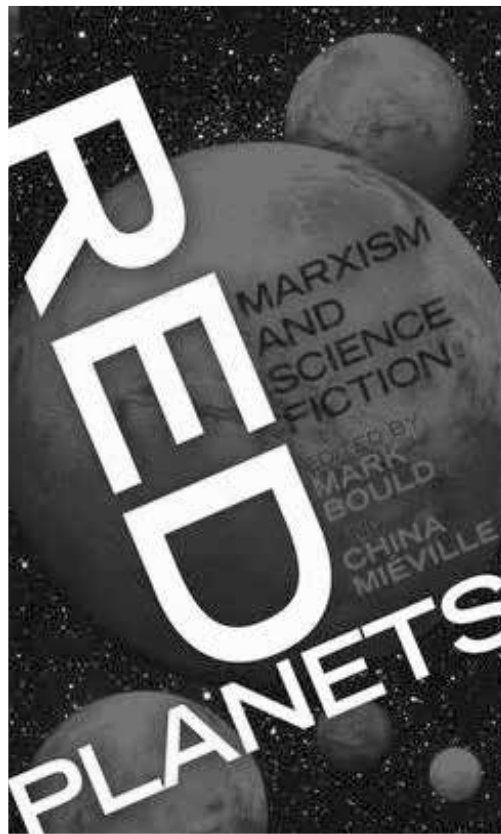


about it whereas literature is able to talk about anything and, therefore, transcend initial classification. Science fiction has been defeated by its own popularity and replaced by the sub-genres it created. Miéville is keen to explore this idea, with his work constantly shifting between sub-genres within the same novels. For example, *Perdido Street Station* slips seamlessly between the technological-Victoriana of steampunk and the hard-sci-fi depiction of quantum physics. He is constantly challenging his reader's perception of genre.

This sub-categorisation is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, science fiction novels have become more accepted by the literary establishment in recent years due to their new-found ability to shake off the historical connotations of the pulp era. Emily St John Mandel's novel *Station Eleven* (2014) – about the survival of humanity and human culture after the world is decimated by 'Georgia Flu' – won the Arthur C. Clarke award for Best Science Fiction Novel whilst also being nominated and shortlisted for multiple literary awards. *Never Let Me Go* was shortlisted for both the Arthur C. Clarke Award and the Booker Prize. *The Road* won its author, Cormac McCarthy, the Pulitzer Prize in 2007. The embracing of science fiction tropes by contemporary literary authors has shown that the barriers between genre and literature are breaking down. However, some degree of literary hierarchy still exists. This brings us full circle back to Margaret Atwood. Ursula Le Guin's review of *The Year of the Flood* (2009) seeks to question Atwood's choice to distance herself from the category of science fiction:

*To my mind, The Handmaid's Tale, Oryx and Crake and now The Year of the Flood all exemplify one of the things that science fiction does, which is to extrapolate imaginatively from current trends and events to a near-future that's half prediction, half-satire. But Margaret Atwood does not want any of her books to be called science fiction...she says that everything that happens in her novels is possible and may even have already happened, so they can't be science fiction, which is 'fiction in which things happen that are not possible today'. This arbitrarily restrictive definition seems designed to protect her novels from being relegated to a genre still shunned by hidebound readers, reviewers and prize-awards. She does not want the literary bigots to shove her in the literary ghetto. (Le Guin, 2009)*

Does Le Guin have a point? After all, Atwood's novels listed here do examine science fiction tropes such as genetics, apocalyptic epidemics, and dystopian future societies. Why then is she so dismissive of the genre



label, insisting that her work is more accurately described as 'speculative fiction'? Is it a case of literary acceptance? Atwood is keen to defend herself against Le Guin's questioning, recognising the multi-layered diversity of science fiction and its ability to cross-inhabit other genres easily. For Atwood, 'when it comes to genres, the borders are increasingly undefended, and things slip back and forth...inter-genre visiting has been going on in the SF world – loosely defined – for some time' (7). Atwood's reaction here highlights the blurred boundaries that science fiction as a genre now has to contend with. Her response to Le Guin's comments is to create and apply a sub-genre label to her work. The definition of the 'speculative fiction' subgenre becomes more significant than the discussion of science fiction and the novel itself.

Miéville appears to be enjoying the act of deliberately questioning genre classification. His novels are playing with preconceived ideas of what a science fiction or fantasy novel should be. Whereas Atwood goes to great lengths to identify her work as something that is not 'science fiction', Miéville seems to relish the problems that classification brings, inviting the reader to create their own. Miéville suggests that genre boundaries should be ignored and, as a direct result, the fiction will become free from expectation and more stimulating.

Miéville's view regarding the boundary between science fiction and fantasy – something which he considers to be disintegrating – is most effectively described in his essay 'Cognition as Ideology: A Dialectic of SF Theory' which appears in *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction* (2009). In this essay Miéville expands upon previous Marxist approaches to genre, such as those posited by Darko Suvin and Frederic Jameson. Miéville unpicks Suvin's conclusion that science fiction is the literature of 'cognitive estrangement' and attempts instead to consider fantasy fiction's worthiness for academic consideration:

*The distinction between SF and Fantasy continues to be pertinent, and that there are specificities to the fantastic, as well as the science-fictional, side of the dyad (the deployment of magic, most obviously), which theory would do well to investigate further. It is perfectly plausible, then, that SF and fantasy might still sometimes be usefully distinguished: but if so, it is not on the basis of cognition, nor of some fundamental epistemological firewall, but as different ideological iterations of the 'estrangement' that, even in high Suvinianism, both sub-genres share. (243)*





In other words, Miéville implies that the discussion regarding the ideological properties of science fiction and fantasy has become misplaced. Instead of focusing upon science fiction's aim to be a 'cognitive' version of estrangement, we should in fact consider both genre's interpretation of estrangement, as this is what both unites and separates them from one another. This examination certainly does apply to Miéville's fiction overall, as it allows novels to be considered as both science fiction and fantasy simultaneously as moments of estrangement within a novel can be examined for science-fictional or fantasy qualities. The depiction of thaumaturgy in Miéville's Bas-Lag books is a good example of this: the fantastical, magic-like, miracle-working being explained using references to the hard sciences. Miéville summarises this new way of considering science fiction and fantasy further in the conclusion to the essay, stating that:

*The boundaries between them also – if anything at an accelerating pace – continue to erode. Where that has hitherto been seen as pathological in SF theory, it is to be hoped that, by undermining the supposedly radical distinction between the two as being on the basis of cognition, that erosion can now be seen as perfectly legitimate. (244)*

Miéville is summarising how science fiction and fantasy tropes are beginning to appear more commonly in literary fiction, as writers begin to explore the idea of 'estrangement' – and all the possible ways of achieving this – in their work. The result is a much more blurred boundary between the genres that deal with this effect.

Miéville is a writer who is forcing us to re-examine how we classify genre fiction. His work straddles different genres, exploring tropes found in literary fiction, fantasy, science fiction and others. He plays with readers' expectations, sending them in directions that they were not expecting to find. He is able to adopt recognisable genre traits and subvert them into new forms. Genre writers in the twenty-first century have become freed from the restraints of association, able to embrace genre fiction's new-found multiplicity. Genre is even able to find its place in the hallowed ground of literary fiction; the boundaries vanishing more all the time. Attebery's theory of 'fuzzy sets' becomes a useful model. Genre is no longer about

boundaries and classifications, but centres and blurred edges – the outer rings of Attebery's 'fuzzy sets' happily co-existing together. In the twenty-first century genre has become more than a collective of taxonomies; it is now an exploration of how those taxonomies can be stretched and explored. Writers are now able to inhabit the spaces in-between genres, moving in and out with relish and excitement to create texts that are rich, experimental and enlightening. The death of classification is the birth of a new all-encompassing form of genre, and the freedom for writers to explore it.

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# Mythological Speculation in Philip José Farmer's The Unreasoning Mask

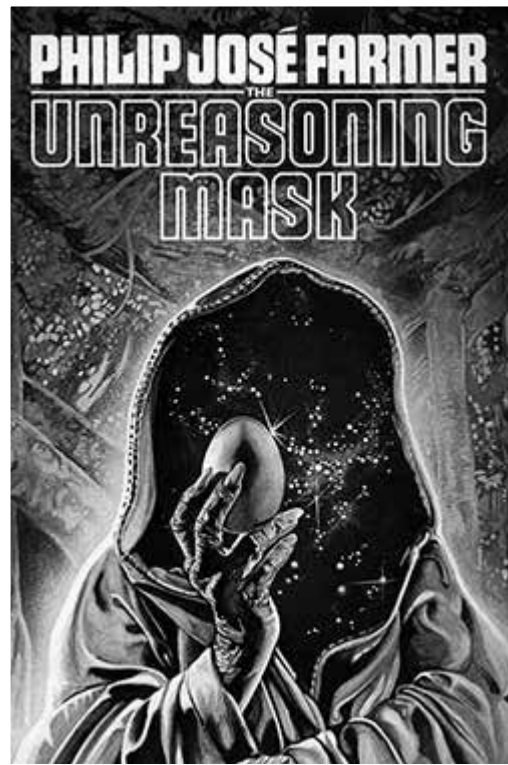
by Michael O'Brien

## Introduction

**T**he *Unreasoning Mask* (1981) is Philip José Farmer's best attempt to combine religious mythology and archetypes within speculative science-fictional frameworks. Other texts such as the Riverworld Series, *Jesus on Mars* (1979), and *Dark is the Sun* (1979) all integrate mythological archetypes within speculative frameworks, however *The Unreasoning Mask's* unique combination of mythological archetypes, Joseph Campbell's 'Jungian Hero', supernatural events, and technological devices, allows it more sophisticated emergence beyond its scientific and religious influences.<sup>1</sup> *The Unreasoning Mask's* unification of science and religion can be explained using Giles Fauconnier and Mark Turner's theory of 'conceptual blending' (2008, p.18). The theory of conceptual blending posits that all thinking is made up of blends of metaphors. Metaphors are blended in cognition to produce learning, language and identity. Fauconnier and Turner provide the following riddle to explain how conceptual blending works:

*A Buddhist Monk begins at dawn one day walking up a mountain, reaches the top at sunset, meditates at the top for several days until one dawn when he begins to walk back to the foot of the mountain, which he reaches at sunset. Make no assumptions about his starting or stopping or about his pace during the trips. Riddle: Is there a place on the path that the monk occupies at the same hour of the day on the two separate journeys? (p.39)*

Fauconnier and Turner say that to solve the riddle we have to imagine a place where the monk meets himself. In reality the monk never meets himself. It is a function of our creative imaginations that he meets himself. Our imaginations blend his journey to the top with his journey to the bottom. This type of conceptual blend is what Fauconnier and Turner call 'the network model'; it is a cognitive network that blends 'two input mental spaces' (Fauconnier 2003, p.xiii). The two input mental spaces are 1) the monk



going up the hill and 2) the monk going down the hill. The imagined notion of the monk meeting himself is a 'creative emergent frame structure in blended space' (Fauconnier 2003, p.xiii). Farmer's text can be analysed with the theory of conceptual blending and shown to produce an 'emergent structure' (Fauconnier 2003, p.131).

## Narrative Purpose

Farmer's narrative revolves around the quest of the hero-figure Ramstan who has stolen an immensely powerful, sentient technological device named the *glyfa* from the planet Tenolt where it was considered a god. Influenced by texts like *Moby Dick* (1851) and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), Farmer launches Ramstan on a journey-quest reminiscent of the romantic tradition, which sees him attempt to 'strike through the (unreasoning) mask' (Melville in Farmer 1983) to the rational domain of 'the Creative Force or Being or God itself' (Farmer and Friend 1978, p.48). As a homage to 'Melville's metaphysical quest

1 Mythological archetypes are Jungian archetypes like the wise old man and the great mother which compose the collective unconscious of universal human experience. Campbell's Jungian Hero refers to the hero whose aim in 'the second half of life is [...] consciousness of the Jungian unconscious' (Segal 1990, p.xvi).

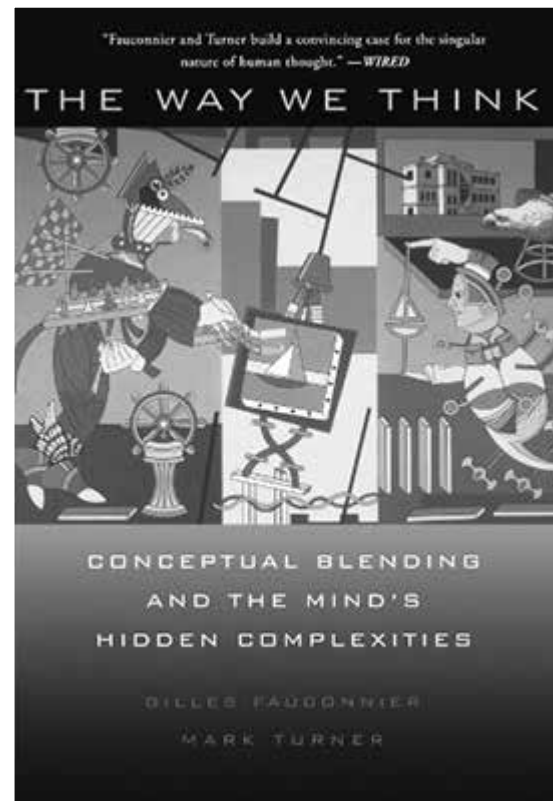
in *Moby-Dick*, which depicted the single-minded Captain Ahab hunt a white whale to rationalise the loss of his leg, Farmer launches Ramstan on a heroic quest to defeat a chaos monster, the *bolg*, to reconcile the irrational nature of an apparently godless universe within the Jungian unity of his unconscious (Chapman 1984, p.85). Ramstan's quest embodies the Jungian process of individuation. According to Jung, individuation is the development of the individual self out of the undifferentiated collective unconscious of humanity. To complete individuation an individual has to later return to the collective unconscious. Influenced by the Jungian mythologist Joseph Campbell, Farmer paints his protagonist's psychological ideal 'as a balance between consciousness of the external world and consciousness of the unconscious' (Segal 1990, p.xvi). Farmer sought this balance in his writing to resolve a 'tension created by the contradictory suggestions' of two metaphorical demon-voices that guided him (Farmer 2006, p.14). These two demon-voices were 'anarchy and irrationality' and 'law and order' (Farmer 2006, p.14) mirroring the Dionysian and Apollonian trends in Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* (1872). Farmer aimed to unify these voices in 'a single voice' or 'an Other's voice, a better voice' (Farmer 2006, p.15). Farmer is the literary 'Cosmic Dancer' not confined to 'a single spot' who 'turns and leaps from one position to another' (Campbell 2008, p.196). He aims to 'ride, not the thoughts of God', but rather 'its voice' (Farmer 1983, p.180).

This article tracks the hero-figure Ramstan's development along the stages of Campbell's Jungian hero. Farmer agrees with Campbell (Farmer and Friend 1978) that heroism is displayed when a character achieves Jungian consciousness of self. Segal says for Campbell:

*The goal of the uniquely Jungian second half of life is consciousness [...] of the Jungian unconscious rather than of the external world. One must return to the unconscious, from which one has invariably become severed. But the aim is not thereby to sever one's ties to the external world. On the contrary, the aim is to return in turn to the external world. The ideal is a balance between consciousness of the external world and consciousness of the unconscious. (Segal 1990, p.xvi).*

Following Campbell's hero-pattern, Ramstan, an atheist ex-Muslim is transported to 'to the threshold of adventure' where he finds 'a shadow presence that guards the passage' (Campbell 2008, p.211). He 'defeats(s) this power to go 'alive into the kingdom of the dark' and 'descend(s) in death' (Campbell 2008, p.211). This article follows Ramstan's development through Campbell's monomythic stages of Departure and Initiation using the theory of conceptual blending to argue that Farmer 'construct(s) intelligible meanings by [...] compressing over vital relations' within Ramstan's psyche (Fauconnier 2003, p.113). Ramstan's psyche is a network of vital relations between different input mental spaces. Just as the monk's riddle blends the input mental spaces of 1) the monk going up the hill and 2) the monk going down the hill, so does Ramstan's psyche cognitively blend the input spaces of science and religion. Ramstan's psyche creates a 'double-

scope network [...] with different [...] organising frames' to produce an 'emergent structure' (Fauconnier 2003, p.131). In a double-scope network two inputs, such as 1) a scientific paradigm, and 2) a religious paradigm, interact producing an emergent model. Ramstan's emergent psychic structure unifies science with religion to develop comprehension of the compressed nature of physical and spiritual reality in the blended creative space of Farmer's text.



## Double-Scope Network

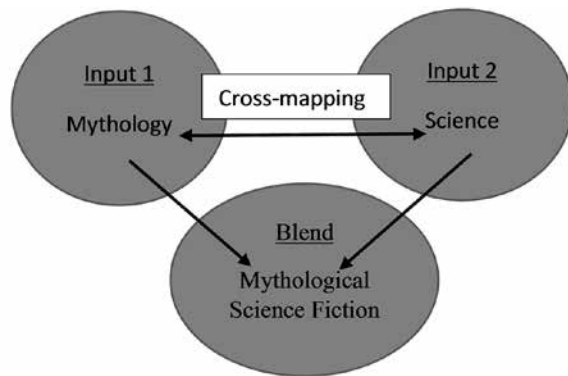
According to Fauconnier and Turner:

*Building an integration network involves setting up mental spaces, matching across spaces, projecting selectively to a blend, locating shared structures, projecting backward to inputs, recruiting new structure to the inputs or the blend, and running various operations in the blend itself. (Fauconnier 2003, p.44).*

So when Farmer blends mythology and science by projecting a Jungian archetype (the wise old man) from the collective unconscious onto the computer screen of Ramstan's spaceship he sets up an integration network. Successfully interpreting *The Unreasoning Mask* requires reflective awareness of the mental spaces of Jungian archetypal psychology and science-fictional devices. Using mythological and religious archetypes alongside science-fictional technology allows Farmer to match across input mental spaces and find shared structures between science and religion in Ramstan's psyche. This is a double-scope network because the conceptual structures of science and religion are separate but converge in Ramstan's mind. Input spaces in the text are science vs. religion, conscious



vs. unconscious, poetry vs. science, Apollo vs. Dionysius, and atheism vs. faith. Cross-space mapping 'connects counterparts' between mental spaces (Fauconnier 2003, p.41). Blended space combines counterparts.



## The Monomyth

Farmer was familiar with Campbell's Jungian Hero and developed Ramstan along the stages of Campbell's monomyth in *The Unreasoning Mask* (Farmer 1978, p.42). The monomyth is comprised of three acts named Departure, Initiation, and Return. Departure is when the hero sets off on an adventure, Initiation when the hero begins to traverse the boundary to another world, and Return when the hero comes back to the world with new knowledge to share. These stages are influenced by Jungian psychology. In Jungian terms, Departure is when the hero departs the collective unconscious, Initiation is when the hero returns to the unconscious, and Return is when the hero returns from the unconscious to the everyday world. After waking from a dream Ramstan attempts to depart from his unconscious faith in God, but as the narrative develops he actually moves closer to becoming re-initiated with this ultimate reality.

## Unconscious Myth and Dream

The novel starts with Ramstan dreaming in a Tavern on a planet named Kalafala. While dreaming, Ramstan strives for severance from the Jungian unconscious. Jung argues the unconscious is the shadow of our conscious selves and 'corresponds to Freud's conception of the unconscious' (Jung 1991, p.284). The reader witnesses Ramstan's unconscious as he dreams of a 'shadow under water' telling him that the mysterious creature named the *bolg* 'kills all but one' (Farmer 1983, p.9). The phrase 'shadow under water' clearly indicates Jung's personal unconscious and Freud's iceberg model of (un)consciousness (Farmer 1983, p.9). According to Jung everyone has a shadow and the less it features in a person's conscious mind 'the blacker and denser it is' (Jung 1938, p.131). Ramstan's shadow chases him through the dream, catches him and, clenching his soul tightly, tells him, 'God is sick. Unbreakable flames fall from the black sky. The earth ripples. Oceans charge. Blood blazes. Flesh fries. Bone burns. Wicked and innocent flee. All die' (Farmer 1983, p.9). Therefore, Ramstan's shadow is very dark and completely severed from his conscious life.

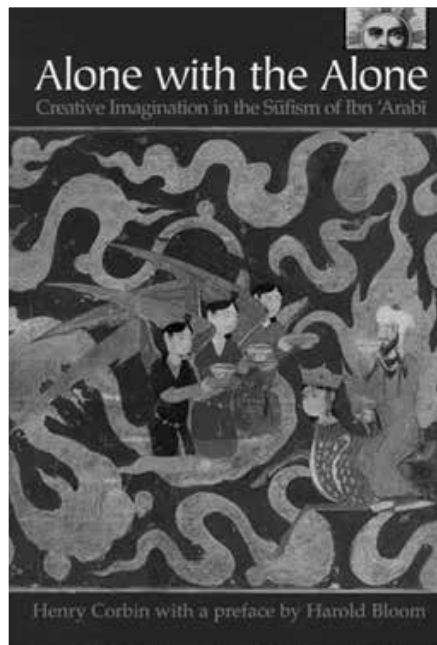
As the dream progresses, the shadow pushes Ramstan 'down a well' (Farmer 1983, p.9), the tightness of the passage signifying, according to Jung, the limitations of his conscious mind (Jung 1991, p.21). However, within this dream-world the well disappears and opens 'out into Space in which myriads of bits of Matter glared' (Farmer 1983, p.9). According to Fauconnier and Turner's conceptual blending, Ramstan's unconscious shadow-self is blending input spaces of a) mythological archetypes and b) naturalised scientific phenomena in a double-scope network. Using Jung, the shadow-aspect of Ramstan's personality is therefore religious faith where in dreaming Ramstan experiences his 'other-than [...] self' i.e. the self, other-than his conscious, atheist self (Jung 1991, p.22). The dream cross-maps 1) 'giant' with 'rocket', 2) 'giants' with 'men', and 3) 'Harut and Marut' and 'Adam and Eve' with 'Space', 'Matter', 'Stars', and 'Eyes' (Farmer 1983, p.9). This juxtaposition textualises Farmer's conviction that science fiction can blend both mythology and realism to create an emergent cosmological paradigm (Farmer 1978, pp.39-48). This cosmology reconciles science with religion in a single image of the universe. Asleep in the Tavern, however, this emerging paradigm, this metaphorical 'human thought process' is one Ramstan remains unconscious of (Lakoff and Johnson 1981, p.6). As he dreams the 'fallen angels' of the Qur'an, Harut and Marut, flash 'into [...] Space in which myriad bits of Matter' become stars, and stars become eyes; his unconscious is processing the material universe mythologically, reconfiguring scientism to religious transcendence (Farmer 1983, p.9). When awake, Ramstan is unaware of these unconscious conceptual blends having consciously 'abandoned the faith of his ancestors' (p.22). However his subconscious faith manifests in conscious following of Islamic traditions; he cannot 'eat the flesh of swine', regards dogs as unclean and wipes 'with the left hand after defecating' (p.22).

Ramstan awakens in the Tavern to an air of impending doom as he sits 'on a chair of stone', the building 'shaped like a coliseum built by drunken Romans' (p.10). Farmer is cross-mapping Ramstan's unconscious with his conscious creating an emergent structure. The black density of his shadow-aspect is symbolically imprinted onto the material Tavern. In the Tavern the patron's goblet is 'cut from the green-and-red fossilized bones of a reptile'; it is a foreboding place with 'blood-red worms' in the wine (p.10). For Ramstan 'everything Kalafalan [...] nodded to the destroyer' (p.10). Ramstan's shadow is appearing, foreshadowing his death. The mapping of the unconscious onto the conscious is a component of Farmer's cosmological-paradigmatic unification of science with religion and mythology. Ramstan's God is both an unconscious mythological being and the universe itself. Ramstan is 'part of God' (p.298). Farmer is attempting to find the rational domain of 'God itself'.

## Departure: Call to Adventure and Supernatural Aid

Ramstan, as a Jungian hero, is called to Campbell's threshold of adventure (the threshold symbolically separating the unconscious from the conscious) when, on

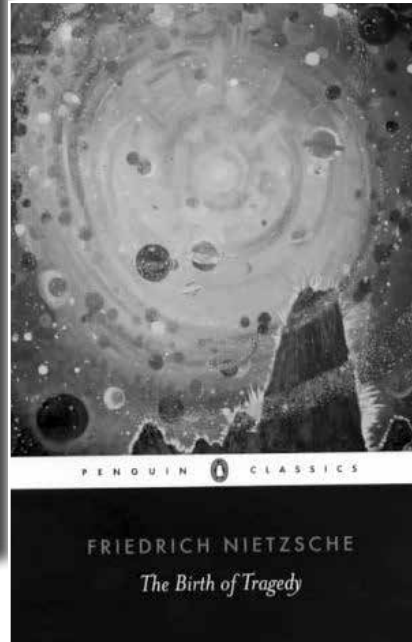
Kalafala, a Tenolt ship arrives to seize the *glyfa*. He is forced to flee the Tolt crew. Campbell says 'the call to adventure signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual centre of gravity from [...] his society to a zone unknown' (2008, p.48). Campbell states that in many mythic narratives the new zone is one of treasure and peril, often 'a distant land, a forest, a lofty mountaintop, or profound dream state' and 'is always a place of strangely fluid and polymorphous beings' (p.48). While hiding from the Tolt in a hotel, Ramstan again dreams of being stalked by his unconscious shadow-self. This time 'a dark, unseen, unnamed thing [...] loomed behind him'



(Farmer 1983, p.41). Echoing Campbell's call to adventure (or call to depart the unconscious), Ramstan runs through a 'forest of trees', crosses 'a flat plain', and encounters 'a high mountain range' (p.42). In waking he sees Campbell's polymorphic being, 'a wavering figure [...] in a dark robe, its face shrouded by a hood' (p.42). This figure appears upon waking at the end of his dream, 'glowing' as an 'afterimage' (p.42). Ramstan wonders if it is Al-Khidhr, or the Green Man, who appeared several times in the Judaeo-Christian-Islamic tradition. According to Henry Corbin, writing in *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of al-'Arabi* (1998), Al-Khidhr is an archetype that appears in mythology to symbolise a figure that guides people to the mystical truth; his purpose is to lead each individual to deeper knowledge of himself and to his own inner divinity (p.57-61). Similarly, Campbell defines 'the herald' as a 'preliminary manifestation of the powers that are breaking into play' (Campbell 2008, p.42). Therefore Al-Khidhr symbolises the approach of mystical truth for Ramstan. Al-Khidhr is 'the result of suppressed desires and conflicts' (Campbell 2008, p.42) and with his wavering and shimmering appearance, like desires 'produced by unsuspected springs', literally 'ripples on the surface of life' (Campbell 2008, p.42). Al-Khidhr symbolises the exteriorisation of repressed religious faith and mythological thinking.

Al-Khidhr resembles Thomas Mann's recurrent figures in *Death in Venice* (1912) who are, as David Luke describes in his introduction to Mann's stories, Jungian 'messengers of death, incarnations of the wild god Dionysius' (p.xxxvii). These mythic motifs prefigure the death of Mann's protagonist Aschenbach. In Mann a red-haired stranger at the North Cemetery symbolises death, and temptation/unconscious desire; the figure of the Gondolier symbolises Charon, transporter of dead souls to the

underworld; the Goat-bearded man on the ship symbolises the satyr, attendant to the god Dionysus. The red-haired man has an ugly 'permanent facial deformity' and exerts 'physical and psychological influence' over Aschenbach (Mann 1998, p.199). The man produces within Aschenbach a 'roving restlessness' and a 'craving for far-off places' (Mann 1998, p.199). Aschenbach identifies in the man the ugliness he dislikes in himself. These figures forebodingly represent the intrusion of the irrational and the return of the repressed.



In Farmer, the recurrent mythic motif of Al-Khidhr functions like Mann's messengers of death. In Mann the figures represent the return of the repressed, depicting the Jungian shadow surfacing from the unconscious to the conscious, exteriorising Aschenbach's repressed homosexuality and self-loathing; in Farmer, Al-Khidhr symbolises the

exteriorisation of repressed religious faith and mythological thinking, and a Dionysian rebellion against the limitations of blind faith. Farmer is cross-mapping Ramstan's unconscious with his conscious. The connection between the unconscious and the conscious is stronger in the hotel than the Tavern. At the 'tag-end of his dream', asleep in the hotel, while hiding the *glyfa* from the Tolt, Al-Khidhr stands 'pointing at the lock' of the door (p.42). Ramstan awakens to see someone attempt a gas-attack through the keyhole. His semi-conscious vision of Al-Khidhr indicates an unconscious and unknown rationality existent in the universe.

## Departure: Crossing the Threshold and Apollo vs. Dionysius

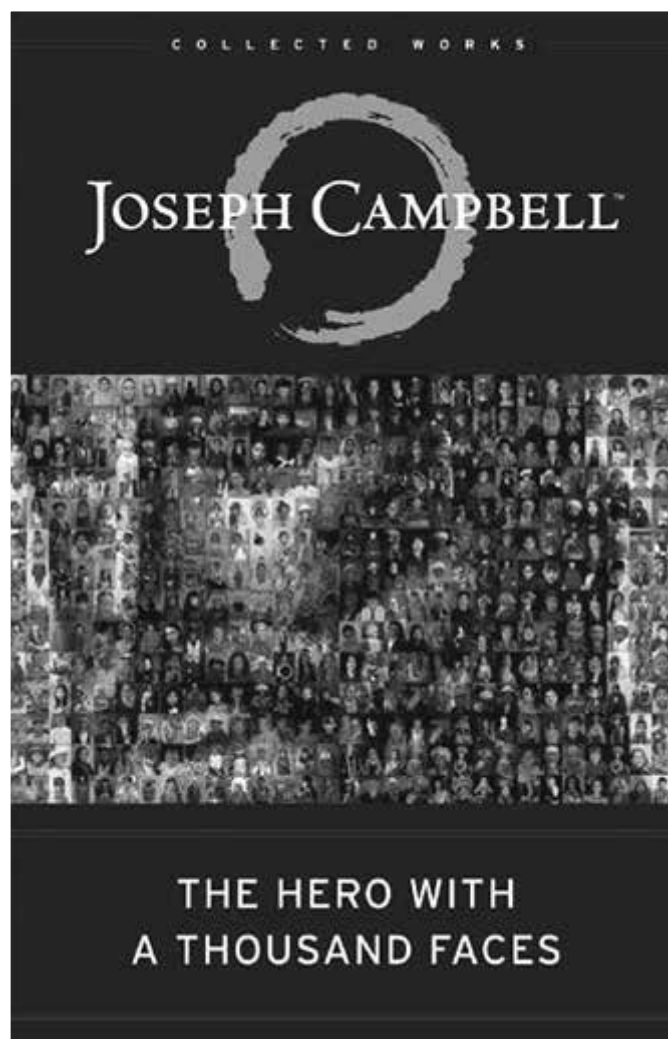
Farmer shows Ramstan's psychological goal is to balance consciousness of external reality with consciousness of the unconscious. Ramstan's visions of Al-Khidhr, symbolise the breakthrough of his unconscious into his conscious. In 'Why Do I Write' (1992), Farmer claimed two metaphorical demons spoke to him: the voices of 'law and order' and 'anarchy and irrationality'. They guide his creative process by creating tensions between order and chaos. Farmer is alluding to Nietzsche's Apollo and Dionysius here. Nietzsche claimed in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) that the Apollonian thematic trend in classical Athenian tragedy represented the desire to order the Dionysian rebelliousness of the human spirit. Farmer is addressing

these themes in *The Unreasoning Mask*. He writes, 'anarchy and irrationality pulse and writhe and rage just beneath the surface of order and rationality, the skin of what we see as reality' (Farmer 2006, p.14). Therefore Ramstan's Dionysian, rebellious spirit issues a challenge to the limitations of blind faith.

After escaping the hotel room with the *glyfa* Ramstan sees 'the red-streaked and glazed eyes of Benagur' looking like 'the half-mad, half-divine face of a stone-winged bull-man in front of an ancient Assyrian temple' (p.44). This bull-man is a Lamassu - a celestial creature from Mesopotamian mythology. They were protective spirits, and sentinels at entrances. Benagur is one of Campbell's threshold guardians shielding access to the unconscious (Campbell 2008, p.64). As Ramstan departs the hotel to cross the primary threshold, to escape the Tolt, 'with the personifications of his destiny to guide and aid him' - the *glyfa* and Al-Khidhr - he meets the threshold guardian Benagur 'at the entrance to the zone of magnified power' (Campbell 2008, p.64). Benagur represents the 'limits of the hero's present sphere, or life horizon' and 'beyond [...] is darkness, the unknown and danger' (Campbell 2008, p.64). He signifies Apollonian law and order and the limits that Ramstan feels would be imposed upon him by accepting the appearance of reality in blind faith. Ramstan's name means 'reckless or stubborn' (p.176) and he rebels with Dionysian 'lusting for the *glyfa*', because the *glyfa* offers infinite knowledge (p.128). In contrast, Benagur believes in God and like Nietzsche's Apollo 'holds sway over the beautiful illusion of the inner fantasy world' (Nietzsche 1993, p.16). He is a well-known Jewish and Islamic theologian and is interested 'in the higher truth' (Nietzsche 1993, p.16). Benagur who 'keeps to himself most of the time' (Farmer 1983, p.114), needs in Nietzsche's terms, 'that restraining boundary, that freedom from wilder impulses, that sagacious calm of the sculptor god' (Nietzsche 1993, p.16). Ramstan however, earlier in the Tavern drinking wine with 'blood-red worms', is alive with 'the glowing life of Dionysiac revellers' (Nietzsche 1993, p.17). He embraces 'dionysiac drunkenness and mystical self-negation, as his own condition' and 'his unity with the innermost core of the world is revealed to him in a symbolic dream-image' (Nietzsche 1993, p.18).

Stoical Benagur declares he was disturbed by Ramstan's 'strange behaviour on Tolt' and accuses Ramstan of behaving like a criminal. Ramstan feels limited by Benagur 'like an imprisoned animal trying to butt its way through a wall' (p.46). He paces up and down with 'his eyes wide' in 'madness and desperation' (p.46-7). Ramstan can only individuate by embracing passion and rejecting Apollonian rationality. His Dionysian 'flashing impulse' (p.226), his desire for the 'ecstasy' of 'supreme knowledge' led him to steal the *glyfa*, casting him towards rejection of the Apollonian law and order (p.265). Ramstan's psychological rejection of blind faith in Apollonian order is violently manifested in thoughts of 'hurling himself at Benagur' (p.226). Apollonian Benagur is correct to accuse Dionysian Ramstan of lustful theft but incorrect to call it 'foul lust' (p.102). In truth Benagur is false, covering himself 'with a veil of beauty' (Nietzsche 1993, p.117). Ramstan seeks 'the original artistic force' (Nietzsche 1993, p.117) and can

only be a Jungian hero if he individuates by first rejecting the unconscious. Returning later to the unconscious he will strike through the veil of rationality to the domain of something new which 'can only be created through living' and uniting 'opposites [...] in [...] a compromise' (Jung 1990, p.105). According to Fauconnier and Turner, and to Nietzsche, this new thing emerges through blending the input spaces of Apollo vs. Dionysius, or faith vs. atheism, to attain the new sphere of knowledge: 'he was part of God' (Farmer 1983, p.298).



## The World's Navel

Abandoning Benagur, Ramstan meets the alien Wassruss who declares he is 'the needle and eye and threader and unspooler and spooler' (p.94) blending Ramstan with the universe, echoing Joseph Campbell's point that 'the hero as the incarnation of God is himself the navel of the world, the umbilical point through which the energies of eternity break into time' (2008, p.32). The Wassruss prophesises that Ramstan's quest terminates with 'death or wisdom or both. And one more thing' directing Ramstan to 'the tree which does not stand alone' on a distant planet (pp.95-6). Ramstan, unaware that he is the incarnation of God, having achieved independence of the Jungian unconscious by consciously rejecting Benagur, Apollo, and Al-Khidhr, who he believes is 'a subjective image appearing to be

objective', is returning to the unconscious (Farmer 1983, p.85). He follows the prophetic directions in his starship to an Earth-like planet in a distant solar system. Arriving, he sees the mythic Al-Khidhr 'standing by the far bulkhead' of his starship pointing to 'the centre of the seven-sided screen' (p.151). Farmer's blending of the mythical Al-Khidhr with the technological monitor-screen indicates the material universe has spiritual properties. Ramstan realises Al-Khidhr is pointing at 'the centre, the middle, of the forest' on the planet (p.151). The 'mothertree' (p.153) is 'the centre of the symbolic cycle of the universe' (Campbell 2008, p.32). It is 'the tree of life' and the 'universe itself, grows from this point' (Campbell 2008, p.32). Ramstan, having rejected the Jungian unconscious by rejecting Apollonian law and order, has returned to the unconscious organisational imperative, striking 'through the mask' to find the 'reasoning thing' at the centre (Melville in Farmer 1983, p.7).

The mothertree, covered with plants, insects and 'photon-emitting growths' (p.158) is the home to three alien Vwoordha; 'for no rational reason' Ramstan knows that they would be there. At the bottom of the tree is a 'shadowy equilateral triangle' containing liquid (p.161). Time stops for Ramstan as he sees 'three creatures moving through [...] the surface of the well' (p.162). As Campbell suggests, 'the effect of the successful adventure of the hero is the unlocking and release again of life into the body of the world' (Campbell 2008, p.32). The mother-tree represents the 'miracle of this flow [...] as a streaming of energy' indicated by the plants, insects and lights that Ramstan sees circling round it (p.32). The equilateral triangle represents 'three degrees of condensation of one life force' (Campbell 2008, p.32). Ramstan's earlier visions of Al-Khidhr exteriorised repressed religious faith and unconscious law and order, an exteriorisation that Ramstan rejected. Entering the World's Navel, Ramstan encounters the source of the visions. Meeting the Vwoordha he encounters 'the green-robed one' from

her form had changed but because they have permitted 'other constructs, moulds' in Ramstan's mind to be filled with their true appearance (p.181). Therefore, they are showing him unconsciously that his mind already accepted God. Ramstan ignores their explanation. His psyche is the focal point for vital relations between atheism and faith and it creates a double-scope network with distinct organising frames. Ramstan's emergent psychic structure remains incomplete.

### Departure: Belly of the Whale

Campbell says, 'the passage of the magical threshold is a transit into a sphere of rebirth' and is symbolised by the hero being 'swallowed into the unknown [...] appear(ing) to have died' (Campbell 2008, p.74). Ramstan passes the magical threshold by entering the *bolg* to destroy it from the interior. As he approaches it he notices 'it looked like the head of Shaitan, al-Eblis, rearing up from [...] hell' (Farmer 1983, p.281). Campbell provides equivalent images of 'the approaches and entrances' of the belly of the whale, 'flanked and defended by colossal gargoyles: dragons, lions, devil-slayers, [...] winged bulls' (2008, p.77). Entering the *bolg* Ramstan's crewmate likens the passage to 'a minnow entering a Shark's mouth' (p.288) similar to the whale, Moby Dick. The inside of the entrance is like teeth, 'crowded with regular rows of stalagmite-shaped structures' (p.288). Ramstan observes 'tonguelike' phenomena and objects shaped like tastebuds (p.289). Campbell says 'The devotee at the moment of entry' into the belly of the whale 'undergoes a metamorphosis' (Campbell 2008, p.77). Ramstan certainly does. Campbell states 'once inside he may be said to have died and returned to the World Womb, the World Navel, the Earthly Paradise' (Campbell 2008, p.77). Ramstan is approaching initiation with the unconscious. Inside the *bolg* Ramstan starts to come to terms with the True Reality that Shiyai described earlier. He chants 'The Saying of Allah's

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## As Campbell suggests, 'the effect of the successful adventure of the hero is the unlocking and release again of life into the body of the world' (Campbell 2008, p32).

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his visions but decides 'she was not Al-Khidhr' (pp.171-2). He deludes himself as 'his childhood religion had made a certain mould in his mind, a preconception, and her image had been fitted into that mould' (p.172). However, when Ramstan asks for the source and purpose of the chant the Vwoordha tell him the green one 'rides the thoughts of God' (pp.178-9). When Ramstan is told that 'Shiyai rides, not the thoughts of God [...] but Its voice' he does not recognise his unconscious belief in God is being reflected in exterior reality deciding instead that he is going mad. As he starts to cognitively process God's existence his perception of the three ancient Vwoordha changes. The face of the green one transforms from 'a ten-thousand-year-old-mummy' (p.171) to 'a beautiful young woman' (p.181). Shiyai explains to Ramstan this happened not because

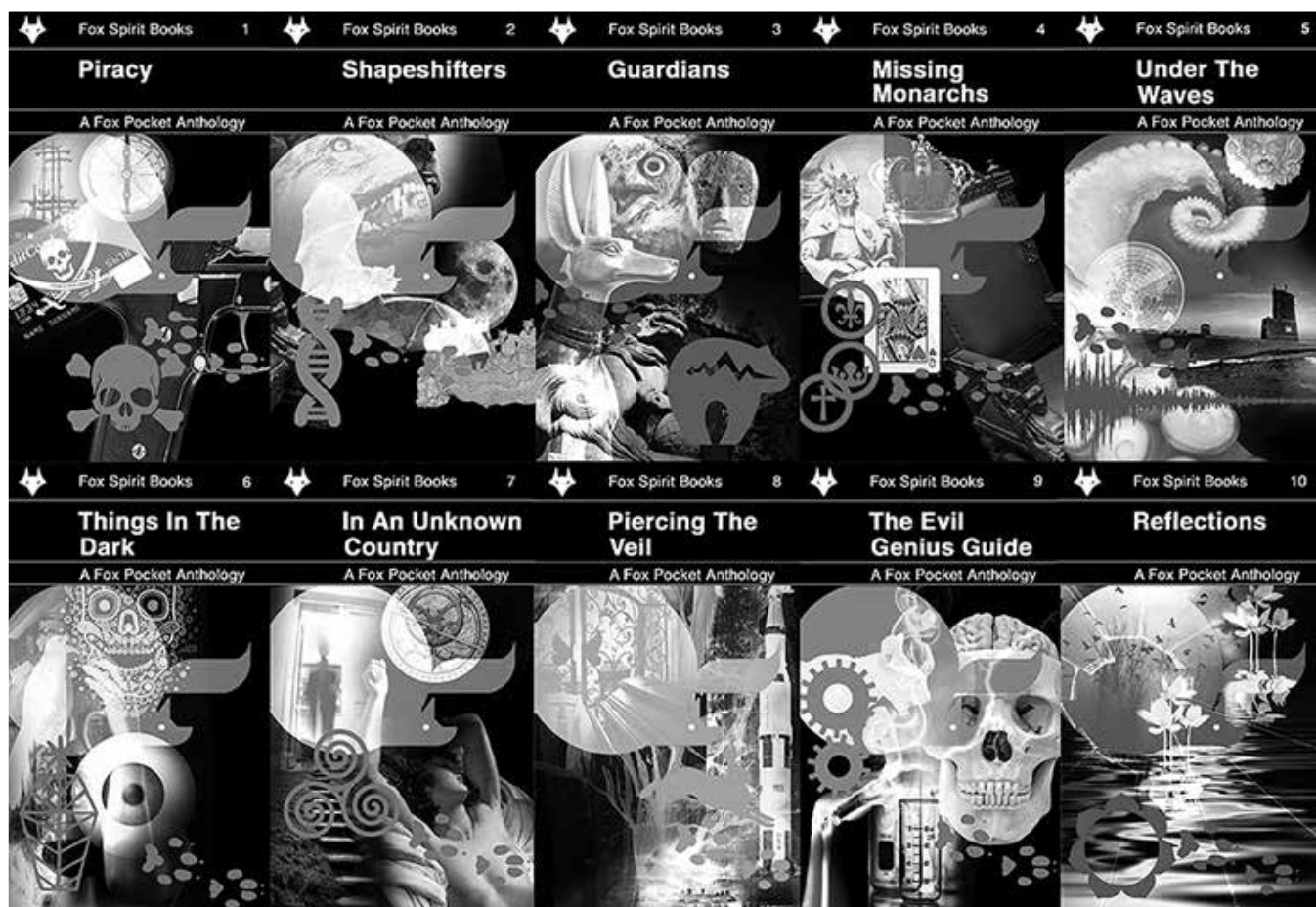
Command to Annihilate All Things', which he heard an Al-Khidhr sect recite in his family home. In approaching the unconscious, in Campbell's Jungian terms, Ramstan is having his spiritual life renewed. Upon finishing the chant Ramstan declares, 'And only His Face lived' but then rejects the Judaeo-Christian-Islamic idea that God is eternal, favouring the blended view that the universe is God, stating 'not even He [...] lives forever' (p.298). Farmer's blending of mythology and science, or spirit and matter, leads to a Pantheistic creation. Ramstan's metamorphosis is his conclusion 'he was part of God, just as all human beings were' (p.298). He balances his unconscious with his conscious by coming to terms with his unconscious faith and blending in a pantheistic God.

## Initiation: Apotheosis and The Ultimate Boon

Campbell states, 'Those who know, not only that the Everlasting lies in them, but that what they, and all things, really are is the Everlasting [...] drink the brew of immortality' (2008, p.142). Although Ramstan now believes he is blended in God, like all human beings, he does not achieve the Ultimate Boon in living. He rejects the Everlasting. He rejects the 'the Imperishable' (Campbell 2008, p.155). He rejects the *glyfa*'s offers of immortality. He achieves individuation by primarily rejecting the unconscious and is a Jungian hero because he later re-accepts his unconscious blending with the universe/God. However, he does not find Nietzsche's 'eternal and original artistic force' (Nietzsche 1993, p.116). He discovers he 'loved answers to [...] questions' more than he 'loved human beings' (p.299). So while Ramstan cognitively accepts that he has gained deeper knowledge of himself, and has identified his position in the universe by coming to terms with the unconscious order of things, ultimately he does not learn to love God. Shiyai suggests however that he 'should not die [...] suspicious' (p.300). Maybe in death Ramstan achieves the ultimate conceptual blend: 'the light of the ultimate illumination' (Campbell 2008, p.155). As Shiyai suggests 'there is a realm' where 'poetry and science [...] meet' (p.180). Perhaps Ramstan will emerge in this 'sphere of art beyond the Apolline' after death (Nietzsche 1993, p.116). Certainly, this is what Farmer wished to achieve for himself, as can be seen by his sacrificing Ramstan to Dionysius in *The Unreasoning Mask*'s creative emergent frame structure in blended space.

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# recurrent:

## KINCAID IN SHORT

### Paul Kincaid

## Sex and/or Mr Morrison

by Carol Emshwiller

*'The head Sublime, the heart Pathos, the genitals  
Beauty, the hands & feet Proportion'*

William Blake

Nothing ages faster than iconoclasm. What is intended to outrage today will seem tame tomorrow, and by the third day it will be hard to remember why it was ever considered unusual.

*Dangerous Visions*, the massive anthology edited by Harlan Ellison which was published in 1967 as the key text of the American New Wave, was certainly intended to be iconoclastic. Ellison's original introduction began: "What you hold in your hands is more than a book. If we are lucky, it is a revolution" (9). This was meant to be the big break with the science fiction of the past, a (small-c) conservative literature that took few risks either in terms of literary style or ideas. It is hard to see how it meant to do this, given how much of the content was provided by writers who were closely associated with that (small-c) conservative past. The UK paperback edition of *Dangerous Visions* came out in three volumes; of the 11 stories contained in the second volume, for example, five came

*Visions*, which came out in 1972, and though the contents were, if anything, more innovative than in the first book, it no longer seemed as if it was a challenge to the established order. (I am convinced that one of the reasons *The Last Dangerous Visions* has never seen the light of day is not only that it would have been totally unwieldy, but that by the time it could have been published it would have had no purpose; by that time the *Dangerous Visions* brand represented the sf establishment rather than the upstarts.)

*Dangerous Visions*, therefore, is an anthology to be admired for its place in the history of the genre, but not necessarily one to be revisited. From our modern perspective, far more of the stories seem to be playing safe rather than kicking against the pricks. But there were a couple of stories that were genuinely revolutionary, and are as challenging today as they were then. One of these is 'Sex and/or Mr Morrison' by Carol Emshwiller.

You may have noticed that all of the authors I've name-checked so far are men. This is hardly accidental: of the 33 stories included in the anthology, only three were by

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***Dangerous Visions*, therefore, is an anthology to be admired for its place in the history of the genre, but not necessarily one to be revisited.**

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from well-established writers like Philip K. Dick, Larry Niven, Fritz Leiber, Poul Anderson and Damon Knight. Dick had always been idiosyncratic (though not exactly iconoclastic) and Knight was known for championing a literary style of sf; but this was hardly a break with the past. These were, on the whole, good stories (Leiber's 'Gonna Roll the Bones', for instance, won Hugo and Nebula Awards, though the account of a man playing craps with death wouldn't really have been out of place in any of a host of other venues at the time), but they were hardly revolutionary.

Nevertheless, it worked, at least to the extent that the hard sf that had been the norm in America before this point instantly seemed passé. There was, naturally, a second, even more massive anthology, *Again, Dangerous*

women. This was 1967, the women's liberation movement was in full swing, but science fiction was not seen as a place for women, particularly not if you were trying to do something radical. Harlan Ellison's introduction to Carol Emshwiller very carefully puts her in a domestic context – 'Levittown housewife – three kids, bad housekeeper, can cook if she makes the effort and now and then she does' (213) – though I suspect these details were supplied by Emshwiller with a far greater sense of irony than Ellison recounts them. Of course he promotes her as a singular writer who 'has her own voice, defies comparison, probes areas usually considered dangerous, and is as close to being the pure artist as any writer I have met' (211), though it quickly becomes apparent that what he means by 'pure artist' is

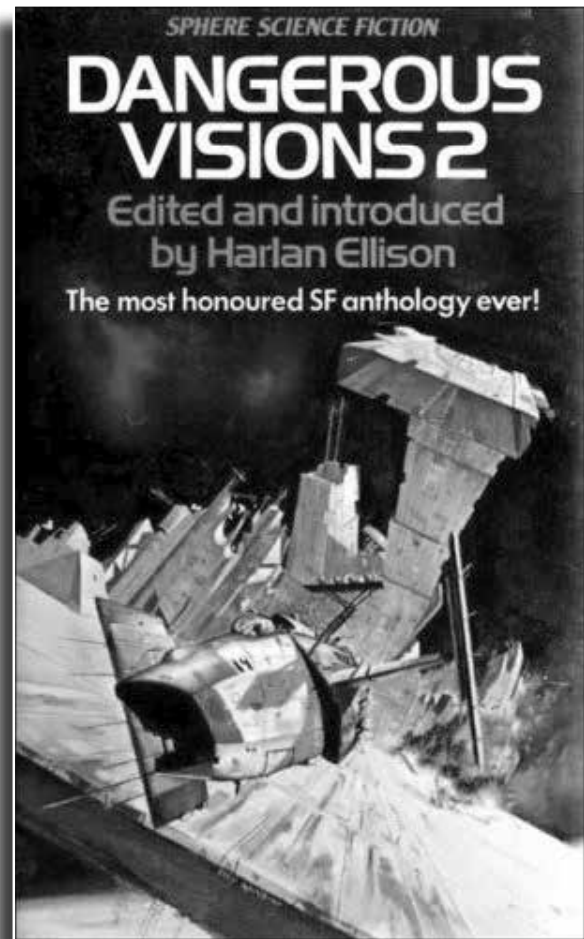
someone who doesn't let herself be guided by the dictates of the market, so this is an Ellisonian circumlocution for 'not widely published'. When it comes to this particular story, however, he is rather more equivocal: it is 'by no means a failure ... easily the strangest sex story ever written ... (and) ... I recommend it to younger writers breaking in, looking for new directions' (213). A model for others to build on rather than a great work in its own right?

I would guess that Ellison didn't really know what to make of the story. In truth, I'm not sure I do; but that's part of the point. He is anxious to stress that it is 'functionally science fiction' (213), whatever that means, but it is really only science fiction if you squint at it in a certain light. Which is not to say that it is a mainstream story, rather it is a story that refuses to slot neatly into any genre categories. There is something voyeuristic in reading fiction; we are outside looking in on figures obliviously performing for our pleasure. But this is a story that stares right back at us. It is a story designed to make the reader uncomfortable, conscious that in this work we are the focus of our own gaze. That is why we cannot categorise it, because to do so would categorise ourselves.

It is, in its simplest formulation, a story about voyeurism, about a woman anxious to spy upon the genitals of her neighbour. But then, that hardly accounts for the complexity of the story.

Emshwiller has a deceptively simple style: short, common words, short, simple sentences. The stories she tells are not in the words on the page but rather lie in the gaps between the words, in what we infer from what is not said. Mr Morrison (we never learn his first name, in fact we learn remarkably little about him; this is not a story about the man but rather about what the narrator imagines the man to be) is a large, fat man, though his 'moonface has something of the Mona Lisa to it' (214). A curious comparison, one might think, but then the Mona Lisa is known for her enigmatic smile, and this story is all about what our narrator reads into the enigma that is Mr Morrison. Actually we are also told that his smile is 'wistful' (214), so not like the Mona Lisa, then; that he has a 'clipped little Boston accent' (214), and that the narrator first thinks he is proud then amends that to shy. The later detail that 'he shuts the front door so gently one would think he is afraid of his own fat hands' (215), tends to support the notion that he is shy rather than proud. Given the intrusion that she will perpetrate against him, the shyness only exacerbates the damage.

What else do we know about him? He is a man of regular habits: 'I can set my clock by Mr Morrison's step upon the stairs' (214). He is a man weighed down by his vast size: 'How many pounds per square inch weighing him down? ... All his muscles spread like jelly under his skin' (214) and consequently, 'the house groans with him and settles when he steps out of bed. The floor creaks under his feet' (215). The heaviness makes him slow of movement, slow of thought, slow of speech. The first words he utters are: "'Heh, heh ... my, my," grunt, breath. "Well," heave the stomach to the right, "I hope ..."' (214, ellipses in the original). This is exactly the sort of vague, meaningless murmur one might make to someone we recognise but don't know, friendly but not committed. But that is not how the narrator interprets it. Everything we are told



about Mr Morrison is from the outside, things we might observe about his size, his smile, his movements, without any degree of intimacy. But the narrator thinks it is more than that, so much more that she can actually intuit his thoughts: 'He thinks, if he thinks of me at all: What can she say and what can I say talking to her? What can she possibly know that I don't know already?' (214).

Of course, the story isn't really about Mr Morrison, it's about the narrator; but we know even less about her. About the only definitive thing we do know is that she is a woman; she is single and fairly old – 'Why, I'm old enough for him to be (had I ever married) my youngest son of all' (220) even though Mr Morrison is 'big enough to be everybody's father' (217) – and she would appear to be quite small, 'almost child-sized' (216); references to fathers, mothers, children, recur significantly throughout the story. She doesn't work, she spends her days at a park or a museum; she has a limited income, a pension maybe, because 'if I'm very careful with my budget, now and then I can squeeze in a matinee' (215). Other than that, nothing. We are not told her name, or given any clue as to her history, her private life, or anything else about her.

What we do know is that she lives in the apartment directly below Mr Morrison. She doesn't leave the building until he's gone to work in the morning, and likes to be home before he comes back. She follows the sound of his movements in the room above; sometimes (and this is where we get our first sense of something creepy in her behaviour) 'I ape his movements, bed to dresser, step, clump, dresser to closet and back again' (215). And as she does so, she imagines 'those great legs sliding into pants,

their godlike width (for no mere man could have legs like that), those Thor-legs into pants holes wide as caves' (215). It is tempting at this point to accept Mr Morrison as someone more than human, someone whose bulk makes him godlike, alien. But always we must remember that it is not Mr Morrison we are seeing, but the narrator's perceptions of him. This is an insight not into the reality of Mr Morrison but into the peculiarity of the narrator's mind.

And at last we begin to intuit something of that peculiarity as she muses: 'Who is he really, one of the Normals or one of the Others?' (215). Though what she means by Normal and Other is something we will have to wait a while to discover. First, she plans an expedition. This isn't the first, by any means: 'recently, I've spent all night huddled under a bush in Central Park and twice I've crawled out on the fire escape and climbed to the roof' (215-6). In fact, 'I was rather saving Mr Morrison for last' (216). Last what? What was she doing in Central Park at night or creeping about on the roof? She doesn't say, this is one of the many things we have to guess from what she doesn't say, but it would seem most likely that she is trying to spy on couples making love. But that doesn't quite explain why she breaks into Mr Morrison's apartment and seeks out places where she can hide and watch him.

Here, having crawled under a desk because she reckons that his bulk means he won't see anything low down, she recalls that 'I've never seen (and doesn't this seem strange?) the very organs of my own conception, neither my father nor my mother. Goodness knows what *they* were and what this

where the narrator is hiding. Suddenly we see that the constant descriptions of his bulk, his heaviness, his slowness are all sexually charged. Right now his fat knees become 'mother's breasts pressing towards me' (219). When she watches him undress, the size of his clothing marks him as alien. 'In what factory did women sit at sewing machines and put out one after another after another of those otherworldly items? Mars? Venus? Saturn more likely. Or, perhaps, instead, a tiny place, some moon of Jupiter with less air per square inch upon the skin and less gravity' (219). It is essentially the same thing that marks him as sexually desirable and as alien. And again she transposes the alien onto herself in her imagination: 'He is thinking (if he thinks of me at all), he thinks: She might be from another world. How alien her ankles and leg bones' (220). The only way that she can encompass the thought that she is falling in love with his bulk, his Otherness, is to imagine that he sees her as alien and therefore as Other. And with this recognition of love comes a sense of more and more bulk, more and more alienness: 'for surely I see only a part of him here. I sense more. I sense deeper largenesses. I sense excesses of bulk' (221).

When he is naked she sees 'Alleghenies of thigh and buttock' (220), but she doesn't see his genitalia, hidden by the pendulous fold of his belly. However, his navel becomes 'the eye of God' (221), and 'The stomach eye recognizes me and looks at me as I've always wished to be looked at' (221). But although she is convinced that he sees her, 'those girlish eyes ... (are) ... as blank as having no sex at

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## Everything we are told about Mr Morrison is from the outside, things we might observe about his size, his smile, his movements, without any degree of intimacy.

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might make me?' (218). To be honest, this probably doesn't seem strange to most of us, in fact we probably haven't paid much thought to the question one way or another. For our narrator however, this perceived strangeness is connected to another thought: 'there are only two sexes and everyone of us is one of those ... (but) ... there must be Others among us' (218). Her night-time expeditions to Central Park, therefore, are part of a self-assigned mission to discover these Others, a third sex, an alien among us. Whether this is a sign of sexual repression (an elderly spinster), or simple curiosity, or because there actually is a sexual Other among us (the science fictional reading), is never made explicit in the story. Why should it be? We are always the Other, this is how the story stares back at the reader.

For now, she waits, beginning to feel safe in the room, as if 'I really did belong in this room and could actually creep around and not be noticed by Mr Morrison at all except perhaps for a pat on the head as I pass him' (218). She has already imagined herself as a lizard scuttling about the room, now she seems to see herself as a pet dog or cat; she may think of herself as on a quest to find the Other, but in her imagination she is the one who seems to be becoming Other.

Then Mr Morrison returns and sits down at the desk

all' (221). In this climactic moment, he becomes the Other she has dreamed about, spent her life searching for: he has no visible genitalia, his gender is abruptly fluid and uncertain, 'girlish' eyes, 'no sex' at all. She has found that alternative to the Normals, and that dawning sexual love is instantly transformed into religious love: 'God, I think. I am not religious, but I think, My God' (221). But notice that the focus is not on Mr Morrison now made God, but on what the eye of God is regarding: the narrator.

She flees, running down to her room, hiding under the bed (but, tellingly, leaving the door unlocked), waiting for her God to pursue her (he does not come). As she waits, she questions whether she is herself normal – 'How is one to know such things when everything is hidden?' (222) – and we recognise that maybe she is not normal, maybe she is Other. Maybe we are all Other. And it is in this way that the story looks back at us, it is in this way that the story is one of the very few that continues to challenge, to outrage, to disturb, to remain iconoclastic after so many years.

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Quotations taken from *Dangerous Visions 2* edited by Harlan Ellison, London, Sphere, 1974.

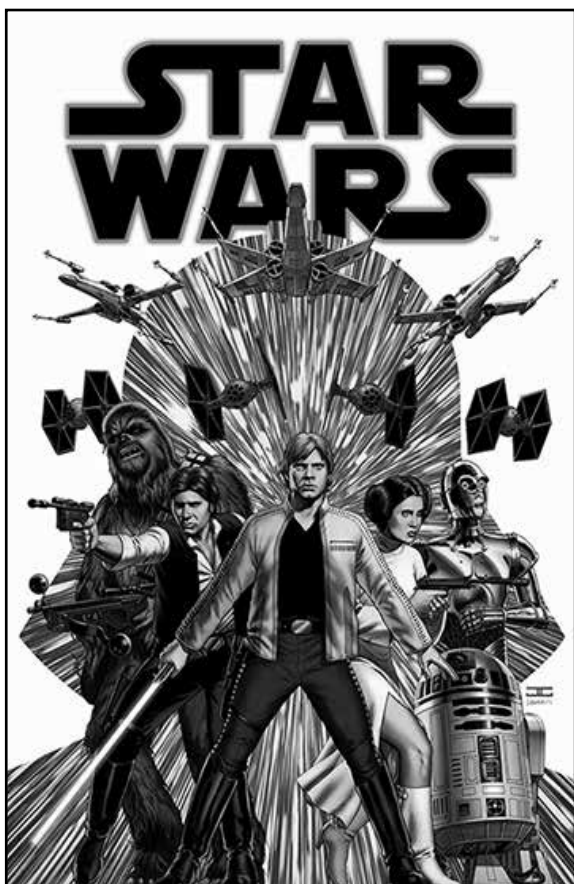
# recurrent: SEQUENTIALS

## Laura Sneddon

### Star Wars: The Return of the Licensed (Comics)

**2**015 became the year of *Star Wars*, with even the critically maligned prequel trilogy failing to dampen spirits once the first trailer of *The Force Awakens* started clocking up tens of millions of views.

When Disney acquired Lucasfilm in 2012 and announced a slate of three new films it didn't take long for one of the mouse's other companies, Marvel Comics, to regain the rights to publish *Star Wars* comics from rival publisher Dark Horse. So ended 13 years of *Star Wars* comic storytelling at the latter publisher, and indeed the previous era of older comics at Marvel – the expanded universe was reset, made un-canon, and Marvel got busy with a roster of much hyped titles.



In late 2014 the media enthused about the alleged one million copies of *Star Wars* #1 that were to be sold, but did the comic live up to the massive hype? And do any of the other comic titles based on film, television and game properties stack up beside it? Publisher Eric Stephenson of Image Comics caused a bit of a kerfuffle in early 2014 when during a keynote speech he declared that, '*Transformers* comics will never be the real thing. *GI Joe* comics will never be the real thing. *Star Wars* comics will never be the real thing.'

Image publish no licensed property comics, focusing instead on creator driven titles, and the above quote was used to bolster his praise of *The Walking Dead*, a comic that has made the jump to the television screen rather than the other way round. Understandably though, fans of the mentioned comics were rather irritated, particularly given the popularity of these particular franchises.

While not often mentioned by the majority of comic news websites, a sizeable and fiercely loyal fanbase is attached to comics starring *Transformers*, *GI Joe*, *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Godzilla*, *Conan the Barbarian*, *Planet of the Apes*, *Ghostbusters*, *The X-Files* and many more. All have made the jump from different media into comics, and while some are more obviously lazy cash-grabs, the more innovative and franchise-friendly comics carve out a respectable piece of the industry pie.

The *Star Wars* extended universe was massive indeed but it's safe to say that comic sales had tailed off rather dramatically in recent years outside of the *Clone Wars* titles that engaged the young readers market perfectly. With a new film perched on the horizon, Marvel began 2015 by releasing *Star Wars* #1, followed by the first issues of *Darth Vader* and *Princess Leia*, and then *Kanan*, *Lando*, *Shattered Empire*, and *Chewbacca*, with more still to come.

The high confidence Marvel had for these titles could be seen most clearly through the very high profile chosen writers: Jason Aaron (*Scalped*, *Southern Bastards*), Kieron Gillen (*Phonogram*, *The Wicked + The Divine*), and Mark Waid (*Kingdom Come*) on the first wave, with Greg Rucka (*Batwoman*, *Lazarus*) amongst the second.



These titles have all received remarkably consistent high praise; with the main title remaining in the top five biggest selling comics throughout the year – and it appears it did in fact top that one million milestone.

It's hard not to smile when opening the pages of *Star Wars #1* and seeing that iconic slanted yellow text followed by the images of a spaceship flying directly overhead. Set between the events of *Star Wars IV: A New Hope* and *Star Wars V: The Empire Strikes Back*, Jason Aaron and John Cassaday show the rebels pressing home their advantage after the demolition of the (first) Death Star.

Cassaday sticks to sleek art and simple lines, prioritising a likeness in characters above interesting pacing or experimental layouts. It's a little disappointing but at the same time the straightforward approach does make it far more accessible to the new comic reader, of which this comic has plenty.

The first arc begins with Luke, Leia and Han talking their way into the biggest arms factory in the galaxy, with a Wookiee up their sleeve and two familiar droids providing tech support. Aaron wastes no time in bringing Darth Vader into the mix, alongside some serious character and relationship development between our main players.

Kieron Gillen and Salvador Larroca's *Darth Vader* series similarly explores the development of the original Skywalker's feelings after both the first film and his meeting with Luke in the arms factory. The gap between him and the Emperor is shown to be widening, and one very fan-favourite character in particular guaranteed this book as another hit.

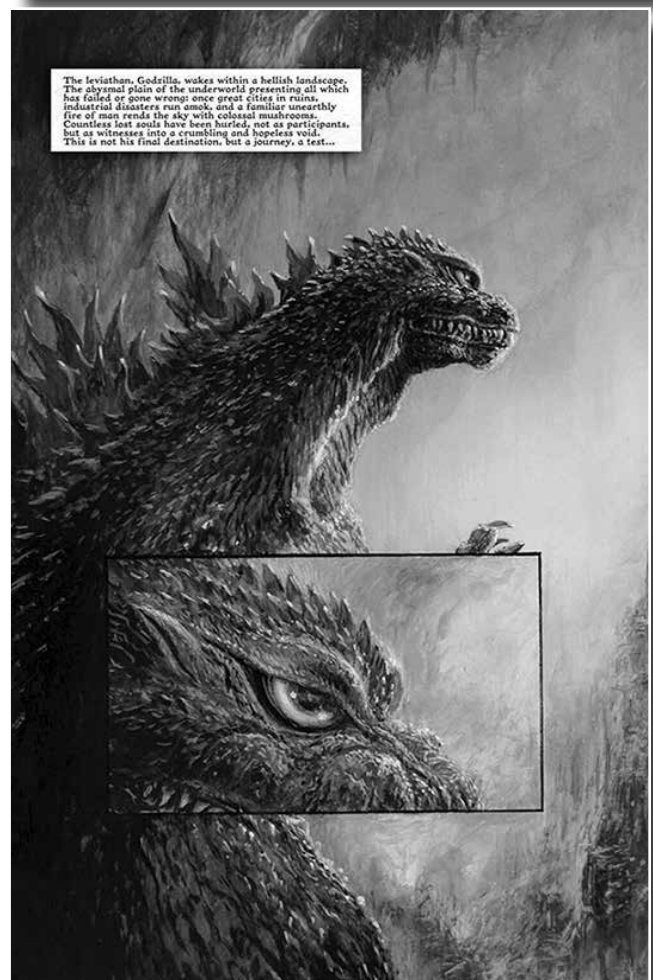
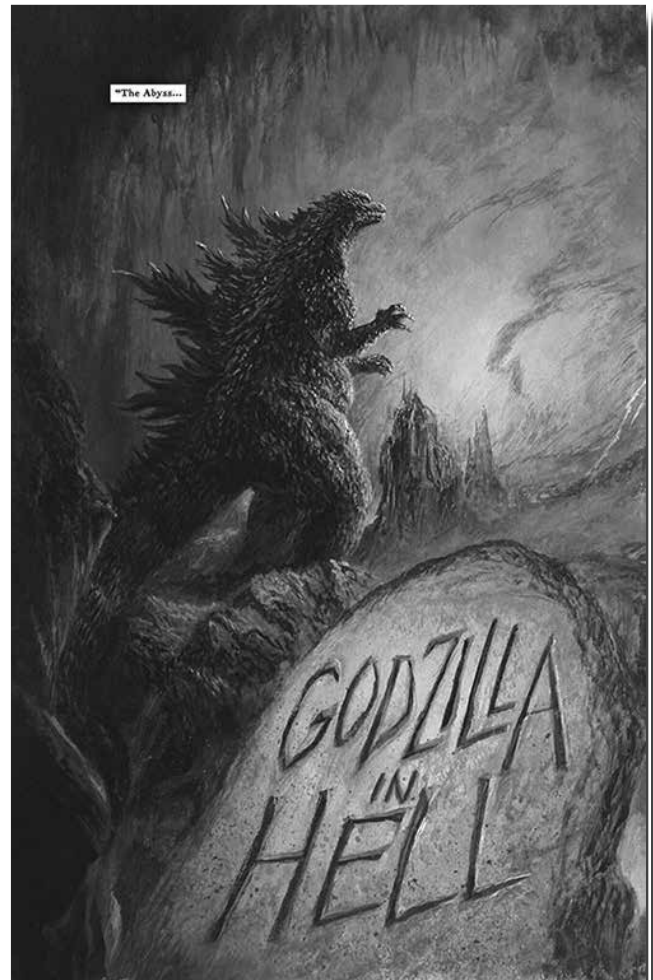
The very fact that these comics are considered to be canon is motivation enough for many a *Star Wars* fan to pick them up, particularly in light of the previous expanded universe being ejected.

What's noteworthy about these sales figures and critical acclaim isn't that the comics are appealing to existing *Star Wars* fans – that market was a given! But the main *Star Wars* title is consistently outselling the usual heavy-weight champions, *Batman* and *The Walking Dead*, proving that new fans are jumping on board, and staying on board. Avoiding the drop off in sales that is the norm for all new series is a rare achievement. It's a massive win for Marvel, and if the new film keeps interest in the franchise high they look set to top the comic sales charts for some time to come.

Meanwhile IDW is enjoying the approach of many fingers in many pies. The licensed property extraordinaire is currently publishing titles for *Star Trek*, *Transformers* (3-4 titles per month), *Ghostbusters*, *The X-Files*, *Godzilla*, and *Jem and the Holograms*, not to mention some suspiciously hasty looking titles for *Back to the Future* and *Orphan Black*.

Not content with covering classic Trek, IDW is on its 11<sup>th</sup> volume of the rebooted *Star Trek* saga that wind in and out of the two films released so far with a loose rule in place that considers everything canon until otherwise contradicted by future films or television series.

The jewel in their crown though is *Godzilla in Hell* by a rotating cast of writers and artists, as everyone's favourite monster is plummeted through the deepest, darkest layers of hell itself. The first issue by James Stokoe (*Orc Stain*, *Wonton Soup*) is as stunning as his fans have come to







expect, with deliciously muted colours, towering physical text, and a hellish incarnation of lust that allows for an epic kaijū battle.

The painted pages of Bob Eggleton's second issue echoes Botticelli's vision of *Dante's Inferno* with text boxes inspired by the best pulp fiction. A far wordier affair than the first issue, *Godzilla* traverses the abyss and encounters the demonic forms of old foes, Anguirus, Varan and King Ghidorah.

With a change of writer/artist every issue, each section of hell is guaranteed to have its own look and narrative with readers never quite knowing what to expect next. It's a neat trick, well suited to a tumultuous fall through hell.

For a lighter read, and often overlooked as a science fiction property, *Jem and the Holograms* is given the respect it deserves at IDW with Kelly Thompson and Sophie Campbell creating a work that stands in sharp contrast to the utterly awful 2015 film of the same name. Refreshing, accessible, and suitable for all ages, the comic starts at the beginning of the story with the wannabe girl band discovering some holographic help.

The intro to Jerrica, Aja, Shana and Kimber may be a little slow for existing fans but for newcomers and those of us with less than

sharp memories, it's a solid start! In a world where touchable holograms are actually on the horizon, the idea of Synergy – a holographic computer that can be worn as earrings – doesn't seem quite so farfetched.

There's sci-fi elements and secret identity shenanigans aplenty, but unlike superhero comics everything is awash with femininity and an embrace of the colour pink – there's no sexism directed at any of the characters, there's no judgement of burgeoning relationships whether same-sex or hetero, and it's one of the only comics on the shelf with positive, fierce depictions of fat (and proud!) women.

The focus here is firmly on fun, as well as making these characters feel very real and relatable. Their hair and fashion is on point but the real skill here is in getting the readers to empathise with the characters so easily. From dealing with performance anxiety, shyness and social complexities to battling their rivals The Misfits, there's something for everyone to identify with.

It's also hugely exciting to see a comic that has an almost entirely female cast proving so popular. With all shapes, sizes and various skin colours covered, *Jem and the Holograms* is a rather unique comic indeed.



Over at Dynamite, amongst the *Twilight Zone*, *John Carter Warlord of Mars* (and the rather more skin revealing *Dejah Thoris* titles), *Battlestar Galactica* and *Voltron*, *Aliens/Vampirella* is currently on the shelf showing the scantily clad vampire babe doing battle with the nastiest monster from space.

It sounds a little like your typical pulp mash-up and certainly *Aliens* and *Predator* are the two properties that have the highest number of crossover titles, but hugely underrated writer Corrina Beckho (*Invisible Republic*) steers this into genuinely chilling territory. Landing on Mars, Vampirella has been sent to investigate newly discovered catacombs of the Nosferatu, and to find out why exactly they all appear to be dead.

The iconic covers by Gabriel Hardman are the only times we see Vampirella in her famous red bikini as interior artist Javier Garcia-Miranda opts to put her in the same jump suit as her human cast. As with all the comics thus far mentioned, layouts are kept extremely simple which is of benefit to new readers, and the storytelling is effortlessly smart. With tensions running high as the body count begins to mount, the top brass predictably blame Vampirella but the depths to which they sink are genuinely shocking.

Vampirella makes a great Ripley stand-in, keeping her cool amidst the chaos with the bonus of superhuman strength and the ability to fly. Beckho wastes little time with exposition, throwing in only the smallest hints to the *Aliens* mythology and unravelling Vampirella's powers only as the narrative unfolds.

Finally there is Dark Horse, who lost their *Star Wars* but retain numerous licensed properties including a pantheon of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* titles, *Conan*, the continuation of *Fight Club*, and a particular focus on game titles such as *Halo*, *Dragon Age*, *Mirror's Edge*, *Call of Duty*, *The Witcher* and *Tomb Raider*. In the last year Dark Horse made a particular splash with a comic that was so popular it even made an appearance on the show with the highest ratings in the US, *The Big Bang Theory*.

*Archie vs Predator* by acclaimed horror writer Alex de Campi (*Grindhouse*) and artist team Fernando Ruiz, Rich Koslowski and Jason Millet sees Archie and his fellow Riverdale pals hitting Costa Rica for Spring Break. Beach games soon go out the window as a mysterious presence



starts to hunt them down, following the teens back to their sleepy town.

Taking the comedy of Archie and the horror of Predator sounds somewhat ridiculous at first glance, but boy does de Campi make it work! The four issue series (now collected in a luscious hardback) is drenched in blood and puns as Archie and the girls fight for their very lives – can they survive? Well that would be telling, but the decapitated head in the vending machine is a nice touch.

The rare scenes in which the reader sees through the Predator's superior vision are used to great effect, particularly in setting up the events of the unforgettable diner scene, and the little icons or emojis give amusing hints to the Predator's murderous thoughts.

Archie has been on a crossover spree of late, with *Archie vs Sharknado* sharing the blood and

guts of *Archie vs Predator* (if not the laughs or indeed the smarts) and *Afterlife with Archie*, where a zombie apocalypse breaks out in Riverdale, proving to be one of the best ongoing series of recent years.

Licensed comic titles have often been dismissed as inferior reads, lacking the originality of a brand new creation or the authority of sequels in the originating media. Often times they fail to take advantage of the unique platform that comics offer, unconstrained by SFX budgets or cast salaries, prioritising a likeness of characters rather than bold and expressive ideas.

But like any category of fiction and art, amongst the missed opportunities lie some true gems – those that are given the blessing of canon or conceive of ways around that obstacle, tongue-in-cheek takes that would never fly in their original forms, accessible stories that appeal to a great audience, and even those that excel beyond their roots to bring a new lease of life to the property.

Many new readers come to comics via familiar characters in licensed properties, which is precisely why the likes of *Transformers* and *Star Trek* have such passionate and long-lasting fanbases. It is also, one suspects, what lies behind the elitism that often sneers at such titles as being lesser than their similarly commercial superhero counterparts.

Perhaps the new *Star Wars* comics and their success in charming comic fans old and new will begin to break down this barrier.

# recurrent: FOUNDATION FAVOURITES Andy Sawyer

## One by David Karp

Given the importance of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), it's interesting that comparatively few novels have pillaged it in the way Orwell himself drew upon Murray Constantine (Katherine Burdekin's *Swastika Night* (1937)). Nevertheless, reviewers of David Karp's *One* noticed its echo of Orwell and Arthur Koestler's 1940 *Darkness at Noon* in the way Karp presents a 'heretical' protagonist interrogated by representatives of a dystopian regime (and, like Orwell's Winston Smith), eventually brainwashed to accept it. Just as Orwell took aspects of *Swastika Night*, such as the idea of a rebellious protagonist with a symbolic name who is approached by a man in a position of power and given a secret book, who then attempts to teach a lover/friend by reading from the book (the friend falling asleep), so Karp shows us an interrogator who develops a sympathetic

own, no slogans, no catchphrases; it displaces no air and leaves no footprints' (p. 68).

In fact, this evasiveness seems to be the novel's greatest interest.

Burden, a happily-married professor at a liberal arts college, in an unnamed state, ('it was a small nation, but it had grown from the enormous cultural heritage of the English-speaking world' [p. 110: all page references are from the 1960 Penguin edition]) is an informer. He writes reports on his colleagues to the Department of Internal Examination which shows up their possible 'heresy'. He is randomly (it appears) selected for interview and is identified as *himself* a potential heretic. The interrogator Lark, who stands in more or less the same relationship to

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**What seems to be a source of anxiety is straightforward conformism. Social manipulation both breeds collective strength and tackles discontent.**

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relationship with our rebel, and an intriguing exchange which suggests that reality itself is something which the power of the state – or the consensus of the population coerced into what to believe *by* that State – can manipulate. The 1960 Penguin edition's front cover trumpets the *Daily Mail's* verdict ('A brilliant piece of satirical and prophetic writing') and, inside, cites the critic Cyril Connolly's decision that those who, perhaps presumptuously, likened the novel to Orwell and Koestler, were in fact correct.

Reviewers from within the science fiction readership, however, were less welcoming. *Fantasy and Science Fiction* (January 1954) slammed 'this long and tedious repetition of a tired topic (the individual vs the State)'. Damon Knight hated it, pointing out 'flashes of imaginative insight' but placing it firmly among novels by 'Half-Bad Writers' in his *In Search of Wonder* (1956). No characters, he says, come to life. Worse still the point of the novel -- the 'real enemy', the State, 'cannot be judged, cannot be compared, and cannot frighten because it does not exist: it not only has no name, but no history, no philosophy, no doctrine of its

him as Orwell's O'Brien does to Winston Smith, believes he can be cured and turned into a good citizen. What follows is the erasing of his personality. Burden is first called for examination, held over on pretext of illness, drugged, lied to, indoctrinated, placed alone and naked in a room and housed in a lunatic asylum in a process of brainwashing through which the virtues of the State are inscribed upon him. He eventually becomes/believes himself to be 'Hughes', recovering from a nervous breakdown which has erased much of his memory, and his wife and children led to believe that he has been killed in an accident. But Hughes himself has heretical traits ...

Although a dystopia, this world is, like the sex and drugs hedonist-utopia of Huxley's *Brave New World*, one which many people would, at least before thinking about it, actually like to live in. Dissidents are cured rather than punished. Execution is rare. Crime is almost non-existent. Some malcontents, such as Burden and his friend Middle-

ton, are unhappy with the way State ideology is breeding a generation of conscientious but dim students, and with the growing phenomenon of the Church of State whose adherents avoid use of the first person pronoun. Looked at uncritically, there is a lot to like about this world. Only as we see more behind the scenes do we discover how totalitarian it actually is. Unlike Orwell, Karp is not showing us a specific political dystopia (only indirectly, in such aspects as its collectivism, is a fear of communism or socialism shown): What seems to be a source of anxiety is straightforward conformism. Social manipulation both breeds collective strength and tackles discontent.

*'Happiness... comes from conformity -- comes from being exactly like your fellows... Man is a social animal and the State is helping him to the realization of the perfect society -- a complete identity of common interest, where all feel a part, take a part, are a part.'* (p. 87)

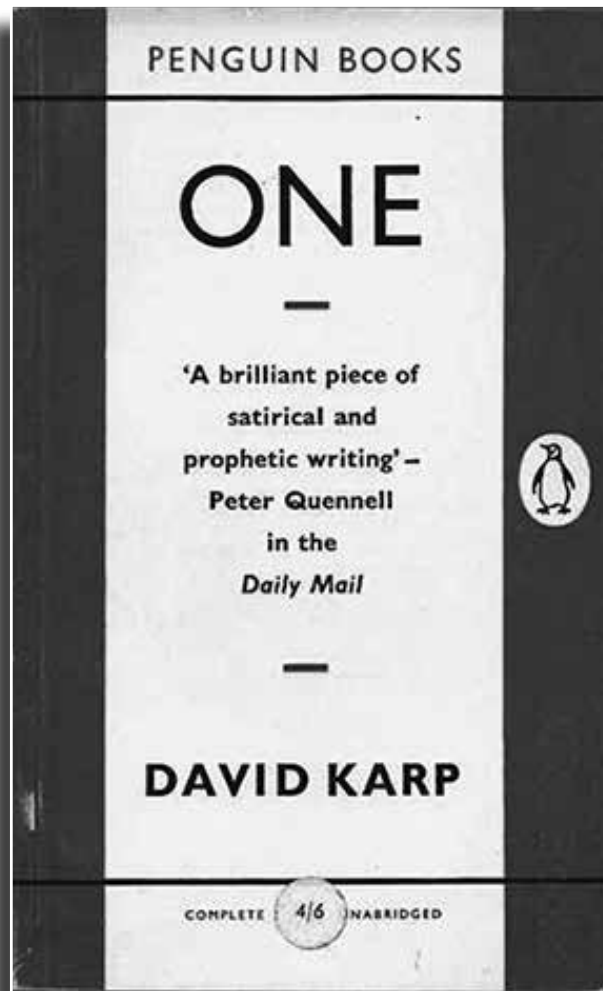
Dr Emmerich's argument with Burden also echoes O'Brien's with Smith, as he relates a fable about the man who saw the reflection of the moon in the water and said that it had fallen into the well. 'And if everyone believed that the moon was in the well -- would the moon then be in the well?' The answer, as with O'Brien's two and two making five, is yes:

*'Nothing is impossible if people will believe it. That is the strength of common thinking. It eventually makes all the things it thinks come true... [by] explaining away the apparent differences with discernible fact....'*

*And it would be true?*

*'It would be made the truth.'* (p. 168)

Who is right: the mainstream reviewers or the science fiction ones? I have read no other novels by Karp, who published ten other novels as well as writing a considerable amount of television work, but *One* certainly seems worth attention. While it lacks the horrific extrapolation which makes *Nineteen Eighty-Four* so powerful, and much of Knight's criticism of Karp's lack of characterisation hits the mark, it's hard to escape the conclusion that even so, characterisation in *One* is nevertheless a cut above much



science fiction (Lark is a curiously sympathetic Inquisitor), and one might well argue that the whole *point* of such a blandly conformist society is that it renders even 'rebels' like Burden as porridge-like as the rest. One minor character, Wright, a 'heretic' whose individualism enables him to be a useful tool for the State, is perhaps the most frightening character because while we never get anywhere near inside him, his very survival as an asset to the State is troubling in its cynicism.

Wright prophesies the growth of individualism and the destruction of the State. We are given absolutely no evidence that this might be possible. Indeed, what Knight says about the lack of *concreteness* of the State is its most chilling characteristic. There will always be twelve to fifteen heretics a year who will have to be destroyed, says Lark to his superior at one point (p. 45). Given the millions destroyed in the last century by totalitarian regimes, this is positively cheery. War and

famine is over. Crime is almost wiped out, certainly among the younger generation. Divorce and marital breakdown are steadily decreasing. Material wealth is increasing, and labour-saving devices more and more available. People are even reading more. The price, a little price (are we reminded of Le Guin's 'The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas' here?), is the destruction and degradation of a few individuals like Burden who hardly know that they are in fact heretics.

Yet Lark insists that: 'the seeds of heresy lie in all of us' (p. 181).

Some reviewers seemed to discern a hopeful message in the conclusion of the novel -- in fact, it is as precisely as optimistic as Orwell. The State has not precisely won, but its position is hardly challenged. Knight says that the State 'cannot frighten because it does not exist'. In fact, it was forming as Karp was writing (it was invisible because it lay all around in the potential of the post-war Western capitalist societies), and the most frightening thing about it is that it, or something like it, may yet prove to be the best of all possibilities that lay before us. I suspect that Knight is correct in suggesting that Karp has not quite *got* the implications of his scenario, and that a greater focus upon what it would be *like* to be a character in such a society would have brought the novel up to Orwellian standards. Nevertheless, I wonder if this invisible, benevolent State is not in fact another of the 'viscerally compelling' touches Knight found in the novel.



# recurrent:

## RESONANCES

### Stephen Baxter

## A Meeting with Medusa

**T**he *Medusa Chronicles*, my new collaboration with Alastair Reynolds (Gollancz, February 2016), came out of a chance suggestion by AI in the course of a nostalgic email exchange: why don't we write a sequel to *A Meeting with Medusa*?

Sir Arthur C. Clarke's much-loved novella was originally published in *Playboy* for December, 1971. It is a saga of the exploration of Jupiter's cloud layers, with the intrepid Howard Falcon encountering aerial life forms dominated by the huge 'medusae'. It was perhaps Clarke's last significant work of short fiction, and has been reprinted many times since – perhaps most notably as a terrifically illustrated serial in the short-lived magazine *Speed & Power* (IPC, issues 5–13, 1974), a rendition which made a significant impact on the imagination of a young Reynolds.

But Clarke said (in *Astounding Days*, 1989) that his own fascination with Jupiter began much earlier, with the spectacular cover painting by Frank R. Paul of the very first SF magazine he ever saw, the November 1928 edition of Gernsback's *Amazing Stories*, showing astronauts on a Jovian moon hanging before the planet itself. Clarke was not quite eleven years old when this was published.

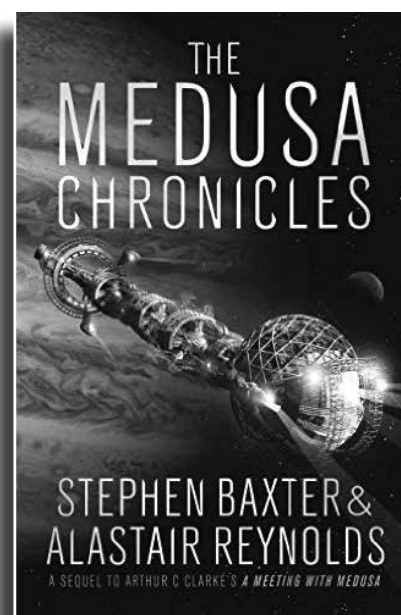
All we can see of Jupiter telescopically (for a non-fiction reference on the planet see Lang, 2011) are the upper cloud layers, as painted by Paul. With no more knowledge than that, much early sf treated Jupiter as merely an exotic, if larger, version of Earth. In the twentieth century however the advance of astronomy gave us a more realistic framework to explore. Jupiter, over three hundred times as massive as the Earth but with a much lower density, must be made of the same stuff as the sun, and must have roughly the same composition: hydrogen, helium, and other elements in traces. The upper clouds might offer temperate conditions, but as early as the 1930s there were predictions that deep within the planet the pressures would transform a liquid hydrogen ocean into a 'metallic' form, capable of conducting electricity and generating a powerful magnetic field.

Against this background, from the 1930s more grounded Jupiter fiction began to appear, thanks, as Asimov acknowledged (introduction to Pohl and Pohl, 1973) to the influence of editor John W. Campbell Jr., who insisted on scientific realism in the stories he published. In Asimov's own 'Not Final!' (1941) Jovians, made xenophobic by an

ignorance of the universe beyond the cloud decks, regard humans as vermin. And because of the planet's vast size and resources, 'I tell you that the Jovians . . . are the natural rulers of the Solar System . . .' For now, however, they lack the technological means to escape their world.

Clifford D. Simak's 'Desertion' (1944) shows an attempt to cope with Jupiter's hellish conditions by transforming humans into a form of Jovian life: 'He had expected a hell of ammonia rain and stinking fumes and the deafening, thundering tumult of the storm . . . He had not expected the lashing down-pour would be reduced to drifting purple mist that moved like fleeing shadows over a red and purple sward.' Poul Anderson's 'Call Me Joe' (1957) features a kind of tele-operation. Rather as in the movie *Avatar* (2009) a crippled human operator called Edward Anglesey is 'psionically' linked to Joe, a centaur-like artificial life-form, a 'pseudojovian', on Jupiter's surface: 'Imagine being *strong!*' Ultimately Joe takes over, with the last of Anglesey's consciousness taken into his own.

In the 1960s predictions of temperate, Earthlike conditions of temperature and pressure in Jupiter's upper atmosphere, as well as the possibility of the presence of a wide variety of organic molecules, led to speculation about life in the Jovian cloud layers. It was into this version of Jupiter that Howard Falcon of *A Meeting with Medusa* descended, in a mixture of a bathyscaphe and hot air balloon. Later, a detailed study by Sagan and Salpeter (1976) led to a famous visual depiction in Sagan's *Cosmos* TV series of cloud beasts not unlike Clarke's.





But by 1971 Clarke had already been to Jupiter. Indeed the planet was a central location in the saga for which Clarke may be best remembered, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and its sequels.

In *2001* itself, while in the movie version Jupiter was the destination for the *Discovery* spacecraft, in the novel Jupiter was used merely for a flyby and gravitational sling-shot en route to Saturn. As the *Discovery* passed, however, two probes were dropped into Jupiter's upper atmosphere. One probe fails but the other, in a prevision of Falcon's adventures, penetrates high cloud to an area of clear air above a deeper layer of clouds; there are glimpses of structure – a cone-shaped 'mountain' surrounded by a halo of 'beads' – before the probe is crushed by the pressure, and *Discovery* sails on (p122).

In the later books Clarke reworked the continuity to make *Discovery*'s target Jupiter, both in order to synchronise with the movie and to take account of results from the *Pioneer*, *Voyager* and *Galileo* probes, whose dramatic revelations about the Jovian moons inspired Clarke to write his sequels in the first place. In *2010* (1982), the mobile consciousness of astronaut Dave Bowman, who passed through the Star Gate at the climax to *2001*, is preserved by the alien Monolith, and he is induced to explore the Jovian interior through

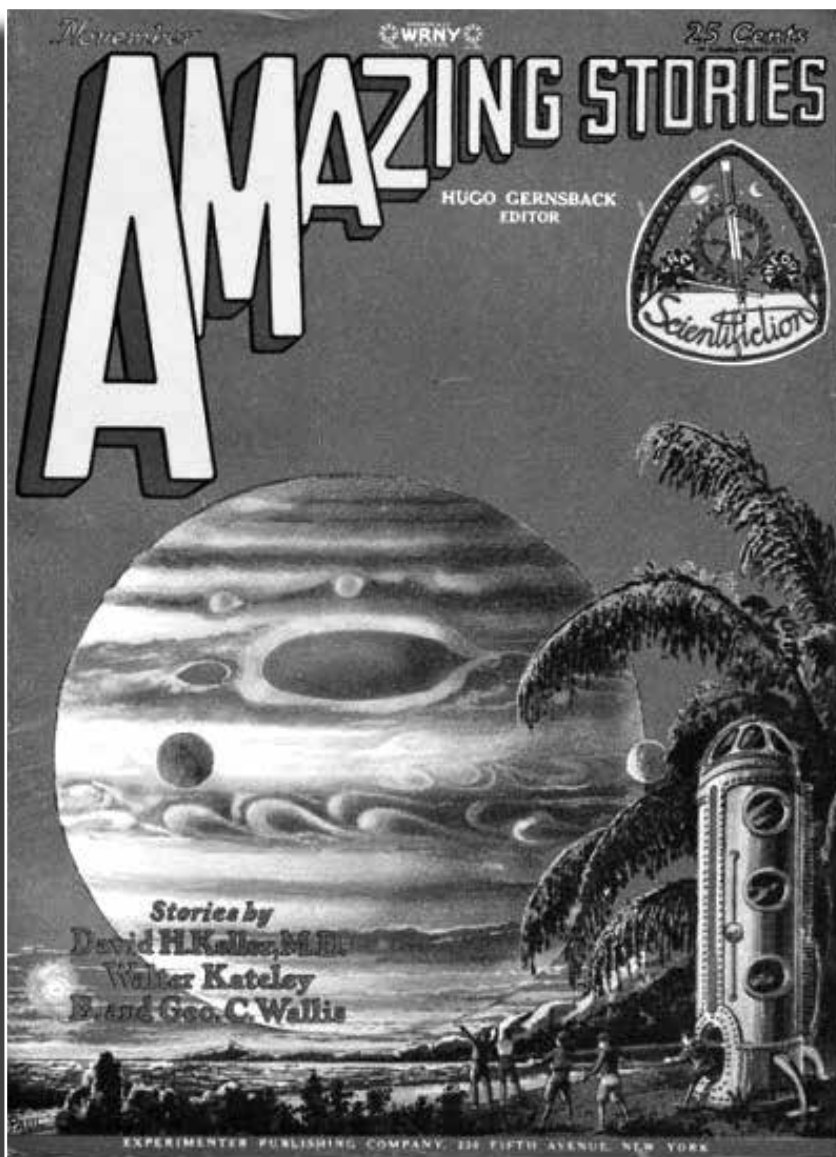
a descent into the Great Red Spot. As with Falcon, in the atmospheric layers he glimpses 'barely palpable mountains of hydrocarbon foam' (p194), on which city-sized creatures browse, which are in turn preyed on by aerial predators of multiple forms (p196). But Bowman descends deeper than Falcon, down through layers of petrochemicals, complex silicon-carbon compounds, a metallic hydrogen ocean, and finally reaches the planet's core of crystallised carbon: diamond (p197). All this is still not an unreasonable guess at what might lurk deep within the giant planet.

During this descent the Jovian cloud life, evidently unintelligent, is dismissed as 'aerial plankton ... an evolutionary cul-de-sac ... A purely aerial culture might develop, but in an environment where fire was impossible, and solids scarcely existed, it could never even reach the Stone Age' (p196). Bowman is aware of disappointment at this among his Monolith-builder masters – and, ominously, a new decision.

Monoliths, used as self-replicating von Neumann machines (p265) cause Jupiter to implode and ignite as a star. This 'devourer of worlds' (p217) will uplift life on Europa, whose ice cover begins to melt, but of course the Jovian life is sacrificed. (The movie version of *2010* (Peter Hyams, 1984) reprises the novel's main events but does not refer to Jovian life.)

In *2061: Odyssey Three* (1987) avatars of Bowman, Hal and a still-living Heywood Floyd are becoming sceptical of the methods of the Monoliths. The uplift of European life is a repetition of the Monoliths' experiment with 'man-apes' in Africa millions of years earlier – 'but at an appalling cost' (p292): 'The Jovians were weighed in the balance against the Europeans – and found wanting ... Should that have doomed them?' (p294). In the final book of the sequence (*3001: The Final Odyssey* (1997)), humanity's doubts about the Monoliths are hardening to defiance. There seems little evidence of an evolutionary breakthrough by the Europeans, despite the Jovians' sacrifice. Questions are even being asked about the efficacy of the prehistoric intervention in humanity's evolution in Africa: 'Did we *have* to become so mean and nasty to survive?' (p153). In fear of more arbitrary destruction, in the end the preserved avatars of Bowman and Hal are used to download computer viruses into the solar system Monoliths and curtail the threat – for now.

Since Clarke's pioneering voyages, more writers have ventured into Jupiter's clouds. In *If the Stars Are Gods* by Benford and Eklund (1977), a thoughtful saga of ambiguous contacts with exotic alien life, we encounter medusa-like Jovians feeding on the planet's radio energy. In Ben Bova's *Jupiter* (2000) humans embedded in breathable fluid quickly pass through Falcon's upper atmosphere, where they encounter 'Clarke's Medusas', and descend into a planet-girdling 'ocean' layer of water



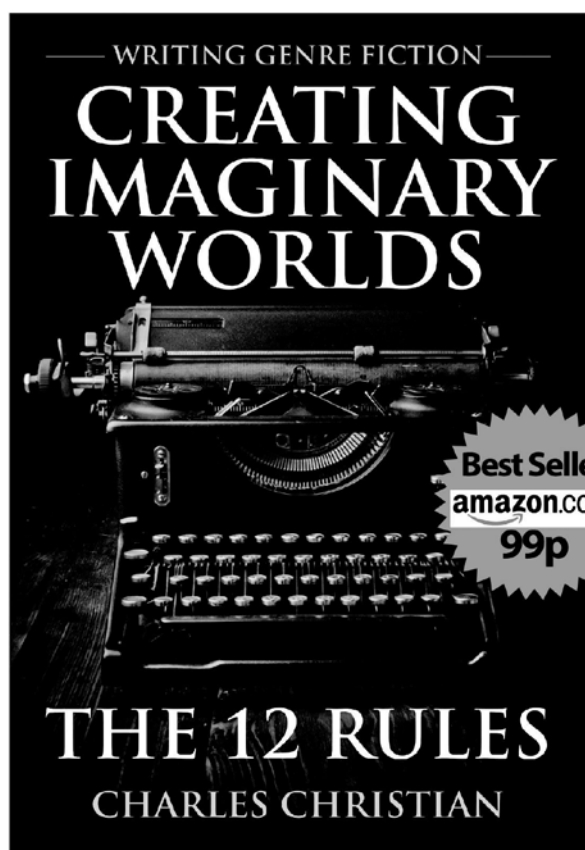
some 5000 km thick. Perhaps the most remarkable fictional descent into Jupiter's clouds, in Kim Stanley Robinson's *Galileo's Dream* (2009), was achieved by Galileo Galilei himself – 'I primo al mondo! The first man to see Jupiter's four moons, which had been circling it since the creation' (chapter 1). In the year 3020, as a by-product of a complex conflict over how to deal with the discovery of Jovian life, Galileo is drawn through time into an extraordinary journey into a Jupiter full of life and mind: 'The bands and the swirls have always been its thoughts ...'

Jovian cloud intelligences have even troubled Doctor Who. In the audio drama *The Jupiter Conjunction* (2012), the Fifth Doctor encounters 'Jovians,' inhabitants of the planet's atmosphere, 'gas, dust and vapour held together by some navigating consciousness ...' He compares their rich culture to 'an architecture made out of ideas'.

Jupiter's moons, which are relatively Earthlike worlds, tend to attract more attention than the great planet itself. But Jupiter is enormous, in mass, area, and volume far out-massing any body in the solar system save the sun itself: it is like a pocket universe. And we know virtually nothing about it – which is one reason Al and I were drawn to our sequel project. Let's hope we don't have to wait much beyond the end of the current century to find out more, when Falcon's *Kon-Tiki* is scheduled for its momentous meeting with Medusa.

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## THE BSFA REVIEW

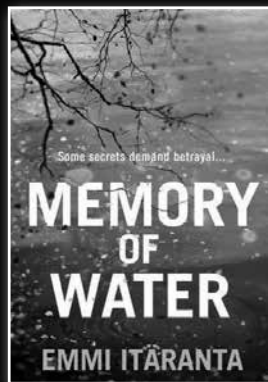
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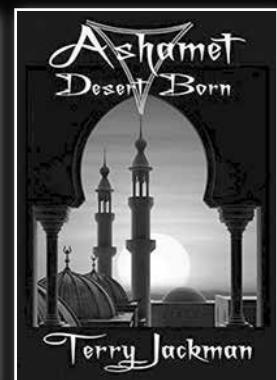
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## Modernism And Science Fiction by Dr. Paul March-Russell (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)

Reviewed by Anthony Nanson

This book is one of a series of titles exploring connections between modernism and topics that at first glance may not seem closely associated with it. Paul March-Russell makes abundantly clear that science fiction has been intertwined with modernism throughout the history of the two movements. One of the delights of his book is that he will unashamedly refer in the same paragraph to authors as different as, say, TS Eliot and William Hope Hodgson without making any distinction between literary and genre fiction. The book is essentially a history of the relationship between modernism and SF from, roughly, the publication of Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race* in 1871 to the demise of *New Worlds* in 1971 and is structured as four chapters focusing on: scientific romance in the late nineteenth century; utopia and apocalypse in the decades around the First World War; American pulp SF; and the British New Wave.

Its premise is series editor Roger Griffin's definition of modernism as "the bid to achieve a sense of transcendent value, meaning, or purpose despite Western culture's progressive loss of a homogeneous value system and overarching cosmology (*nomos*) caused by the secularizing and disembedding forces of modernization". This definition frames modernism as critically responsive to modernity rather than being simply the cultural expression of it. It also emphasises thematic content over the innovation in form commonly associated with modernism. Most of March-Russell's discussion concerns the ideas in the stories, rather than the ways the stories are written, but the examples where he does discuss innovations in form have a crucial role in his narrative: for example, Raymond Roussel's construction of an "arbitrary and mechanical prose style" for novels whose characters are partly or wholly machines or Alfred Bester's use of intertextuality to suggest "an amnesiac civilisation on the brink of total destruction" or William Burroughs's splicing together of texts in pursuit of a "silence" beyond the reach of a "parasitic" and toxified language.

The first two chapters are a bricolage of examples of authors, texts, intellectual trends and the connections between them arising from personal relationships or the cultural influence of one text or current of thought upon another. Chapter 1 is organised around several interconnected themes: deep time and lost worlds, visions of the future, transcendent consciousness, higher dimensions, the man-machine. Chapter 2 is unified by the theme of utopia and dystopia. March-Russell keeps the inevitable references to HG Wells fairly brief to give space to more detailed summaries of texts by less familiar authors. Particularly intriguing among these are a number of French writers, whose influence is referenced through the rest of the book, even though with the onset of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century French SF seems to drop through a black hole into a separate universe. They include, besides Roussel, Alfred Jarry, who devised the pseudo-science of pataphysics, "the science of imaginary solutions"; Maurice Renard, author of *Doctor Lerne*, "a delirious and sexually explicit" reworking of motifs from *The Island of Doctor Moreau*; and writer and astronomer Camille Flammarion, whose writings deliberately "blur the line between fiction and pedagogy".

That conflating of the impulses to tell a story and to

communicate ideas, collapsing the distinction in form between fiction and non-fiction, goes right back to the Scottish poet and publisher William Wilson's coinage of 'science-fiction' in 1851 - long before Hugo Gernsback! - to refer to writing "in which the revealed truths of Science may be given, interwoven with a pleasing story which may itself be poetical and true". It is one of the threads running through March-Russell's history, classically exemplified by Olaf Stapledon's striving "for a narrative form that 'does not pretend to be a novel' where literary convention is at once transcended by the synthesis of form and content". Another thread is the tension between secular scientific understanding - hallmark of the modern condition - and an irrepressible hankering for the metaphysical or paranormal, which forms one aspect of the modernist response to the disenchantment of the world wrought by modernity to bring about, says Griffin, "a protracted spiritual crisis that provokes the proliferation of countervailing impulses to restore a 'higher meaning' to historical time". A paradoxical coupling of mystical and scientific aspects of SF's visions has fed back into the real world to inspire scientific advances, as in the case of Jack Parsons (devotee of Aleister Crowley, magic-practising buddy of L Ron Hubbard and keen reader of *Amazing Stories*), who invented a storable solid rocket fuel and co-founded the Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

In the latter two chapters a stronger narrative emerges; a familiar one to SF fan, but March-Russell points up its modernist dimensions, albeit that by this stage SF has largely separated from mainstream literary culture. For the pulp magazines the modernism concerns the application of science to making a better world. There were some sharp differences of opinion about the ideology by which this utopian aim should be pursued. For the Futurian faction, which included Isaac Asimov and Frederick Pohl among other luminaries, "logical science-fiction inevitably points to the necessity of socialism, the advance of science, and the world-state; and ... these aims ... can best be reached through adherence to the program of the Communist International" (quotation from Donald Wollheim). A position that got most of them - though not Asimov - banned from the first World Science Fiction Convention in 1939.

That the modernist quest for utopia has a dark side became only too evident when attempts were made to construct an ideal society for real, in the form of the Soviet Union or the Third Reich - and more insidiously evident as both human beings and the physical environment were progressively compelled to comply with the demands of machines. Hence, for example, the battle of ideas between Wells's advocacy of enlightened authoritarianism and the diverse responses in fiction from the likes of Yevgeny Zamyatin, CS Lewis, Aldous Huxley and Wyndham Lewis. Besides manifest critiques of fascist domination - such as Katharine Burdekin's *Swastika Night* (1937) in which the Nazis still rule the world 700 years hence - there is also an impulse verging on fascist in some modernist SF to valorise a superior kind of man (for example, in work by Edgar Rice Burroughs, Robert Heinlein and AE van Vogt).

Bester is the pivotal link from American pulp SF to the British New Wave and what March-Russell presents as the apotheosis and collapse of modernist SF in the convulsions of *New Worlds*. Here I start to feel anxious about the use of the terms 'modernism' and 'postmodernism'. Bester's intertextuality and the audacious literary mindfuck of Brian Aldiss's *Report on Probability A* and JG Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* would seem, in form, to be quintessen-

tially postmodernist; certainly more so than the 1980s cyberpunk texts that are regarded as postmodern SF and yet are relatively conventional in form. However, if we accept Griffin's definition of modernism in terms that prioritise theme, as the quest for meaning and a better world, then it follows that postmodernism means the abandonment of that quest. Cyberpunk is postmodern in that sense. My interpretation of March-Russell's account of *New Worlds* is that it narrates not so much an *apotheosis* of modernism as a traumatic *transition* from modernism to postmodernism. In other words, in the stories published there and simultaneously in the crisis of funding for this avant-garde magazine, we witness the abnegation of hope for meaning and a better world.

March-Russell makes the demise of *New Worlds* emblematic of the demise of modernism and the counter-culture. Surely the counter-culture lives on – in Stroud, where I live, you can't escape it – but perhaps what he's referring to is the end of the avant-garde as a cultural force that was taken seriously, whose products were sold on a viable scale and influenced society but which today is reduced to underground small presses by a cultural industry shaped by big business to maximise return on investment. From this perspective, postmodernism valorises not so much a moral rejection of the unsavoury fruits of modernism as the replacement of the quest for meaning and a better world by the commercial imperative.

In the coda to his book March-Russell challenges the dominance of cyberpunk in representations of recent SF as complicit with the hegemony of postmodernism in the academy and neoliberalism in political economy. This isn't the end of the story, he reassures us. Modernist SF has continued to be written by the likes of Kim Stanley Robinson and Octavia Butler. And there's something new as well, of which we see a symptom in "Geoff Ryman's call in 2002 for a mundane sf, focused more on global and near future conditions". In his preface Griffin speaks of a paradigm shift he calls 'post-post-modern' which seeks to engage more deeply with reality by bringing contrasting perspectives to bear upon it. He's talking about historiography, and I dislike the failure of imagination exposed by that term 'post-post-modern', but it makes sense to contemplate what comes after the postmodern in SF as well. March-Russell closes by pointing to innovative work by writers such as China Miéville, Gwyneth Jones and Adam Roberts which carries forward the modernist impulse yet is carefully sceptical of its limitations.

Except briefly in the introduction, this book deploys no

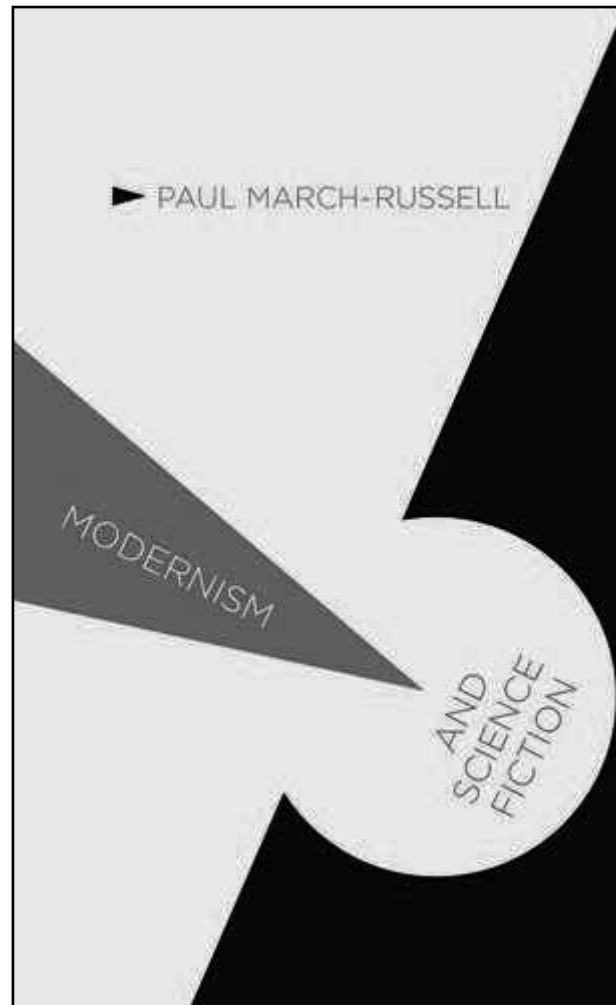
cryptic critical theoretical apparatus and should interest any serious SF aficionado. That being so, the price tag of £60 for a small-format book of 157 pages plus notes seems absurd, even for a hardback, and is presumably pitched exclusively to university libraries. For that price, moreover, you might expect immaculate copy-editing. There are many instances of dodgy syntax and of sentences overloaded with parenthetical clauses, whose resolution by firmer editing would enhance both the pleasure of reading and the ease of comprehending the dense concentration of knowledge March-Russell has packed into the limited space of this book.

Why shouldn't scholarly books be a joy to read? And

where do you draw the line between fiction and scholarship anyway? In his account of the death of *New Worlds* March-Russell mentions "the absorption of the New Wave into the emerging academic discourse on sf", which made me wonder what may be lost when the intellectual energy of avant-garde art is channelled into the more disciplined milieu of academia. I experienced *Modernism and Science Fiction* as an exhilarating imbrication of history, biography, cultural context, anecdote, story summary, quotation and comment. Not a million light-years from an exercise in postmodern pastiche, perhaps. The book peddles no central thesis as a modernist text might do. Yet emergent from the intermeshing of texts and events, in a manner in keeping with the 'post-post-modernist' paradigm, is a compelling picture of the reciprocal influence between SF and the transformations of the real world. Yes, imaginative fiction and film give expressive response to what's happening in the world, but they also become part of the cultural matrix that

determines what happens. This book heightened my sense of how much is at stake in the writing and publishing of SF and, indeed, the production of SF in other media. SF is not merely a stimulating diversion; what is at stake is the future of the world.

Although this book belongs to a series about modernism, I hope March-Russell may consider applying his erudition to write a companion volume, on, say, 'postmodernism and science fiction', to unpack in equivalent detail the story from 1971 to the present day – a period of nearly half a century in which I daresay the majority of SF ever written was written. If he does, I hope his publisher will produce it – and *Modernism and Science Fiction* – in a reasonably priced paperback edition that individual readers can afford to buy.





***Europe At Midnight* by Dave Hutchinson  
(Solaris, 2015)**

**Reviewed by Paul Kincaid**

In his 2004 collection, *As The Crow Flies*, Dave Hutchinson included a story that has stuck in my mind ever since I first read it. 'On The Windsor Branch' is presented as a catalogue entry in a sale of cartographic curiosities, the one surviving sheet of an alternative to the Ordnance Survey begun by General H. Whitton-Whyte in 1770. What is curious about this map, we discover only in the footnotes, is that it shows to the west of London the county of Ernshire. And since the map is the territory, there is a version of reality in which one can travel to Ernshire.

This story now forms the spine about which Hutchinson has constructed *Europe At Midnight*, the sequel to his justly-praised *Europe In Autumn*. It should be said straight away that this is not a direct sequel. Anyone expecting a straightforward continuation of the previous story is doomed to disappointment. Rudi, the chef turned coureur who led us through the first volume, reappears only in the final pages; and the fragmented Europe that was such a politically acute and stunningly realised feature of *Europe In Autumn* is here visited only briefly.

We begin, rather, in a university at war with itself. A university, moreover, that has a Professor of Intelligence who jokingly calls himself Rupert of Hentzau and who serves as our narrator. There has recently been a civil war in which the old government of the university has been overthrown, many of them killed. As part of the new order, our narrator has been landed with the most unwelcome and least supported job on the campus. His role is two-fold: to keep a nervous eye on the Science faculty, which does not accept the new order and which is rumoured to be developing a devastating weapon; and to investigate the groups who keep trying to escape the campus, usually dying in the attempt. In the end, Rupert decides to trace one of these supposed escape routes.

Meanwhile, in a miserably rundown London a man claiming asylum is stabbed in a motiveless attack on a bus. Jim, a tired security agent with a failing marriage, is called on to investigate and finds himself unexpectedly part of a top secret committee studying something he can't quite believe: that there is a parallel England accessible through a curious twist in reality. One researcher has spent her life tracing rumours and reports about Ernshire and the man on the bus may just be the clue she has been waiting for. The man is, of course, Rupert.

One of the joys of Hutchinson's novel is that his most extravagant inventions are always anchored to the mundane, the grandest of events are in the most ordinary of locations. It turns out that Rupert escaped only just in time; behind him, the Science faculty exploded an atomic bomb that rendered the whole of the pocket universe uninhabitable. This proves to be par for the course, as we slowly realise that the university was isolated in its own pocket universe precisely to provide an isolation zone for weapons research. And the Science faculty has already manufactured the Xian flu that so devastated Europe it paved the way for the political fragmentation seen in *Europe In Autumn*.

There is, therefore, a war going on between Ernshire and the Europe we know. But Europe is so concerned with its own discords and woes that it doesn't even realise it is

under attack. Well, except for Jim's secret committee. One of the delights of the first novel was the satirical underpinning of the story. In the new volume, that satire is most obvious in the committee. As more is learned about Ernshire and the university, so the committee grows, until the original members are frozen out by a huge and unwieldy body largely composed of politicians and business leaders who see Ernshire not as a threat that has already been responsible for the deaths of millions but as an untapped commercial opportunity. There is a consistent sad comedy about the workings of the committee, a tone of voice that is, to be fair, typical of Hutchinson's writing as a whole. There is science fictional invention galore throughout both of these books but the response that is invited is less awe and amazement than sorrow. In this world, everyone screws up and the bigger the organisation, the bigger the screw up; and we all suffer as a result.



Another example of this sad comedy is in one of the few ventures into the Europe riven into myriad statelets familiar from the first book. In this instance, it is Dresden; one of the wealthiest polities in Europe but also one of the most paranoid. The portion of Dresden that has declared independence offers specialist computer services, no questions asked, and it has made a lot of money as a result. But it is so in love with security that it has built a wall around itself and no one is allowed to leave or enter. Everything is taken care of, except the main sewer, and when the sewer collapses, they have no alternative but to call in outside help. The irony is delicious: their high tech, high flown security is breached because they didn't pay attention to the most basic of human needs.

On the other hand, what the Dresden sewer does show is how thoroughly Hutchinson has thought through the detailed workings of his world. There is a running joke about the Eurovision Song Contest, now an inevitably complex and cumbersome affair, that is both very funny and very revealing about how such a fragmentary Europe might function. Whenever we catch a glimpse, even tangentially, of this broken jigsaw puzzle of a continent it feels just right. This, we are confident, is exactly how these lunatic, para-

noid statelets would operate; exactly the degree of criminal intent or political self-serving or fear of the other that would drive their creation; exactly the way they would succeed or, more likely, fail. These two novels are an object lesson in world building. We know this Europe, there is an ineluctable truth in it, and yet its multifarious details are presented to us not heavily handedly, not through ponderous info dumps, but lightly in asides and jokes and through a surprisingly attractive world-weariness.

So convincing is this Europe, so various and intriguing, that it comes as something of a shock to realise just how little of this novel is set there. At the end of *Europe In Autumn*, Rudi the coureur crosses a different border into a different universe and it is that crossing that Hutchinson has chosen to pursue in this novel. That different universe, we assume, is Ernshire. (I say “assume” because another possibility is opened up, literally, during Rupert’s brief visit behind the walls of Dresden but that possibility is not followed up here, instead hanging like a promise awaiting the third volume.) Therefore, by a series of contrivances (some of which, it must be said, feel rather too contrived), Rupert travels from the university to London to fractured Europe and eventually, inevitably, into Ernshire.

In keeping with its origin, Ernshire proves to be a bucolic image of rural England, conservative, slow, sparsely populated and picturesque. Except that by now the county extends over the whole landmass of Europe. What we get are slow journeys by unreliable rail services between widely dispersed towns and villages or cities still in thrall to the aristocracy. Here we get a taste of Hutchinson’s political anger as he provides a glimpse of the hard life of the poor labouring in dangerous conditions for minimal wages under uncaring capitalists. It’s a pity really that this is presented as an aside, as a bit of local background colour while Rupert tries to discover who might be behind the cross-universe attacks, rather than as part of the narrative thrust of the novel.

There is a passage in *Europe In Autumn* when Rudi is held as a prisoner in London which I felt slowed the pace of the novel to an almost fatal degree. The section set within Ernshire does much the same for this novel and because it comes that much later in the story, it is not so easy to pick the pace up again afterwards. Hutchinson manages the trick but at the expense of a somewhat frantic feel to the climax of the novel. A more direct political attack within the Ernshire section might well have kept up the pace better.

Nevertheless, *Europe At Midnight* proves to be every bit as compelling a story as its predecessor. It suffers, perhaps inevitably, from the problem of being the middle volume in a trilogy, filling in some of the background and laying trails that can be picked up in the concluding volume. Both Rupert and Jim come across as slightly colourless when compared to Rudi, largely because his passion for food and cooking gave him an interest outside the strict demands of the plot; yet they hold our interest and sympathy, and steer us through a plot that is at times highly complex. Hutchinson is an assured storyteller and if the new book doesn’t quite have the impact and originality of *Europe in Autumn*, it still holds its own. The completed trilogy promises to be one of the major works of science fiction this decade.

## **Memory Of Water by Emmi Itäranta (HarperCollins, 2014)**

**Reviewed by Donna Scott**

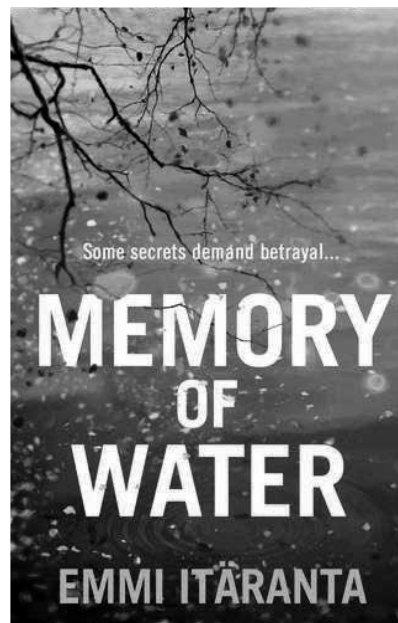
**N**oria Kaitio is an apprentice at her father’s tea house, a role traditionally reserved for a tea master’s son. And this is not the only complication involved with her apprenticeship: on her seventeenth birthday, she is shown a powerful family secret.

Her village is under military occupation, with travel anywhere beyond heavily restricted. Her home is by the side of the dead forest and the plastic grave. Water is heavily rationed and not always good to drink. Many villagers try to build secret water pipes but if they are found out, their houses are marked for water crime, and then the people disappear and no one knows what happens to them. The soldiers are respected and feared but at least Commander Bolin, who regularly visits the tea house, is on her father’s side. However, one day, he brings another commander who disrespects the customs. He is highly suspicious of how a tea house can survive and serve such good quality tea when water is so scarce. Noria’s mother wants to tell the soldiers the family secret – that the tea masters are guardians of a hidden natural spring – but Noria’s father thinks this would not be a good thing to do at all.

In the meantime, Noria’s friend Sanja gets an old machine working and plays some discs that talk of an expedition to find the lost lands where the water runs freely. Who were these people and why did they leave these discs behind. What happened to them? These are secrets that could tear the girls’ families apart and destroy their village – or possibly save them all.

Given the youth and relative naivety of the protagonist, from whose eyes we see this very restricted village life, it would have been understandable for Itäranta to present Noria and her world as simplistic. However, Itäranta is highly skilled at presenting the setting and the characters with nuance, subtlety and layers of political resonance: the villagers seemingly face their restrictions for the greater good of all but how can they possibly be sure that this is true? Water and nature are used as leitmotifs throughout: the language is rhythmic and a sense of balance is finely evoked. Even the soldiers’ manner of execution is mysterious and steeped in ritual. Like the tea masters, they keep the knowledge of what they are doing to themselves and only death can bring revelation to anyone else. That the inhabitants of this world have survived some kind of ecological disaster gives us one reading concerning green ethics; there is another concerning privilege and oppression, the control of knowledge.

On the surface this is a simple dystopian story but the tension is kept high throughout, the characterisation is very well done and the prose beautifully written, evoking the delicacy of a mannered tea ceremony. This novel assuredly deserved its place on the 2014 Arthur C Clarke Awards shortlist.



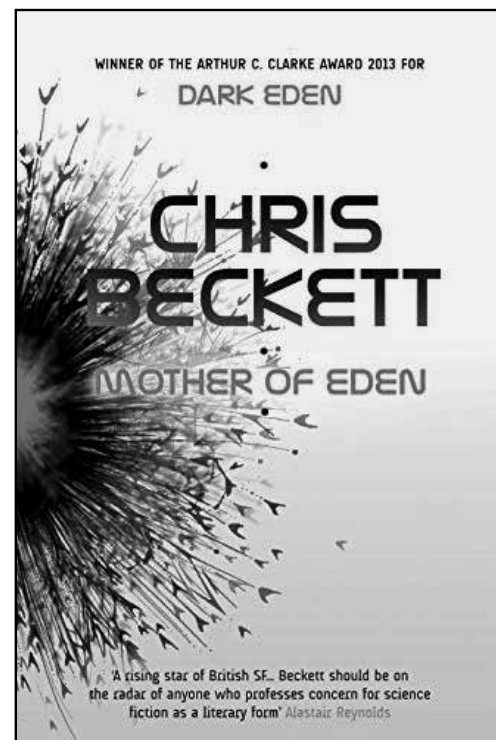
**Mother Of Eden by Chris Beckett (Corvus, 2015)****Reviewed by Dave M Roberts**

Chris Beckett's 2006 short story 'Dark Eden' relates how two astronauts are stranded on an inhospitable planet as their companions take a damaged spacecraft in order to get help. There is no sunlight; any natural light comes from the bizarre bioluminescent flora, which gains its energy from deep roots, which tap into the heat below the planet's surface. The 2012 novel of the same title picks up the story about a hundred and fifty years and several generations later. The descendants of Gela and Tom, the two astronauts, are still eking out an existence in a small temperate region known as Circle Valley. The events of humanity's arrival have passed into legend and form the basis of a religion for the fledgling society, at the heart of which is the ring that Gela wore. This holds the group together as a Family in name and actuality. As Family has grown over the generations, it has become apparent that the society can no longer be sustained by the small temperate region they are settled in. Inevitably, the society fractures as John leads people out of the valley and into the cold dark to find new places to settle, leaving David as leader of those who hold onto the traditions. John also takes the ring, marking his group as being new in attitude but still holding to the mythical origins of their society.

*Mother Of Eden* takes place about five generations after *Dark Eden*, the events of which have now been incorporated into the mythology, building on the stories of Gela. This time, there is a greater complexity as the groups have split and there are differences in the way that the stories are emphasised. As the population has become distributed, diverse groups have developed with very different social structures and sensibilities. Language too is starting to diverge with the different settlements having distinct accents and dialects. It is clear that given a few more generations, there will be distinct languages starting to appear.

What is also happening is the corruption of the origin stories for political ends. For example, the role of Earth President has become blurred. In the original story, the President was female. This is still the case in the stories told by the Davidfolk but for the strongly patriarchal society at New Earth this is a somewhat awkward fact. For them, it is simply not feasible that a woman could hold such a position so the President figure has become Gela's father. This not only stresses that male dominance is somehow the natural order but also enhances the religious power of the story. Gela is now not just an unfortunate astronaut but the President's daughter, which gives a far greater significance to the developing society. This significance gives justification to the use of the indigenous bats as slaves. There is strong evidence that these abused creatures are more intelligent than it would first appear.

Into this world is dropped Starlight Brooking, a young woman from a small and remote settlement, near to but separate from the Davidfolk. As a result of venturing away from the security of home she encounters ostensibly more advanced societies, meets the son of the Headman of the Johnfolk, and returns with him to New Earth, becoming his Housewoman. When he becomes Headman, she becomes The Ring Wearer and Mother of Eden, a position that theoretically imbues her with real power. However, the society is far removed from what she is used to. Here it has a complex hierarchical class structure with Big People and Little People. Who holds actual power is not as simple



as who holds the positions of power. This structure is additionally enforced by the Teacher class, who have sole control over what is written down and retained. Starlight is very astute in noting that what is written purporting to be The Word of Gela is written by the (all male) teachers. The teachers then refer back to these same texts to re-enforce their own arguments. It is not only patriarchy that is strengthened in this way but the developing religion and by extension the control of the whole society. There are also stories passed down only by the women, a 'secret story' that is essentially a mantra about being good to each other, everyone is equal and watching out for men who think the story is about themselves. This was originally passed from Gela to her own daughters. In the patriarchal New Earth, this is inflammatory stuff and passing it on is punishable by death.

Starlight, in her new position as the Ring Wearer, simultaneously takes on the role of innocent abroad and a power for change. Coming from a society that is run on a level of mutual trust and respect, Starlight is appalled at the level of brutality and control that is used to run New Earth and takes a somewhat naïve approach in attempting to change this. As *Mother of Eden*, she has a symbolic power which, when appealing directly to people, is very effective and popular. However, that popularity only counts for so much when going up against the incumbent and brutal power structure.

While the story of *Dark Eden* became part of the mythos of Eden, it is far from clear whether or not Starlight's journey will become part of that same mythology or if it will be suppressed. Control of the story gives power and there are people at the end of the book who would definitely want to see that story disappear. *Mother Of Eden* has considerably more to offer than its deceptively simple plot would have you believe. It clothes the character's story with the development and control of religion and explores the way that writing the story down significantly alters the way that it develops and the ends to which it can be put. I have to admit, I am intrigued to see where it will go next.

***The Causal Angel* by Hannu Rajaniemi  
(Gollancz, 2014)**

**Reviewed by Susan Oke**

**T**he *Causal Angel* is the last book in the adventures of gentleman thief Jean Le Flambeur, bringing to a conclusion the overarching story begun in *The Quantum Thief* (2010) and continued in *The Fractal Prince* (2012). This is hard SF, combining the imaginative extrapolation of quantum physics with engaging and compelling characters and a story that pulls you in from page one.

The adventure takes place within our solar system - the first book focussed on Mars, the second on Earth and the third on Saturn - in a future where minds are uploaded and copied; they become *gogols* that can inhabit synthetic bodies or live in virtual environments. The majority, however, form the key labour force working at tasks that once would have been the province of artificial intelligence. Despite the occasional complexity of the science, it all feels very grounded and believable.

There are two major power blocks within the solar system: the Sobornost Founders who offer immortality in the form of uploaded *gogol* minds; and the game-playing Zoku whose immortality and cohesive culture are assured by their quantum zoku-jewels. The Sobornost Founders - six god-like individuals - have an uneasy alliance that is undermined by power plays and intrigue. One in particular, Josephine Pelligrini, is fighting for survival against a coalition that is determined to kill her. She needs the power of the Kaminari jewel - a Zoku artefact that can change the nature of the universe - and she has the tools to get it: Le Flambeur, infamous thief and ex-protégé, and Mieli, an Oortian warrior and starship pilot.

While there are a number of points of view represented throughout the trilogy, Mieli and Le Flambeur are the main protagonists. Their relationship begins as jailor and prisoner and battles its way through misunderstandings and betrayals to a binding friendship. Both are mired by the past and bound by promises: Mieli by her oath of loyalty to Pelligrini, given in trade for the freedom of Sydan her lost love; while Le Flambeur, haunted by the knowledge that he is just a shadow of his former self, strives to make amends for past mistakes.

One key theme throughout these books is identity: the Sobornost Primes can have countless copies made of their minds, these *gogols* forming copy-clans that work to monitor and control the solar system. The Zoku can take any form they wish and spend their time creating artificial Realms in which they play endless games. Mieli grew up as a Zoku tithe-child in an Oortian community and as such was always striving to prove herself. For Le Flambeur, shaped by Pelligrini into a master thief, there is always one more challenge: "becoming more than he is with a single act. It feels like being reborn."

Jean Le Flambeur lives by one key tenet: There Is Always A Way Out.

In *The Quantum Thief* he is broken out of the Dilemma Prison by Mieli. His first mission is to steal back himself. He must recover all the secrets he deleted from his mind when captured; only then will he be able to carry out the major heist required by his patron. Following the trail left by his former self, he discovers his 'memory palace' on Mars but then demonstrates the difference between himself and the original Le Flambeur by refusing to sacrifice his friends to open it.

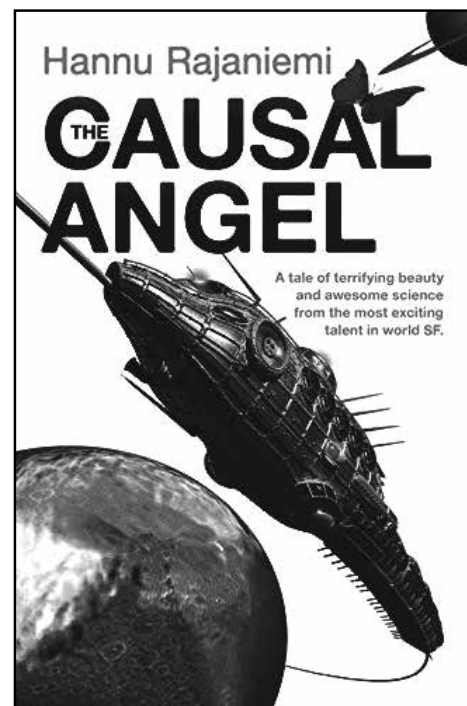
*The Fractal Prince* is presented in the form of stories-within-stories, interlocked and embedded, revealing the connection between him and the Flower Prince: one of the Aum. The Aum are powerful beings that protect the city of Sirr, the last bastion of civilisation on the ruined Earth. The Earth is destroyed by one of the Founders but Le Flambeur negotiates with the Aum to save the people of Sirr and escapes with the secret to opening the Kaminari jewel.

The menace of the All-Defector - introduced at the beginning of *The Quantum Thief* as the *thing* within the Dilemma prison that never cooperates and gets away with it - is brought to the fore in *The Causal Angel*. Pelligrini smuggles it out of the prison, hidden within Le Flambeur's mind, as her backup plan if the thief fails: a common threat to force the Founders to work together. Instead she finds herself trapped by the All-Defector, which has its own plans for the Kaminari jewel and the future of the universe.

At the beginning of *The Causal Angel*, Le Flambeur is free of both Mieli and Pelligrini; he has a chance to make a new life for himself. Instead he searches for Mieli, determined to rescue her. So little of him came out of the prison intact, all he has left now are the promises he made. Meanwhile, Mieli is in Supra City on Saturn re-discovering her Zoku roots and trying to ferret out the hiding place of the Kaminari jewel.

Le Flambeur works hard to keep his promises. He manages to seed a new Sirr city on a nanotech Plate that he stole from the Zoku. He manipulates events to place Mieli where he can snatch her and escape in his new starship. It's only then that he realises the depth of his mistake. The All-Defector has infiltrated the Sobornost Founders, who attack the Zoku in force. If the All-Defector gets hold of the Kaminari jewel, the new city of Sirr will be destroyed and the universe with it. The thief has one last job to do.

*The Causal Angel* is an expertly crafted finale for what I consider to be a masterful trilogy. The future created by Rajaniemi is wildly imaginative, the bounds of science stretched and moulded to create worlds and cultures that are both challenging and believable. And as he reminds us at the end, no matter the dilemma: There Is Always A Way Out.



***The Fifth Dimension* by Martin Vopěnka,  
translated by Hana Sklenkova  
(Barbican Press, 2015)**

**Reviewed by Dan Hartland**

In a short essay on the publisher's website, Martin Vopěnka explains his novel. He does so with an apology - he as a rule does not believe, correctly, that stories should require supporting apparatus - but, because he has written a novel about mathematics and theoretical physics, and his father Petr Vopěnka was a world-renowned mathematician, in the case of *The Fifth Dimension* he must make an exception:

*[...] our thinking itself shows signs of another dimension. That thinking is not derivable from mere matter, from mere spacetime, from mere neural connections and chemical reactions in our brain. That our thinking is not of material nature and shows signs of rebellion against four-dimensional spacetime. At the same time, it realises itself through the physical body we acquired through evolution and with which it is inextricably linked.*

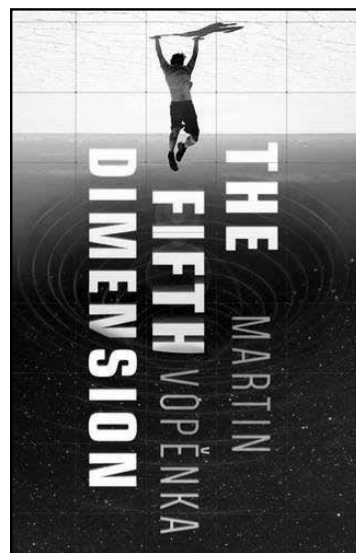
The story of Jacob, a successful businessman in the construction sector who, in the throes of an economic downturn, loses everything and must cast around for an alternative income, *The Fifth Dimension* is at times just as dry as Vopěnka makes it sound in the above; at the same time, it is never less than thoroughly compelling - and I wonder if these two characteristics are not linked.

Jacob happens upon a small ad, angling for applicants to contact an anonymous office about an unusual project which will pay big money. Haunted by his responsibilities to his wife and two children, he attends a series of Kafkaish interviews in which nothing about the project is given away. It eventually emerges that Jacob has volunteered to spend a year on his own in the wilderness of the high Andes, forbidden to contact anyone, and that he will be paid \$200,000 for taking part in this 'experiment'. Alena, his wife - a curiously passive figure who becomes dominant only in Jacob's increasingly fevered Andean sexual fantasies - agrees to this more readily than we might have expected and the experiment is underway by page seventy five.

Jacob spends much of his time in the Andes chewing over, and extrapolating upon, theoretical physics - and arriving at a realisation not unlike Vopěnka's own:

*Thinking (and with it life) is not derivable from the four dimensions of spacetime. Thinking, although subordinate to the laws of the universe in our material bodies, is also related to the fifth dimension - which I might call the place of the pure spirit.*

Many readers of science fiction will snort at the idea of a "place of the pure spirit"; it will seem to them quite at odds with the long passages of the novel that deal with orbits around black holes, event horizons and gravitational fields: it will seem like religion. It is Vopěnka's droll anti-style, his bone-dry prose, that lends, however, the novel's wackier speculative elements the necessary veneer of plausibility. In many ways, the voice reminds me of Zoran Živković: dealing with often bizarrely fantastical things in so matter-of-fact a way that the wilder paragraphs read, counter-intuitively, like the blandest of reports.



Take, for example, Jacob's vivid experiences of the unknowable activities of his wife and family. Forbidden from contacting them, Jacob nevertheless imagines himself to be in total communion with them. He knows, he tells us, when his son is ill; he knows, he insists, when his daughter misses him; and he knows, in colourful detail, the particulars of Alena's affair with the manager of the company for whom he is now working. That doubt impinges upon

these wilder imaginings, this "fantasy of mine", does not serve to dilute Jacob's conviction that he has somehow entered the minds of his loved ones on the other side of the world. They comply, too, with the snide insinuations of Denis, an employee of the company who unexpectedly takes to visiting Jacob's mountain hideaway and implies Alena is, indeed, having an affair. There remains, that is, the possibility that Jacob's theory holds - there is certainly no evidence conclusively to disprove it.

This alliance between dry style and colourful subject creates in the novel a glorious uncertainty which propels the reader through a narrative in which very often nothing happens and certainly no conclusions are reached. In this alliance is, I think, the Vopěnka's softer, slyer project: to write a novel which expresses the literary mindset in a science fictional voice (or, indeed, vice versa).

*There is no better way to affirm existence - your own as well as the existence of the time-spirit-space that surrounds us - than by sharing. I imagine that I am the only creature alive in the whole world. I am flying in a space rocket, knowing that I will never have the opportunity to communicate anything to anyone again. When I put myself into that role, it's a terrifying concept. I would actually be already dead.*

In a recent review of Laura van den Berg's *Find Me* published in *Strange Horizons*, Nina Allan wrote of the traditional separation between science fiction and "style", "genre" and "literature", and the difficulties inherent in either side attempting to bridge the gap (poor writing in one direction, ignorance of conceits in the other). *The Fifth Dimension*, it seems to me, is an attempt to square the circle: the thinking that is done in it is empathetic and speculative, spins from cosmic concepts domestic details; it imparts dispassionately the lonely imaginings of a troubled mind; it justifies the novel form's fascination with bourgeois gossip and interpersonal relationships by reference to theories and physics, existential questions posed in the language of quantum mechanics.

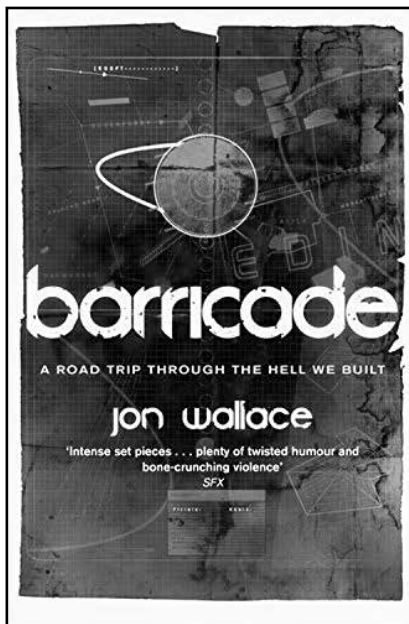
Does it all amount to a unified theory of literature? Of course not. But if the book's theories are incomplete or even arrant nonsense they are at least beautifully balanced - as any novel, science fictional or otherwise, should be.



**Barricade by Jon Wallace (Gollancz, 2014)**  
**Reviewed by Maureen Kincaid Speller**

The story behind *Barricade* is that Jon Wallace's brother told him 'you really can't write women'. Having pondered that criticism, Wallace's response, as he explains in a blog post at Civilian Reader, was to make the best of this by deliberately creating a female character who is an engineered human, "a construct of unrealistic male expectation and base desire". While Wallace may have solved his writing dilemma, if the best you can do is to describe your character as being "loosely modelled on noir femme fatales" (meaning she has "some great lines") you probably haven't made that much progress. Particularly not when she is the only major female character in sight.

Indeed, as fiction *Barricade* is barely in touch with the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, let alone the 21<sup>st</sup>. I can see what Wallace was trying to do – creating a world in which post-humans are struggling to build a new society – but *Barricade* is little more than a high-concept taxi ride gone terribly wrong. The first response of Kenstibec, the viewpoint character, is invariably violence, although this is somehow justifiable because, of course, he possesses no emotions (I am not convinced that Wallace understands what that actually means). So it's presumably not personal, and thus doesn't count, when he kicks Starvie, that construct of unrealistic male expectation, all over the shop. Of course, Starvie isn't simply the pleasure model she looks to be – oh no, she is so much more than that, according to Wallace's blog



post. Apparently, she really hates what she has to do to survive in this world but exploiting her looks is the only way to get by. I'm grateful for Wallace's 'insight' here as alas it is not at all obvious in the novel, where Starvie's views are always mediated through Kenstibec, who is not exactly a feminist ally. Starvie does in fact play a significant role in the novel but her motivations, insofar as they are hers, remain a mystery.

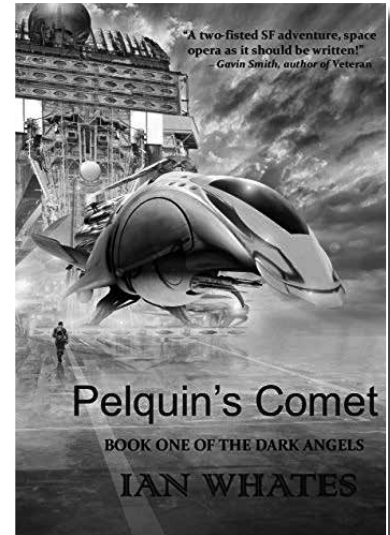
*Barricade* is a deeply frustrating novel. The situation makes little sense, the plot is minimal, the gender politics are nightmarish and the 'snappy' dialogue frequently misfires (because only Chandler was any good at sounding like Chandler). Yet there are occasional glimmers of potential. Kenstibec was once a builder and those moments when he expresses a desire to fix things rather than break them ring most true. Beyond that, it's difficult to find much to praise in a novel that is predominantly a *Boys' Own* wet dream, seemingly written to say 'yah, boo, sucks' to Wallace's big brother.

**Pelquin's Comet by Ian Whates**  
**(Newcon Press, 2015)**

**Reviewed by Susan Oke**

This book has a really delightful *Firefly* feel to it but stands on its own with a strong, fast paced storyline and engaging characters.

Pelquin and his partner Nate are on a mission to retrieve a cache of Elder tech. It is a major find that, if they get to it first, will make the crew of the Pelquin's Comet extremely wealthy. Pelquin secures a significant loan from First Solar Bank to fund the expedition. Drake, the bank's representative, joins the expedition to watch over the bank's investment. He boards the ship with Mudball, supposedly a genetically engineered pet, but actually an alien from the Elder days.



The story is told primarily from the point-of-view of Drake and Pelquin, though we do get to see the world through the eyes of a variety of subsidiary characters. Pelquin is the charismatic captain, a risk-taker and romantic who dreams of following in the footsteps of the Dark Angels, who were famous for finding Elder tech caches. Drake is more logical, a keen observer who is adept at manipulating data. Mudball, his invaluable sidekick, communicates with Drake mind-to-mind; it can hack any computer database and read the crew's physiological 'vital signs'.

Drake plays the straight man, while Mudball provides the comic relief. But this light-hearted tone has a sinister edge. The opening chapter gives a brief insight into the power of the banks and Drake's role as their representative but the key is Mudball: the little furry alien has a much scarier aspect and secret agenda all of its own. If not for the need to convey this point, chapter two would have been a much more effective opening for the book.

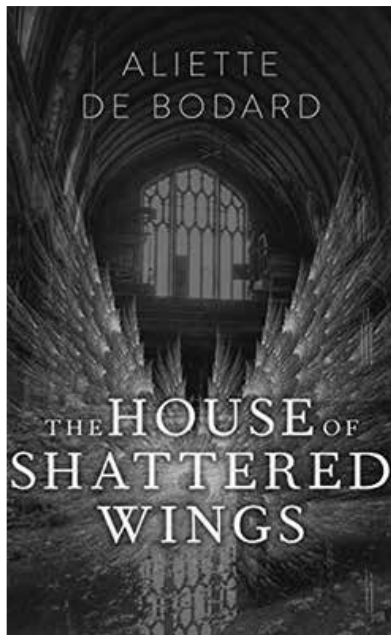
Pelquin's Comet visits several planets for repairs and to pick up key items for the trip to the cache. The adventures along the way provide ample opportunity to develop the characters and reveal tempting hints about their past. The on-going tension between Pelquin and Nate keeps the reader guessing—is Nate a traitor or on the level? Meanwhile, an underground organisation (named Saflik=Purity) is working to identify and eliminate former Dark Angels for the sacrilegious act of plundering Elder tech for personal gain.

The build up to a confrontation with Saflik in the next book is deftly done, and a quick dip into Mudball's point-of-view at the end shows us the cold heart of the fluffy alien. I find myself fully invested in both the world and the characters and I am keen to read the next instalment of *The Dark Angels*.

**The House Of Shattered Wings by Aliette de Bodard (Gollancz, 2015)****Reviewed by Duncan Lawrie**

I loved de Bodard's first novel *Servant Of The Underworld* and enjoyed the ways she worked through the concepts of Aztec magic in the course of her *Obsidian And Blood* trilogy. So I was looking forward to *The House Of Shattered Wings* but whilst it is again clever and original, the story doesn't match the ideas.

The magic in this novel uses various ideas of Heaven across the world's cultures, although being set in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Paris, the dominant paradigm is Christian. In keeping with common belief, there is no access to the Christian Heaven for the living; all the magic in the Western system comes from angels who have been cast out of the Celestial City. These Fallen, despite losing their wings, are quintessentially magical which gives them personal power and inheres in their physical being so humans can use that magic through such acts as capturing their breath or taking and burning their bones. This neatly captures the idea of saintly relics whilst limiting the power such objects could have.



The Fallen have grouped themselves and their human allies together into Houses which, in the era of the story, are in uneasy truce. A disastrous war between Houses devastated Paris sixty years before in 1914. The date echoes powerfully in European history but is not otherwise explained. Indeed, this novel does not feel anchored in time. Fitting with the Bible, the oldest of the Fallen is Morningstar but there is no feeling for how the culture of Christendom has been affected over centuries by the real presence of angels, even though they have no access to heaven and do not know why they are exiled. Further, the Fallen are powerful but neither innocent nor evil – they are not particularly distinct from humanity. As some Houses have human leaders, it is strongly suggested that political capabilities overcome magical.

Still, this is not a simple Christian world, as demonstrated by Philippe, an Immortal who has been cast out of the Jade Emperor's Court. The Far East has, as in our history, been overwhelmed by European colonisers and,

along with many other colonials, Philippe was drafted into the war between the Houses. The book feels most alive when de Bodard describes these Eastern/Viet magics. The founding myths are set out so the reader can understand the hopes and fears of a Dragon Kingdom transplanted to Paris. Their world is just as wrecked as the rest of the city but their struggle to survive as a hidden culture in the alien territory of the West is more clearly defined. Perhaps Paris itself would feel better defined if the same approach was used in telling how it came to its current shattered state. The contrast helps, nevertheless, so Philippe's presence brings to the surface some of the power structures of the setting. The failure of cultures to meet is beautifully demonstrated in the nature of their magics; there are overlaps between East and West but the differences mean there are places where the magics simply go past each other.

The plot begins with Philippe bonding to a newly Fallen as both are taken by House Silverspires. The Fallen is named Isabelle by Selene, head of the House, and given a place of honour, whilst Philippe is enslaved. The House is weak with a weak leader; Selene has been head for twenty years since Morningstar disappeared and the other Houses have finally decided to take advantage of this, hoping to undermine and destroy Silverspires without open warfare. And something else stalks the city, killing dependents of the House. Selene hopes that Philippe may be a useful tool but the last thing the House needs is to bring in a malcontent. It is a neat set-up but there wasn't enough to make me care about the survival of Silverspires.

Perhaps this is because there are no clear heroes in House Silverspires. Philippe is closest to being such a character but he genuinely only wants to be left alone – and when he is urged into action by his conscience, he is too late to make a difference. Isabelle, newly Fallen, is dependent on House Silverspires and doesn't ever develop much agency herself. Selene is an interesting case. As a Fallen and head of House Silverspires she is a powerful individual but she is almost overcome with imposter syndrome, believing someone better will come to take the role, that she is not the shadow of her mentor, Morningstar. This core trait makes her a very consistent character but not an attractive one. Her eventual acceptance of her role provides transformative power late in the novel.

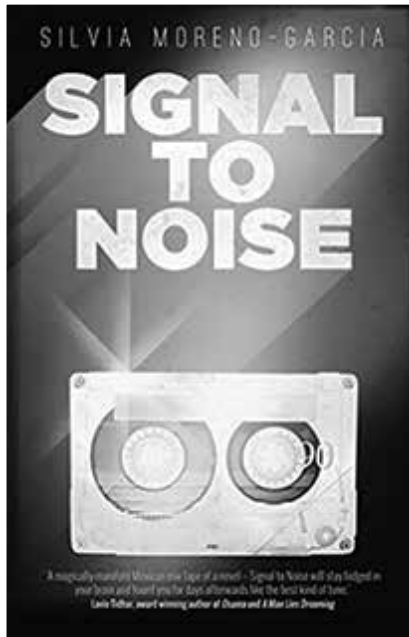
There is one further protagonist, Madeleine. She is a complex character and, as House Alchemist, provides some insight into the way magic works in the novel and how the House system works. She has spent time in two Houses and has a fully developed sense of the negatives of dependency as well as the benefits. Her access to magical artefacts has led to an addiction to angel essence, which adds to her fears and compounds her belief in her own failure. She often does the right thing but as her secrets are discovered, her life is thrown into further turmoil and the fear never goes away. In this book we never get to the heart of her character and her further breakdown feels like a distraction. There is much here which could yet transform Madeleine; perhaps this is a marker for her role in further volumes.

There are other markers which, for genre readers, encourage an expectation that this is not a standalone novel. Whilst the threat central to this novel is thoroughly defeated, Paris is lessened by the events of the book. It is an excellent demonstration of Clute's Thinning, of the world going away only to be recovered by further entries in the series. As a standalone entry, this is an exercise in bleak.

***Signal To Noise* by Silvia Moreno-Garcia  
(Solaris, 2015)**

**Reviewed by Shaun Green**

It's 1989 in Mexico City and a familiar drama is playing out. Teenagers Meche, Sebastian and Daniela are uncool outsiders looking in, united by their outsider status more than common interests. Brusque, combative Meche shares a love of music with her father, her records helping her endure all the problems in her life. Sebastian's tastes tend to the literary and he hopes one day to escape his poverty and see Europe. Daniela has been pampered through childhood and is relentlessly girlish and passive, though she is not alone in tending to accede to Meche's wishes. The latter is



the trio's natural leader so when she wonders if music could provide a gateway to the folk magic of her grandmother's stories, her friends agree to help her cast spells with songs.

It's 2009 in Mexico City and a familiar drama is playing out. Meche is returning to a home she has not seen in years, preparing to bury her estranged father. She must confront the ghosts of her past: not only processing her father's death and sorting through the records

and diaries he left behind but also what has lain between her and her childhood friends for twenty years.

The power of three has a long history in tales of folk magic, just as teenagers alienated from their peers or struggling with home life and young adults dealing with the aftermath of a parent's death are established dramas. Even music-as-magic has notable pedigree. But then, mixtapes are typically composed of a thoughtfully selected series of choice cuts; some familiar to the mixtape's intended audience and some new; perhaps too some known to be cherished or found rich with meaning. So too this novel.

In contrast to mixtapes, *Signal To Noise* doesn't rely on referencing songs and musicians to provide its emotional texture. Its characters are full of life, with all the contradictory twists and turns life implies. Meche in particular is a pleasure to follow: she is poor at acknowledging her feelings, most of all to herself, and yet there they are on the page, spoken in her actions and decisions. She is a difficult person but one who is easy to like. As *Signal To Noise* explores its story, switching between 1989 and 2009, we slowly explore these characters and all the small moments that come to constitute a shared personal history.

While tastes will always differ, I hope others will give *Signal To Noise* a chance. It is a novel which doesn't set out to shake the world but rather to present something that is personal and thoughtful; emotional but sometimes guarded. In this, it is much like the box of mixtapes I'll always keep.

***The Incurruptibles* by John Hornor Jacobs  
(Gollancz, 2014)**

**Reviewed by Maureen Kincaid Speller**

*The Incurruptibles* is an alternate history, set in a world in which the Roman – or Ruman as it is here – Empire didn't collapse but instead continued to colonise the world. What we would recognise as North America was already inhabited when they arrived but if Shoe-string the dvergar (or dwarf as he'd be in our world) is to be believed, there was at least one previous wave of colonisation. The land was already inhabited by the vaettir, variously referred to as indigenes and elves; tall, immensely powerful creatures with pointed teeth and a taste for scalping their enemies. It doesn't take a genius to see that the vaettir and the dvergar represent various stereotyped aspects of the Native Americans of our world, the wild Indians and the pacified. The Rumans regard the vaettir as vermin and the dvergar as not much better.



As the new frontier proceeds steadily westward, there's a demand for people like Shoe and his partner, the taciturn human, Fisk, to act as guides and hired guns, keeping their clients out of danger in this new-world version of Middle-Earth. Yet, as if all this alternative Wild West with Rumans wasn't enough, Jacobs also throws in a system of daemon-driven technology which powers everything from riverboats to guns. It's dangerous stuff and requires a lot of protective warding, hence everyone's presence in the Territories, where the necessary silver is mined and traded.

This is a novel based on a set of myths, uncritically accepted, about the white man settling North America. Fisk might be a man with a dodgy past but he and Shoestring are just grittier versions of the Lone Ranger and Tonto. The presentation of the vaettir and dvergar is an uncritical recapitulation of the history of encounters between Native Americans and white settlers, as told by white settlers. Twice, we see a human woman captured and taken away by the vaettir and Fisk recounts his family's persecution by a group of *them*. Not one human character queries whether they should have intruded on vaettir lands. The only attempt at redress comes when Shoe notes the discrimination he experiences as a dvergar half breed and shows compassion for a captured vaettir woman but he is, of course, also an outsider, not fully human. The humans never protest when Beleth the magician tortures the vaettir woman for days on end, and forces Shoe to act as translator. At best, they shuffle their feet, and seem surprised that she reacts so violently when she escapes. All of this is of a piece with literary and cinematic representations of the savage Red man, and it is deeply disappointing to see a contemporary author unquestioningly churning out this sort of thing.

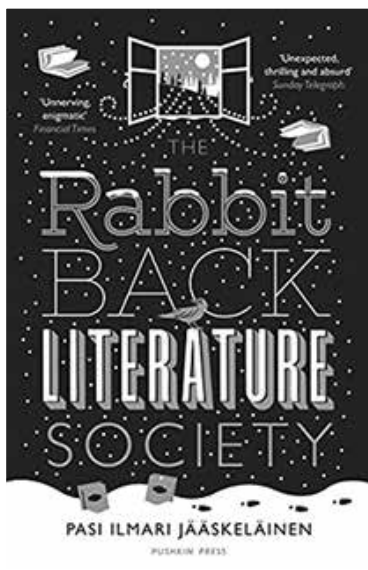
*The Incurruptibles* is a veritable cornucopia of ideas but so much of it is simply window-dressing. It's as though Jacobs ran excitedly through the ideas shop, throwing every shiny thing into his story basket, before trying to make everything fit together somehow. In fairness to Jacobs, he's created a cast of characters who are mostly decent, likeable people but even that is a cliché. And in no way does this redress Jacobs's failure to consider matters from the point of view of those being colonised against their will. It's far too easy to stick with the myth about the white man's manifest destiny.

**The Rabbit Back Literature Society by Pasi Ilmari Jaaskelainen, translated by Lola M Rogers (Pushkin Press, 2014)**

**Reviewed by L J Hurst**

**W**itting and unwitting parallels are one of the keys to reading this book.

In *Rabbit Back*, the Finnish town where protagonist Ella Milana lives, the librarian could be Ella's escape from provincial life by introducing her to Laura White, successful author, recluse and patron of a writing school. White seems to have stopped writing and given her career to mentoring her group which, like Britain's Order of Merit, has a fixed size. She is famous for her Creatureville stories about characters such as Bobo Clickclack and the Odd Critter who, in turn, fear the Emperor Rat. Ignoring the question of the names which appear to be very inconsistently and distractingly translated, we are in a world of parallels – writer, influential yet svedo-



phone Finn, controlling her own fantasy world: what is the relationship between Laura White (an Anglophone name) and Tove Jansson? Is Creatureville in the universe of Moominvalley?

Meanwhile, Ella, on being admitted to the school, discovers that the students play a game in which they invade, without warning, each other's properties. And breaking down their inhibitions with truth drugs, so that they can express their inner feelings to each other, they confess in shades

of dianetic auditing. Only slowly does Ella realise, though, that if school numbers are limited then she must have taken someone else's place, a discovery that is almost a genre in itself – Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* and M John Harrison's *The Course Of The Heart* are just two examples.

As the prophet warned, time and chance affect everything, even this review. Had this been written a few months ago it would not have been possible to link Creatureville even more to the work of Tove Jansson but anyone who now reads *The Rabbit Back Literature Society* will now have the film *Moomins In The Riviera* and its bright colours to temper their reading, dissipating the claustrophobic provincial life in which Ella Milana lives.

On the other hand, we've also had Philip Kerr's *Research* (2014) and Sascha Arango's *The Truth And Other Lies* (2015) which are about stolen glory, on the skeleton of some real artist and a poseur who passes off their work. It must be coincidence but again there are parallels. The authors start to use similar imagery – Ella is startled by packs of dogs invading her garden while Arango's protagonist is at war with a marten wrecking his home – where real rather than fantastic creatures become symbols of insecurity.

Laura White, has spoken of, but never written the story of Emperor Rat, Jaaskelainen tell his readers. Her world was never that dark. Perhaps, though it cannot be found in *The Rabbit Back Literature Society*, he has given us an idea of what it might be if we reach out to know it ourselves.

**Deep Time by Anthony Nanson (Hawthorn Press, 2015)**

**Reviewed by Karen Burnham**

**I** could have gotten through *Deep Time's* 700 pages much faster if I hadn't stopped to underline each instance of really unpleasant sexual, racial or colonial attitudes. Set in an African Ruritania, a "scientific" expedition seeks to explore the dark interior despite civil war breaking out around them. However, as they penetrate the forest they discover that they are actually navigating back in time.

I put "scientific" in quotes because this is a dysfunctional group from day one. Dr Brendan Merlie, our first-person narrator for this slogging tale, is a zoologist who has ruined his professional reputation. He's hoping to redeem himself with this expedition but one of the sponsors is a *Fortean Times*-style tabloid which insists on embedding Portia Penhaligan, a female journalist ill-prepared for the rigors of an outdoors adventure. The other "scientist" in the group is Salome Boann who Brendan apparently didn't bother to Google before inviting to join the group as her degree is never mentioned and he's surprised to learn that her book is New Age pseudo-science. Because, you know, women can't think scientifically. Then there's Curtis Wilder, an American who has been making his living in Africa helping out warlords and shooting things—activities he enthusiastically continues throughout the mission. There are only two characters with any shred of common sense or decency: Vince Peters, an Afro-Caribbean photographer, and the heroic

Moyedou, who as a citizen and forest ranger of the unnamed country demonstrates a moral conscience that the other characters mostly lack. Inevitably, it doesn't end well for either of them.

It turns out that only Salome can navigate through space and time—despite her upbringing in the United States, her genetic heritage means that she is perfectly adapted to both walk through time and navigate the African jungle. Thus whoever controls her controls the expedition and Curtis and Brendan start seeking to possess her as both a means to their own ends and



as a sexual prize. She doesn't get to do much controlling of her own—this book has serious issues with feminine power. Meanwhile at the end of the book it turns out that Portia, off stage for several hundred pages, has actually been accomplishing something useful and probably should have been the main character.

The concept, although executed as an awfully verbose *Lost World* adventure, is an interesting one that the characters never really take advantage of. I never imagined that I would think to myself: "I wish this premise could be written up by Dan Simmons." Some of the attitudes would be equally problematic but at least the characters would be more interesting, the pace would be cracking, and the descriptions vivid. Lacking that, however, if you want to read a much more interesting book set in an African Ruritania let me commend to you *The Wizard Of The Crow* by Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o. At least then you won't spend hundreds of pages rooting for the dinosaurs to kill off the so-called protagonists.

***Ashamet, Desert Born* by Terry Jackman  
(Dragonwell Publishing, 2015)**

**Reviewed by Donna Scott**

Prince Ashamet, heir to the Voice of Heaven, knows only a life of privilege and pleasure on his desert world. It is the day before his thirtieth birthday, and also his wedding to one of the rare “females” of his race, but as he notes, females are for breeding. For pleasure, other “males” make more appropriate companions. As a wedding gift he is presented with a slave: a male with unusual white skin. Taken as a boy, the slavers always intended Keril to remain an innocent until given to his master. However, as intriguing as he is, his innocence means Keril is terrified. Whilst this is an annoyance to Ashamet, who is used to getting his own way, he resolves to seduce his slave rather than take him by force.

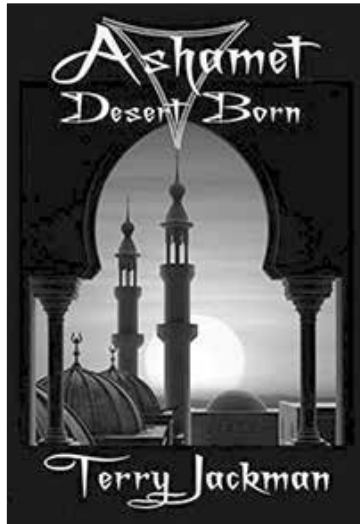
After his wedding, Ashamet returns to the company of his soldiers and courtiers, and tries to focus on his hedonistic pleasures: the flirtations, and social-climbing intrigues of his fellow males, as well as his seduction of Keril. However, he is distracted by an itch on his arm, which gradually reveals itself to be an En-Syn, in other words the mark of the gods. Ash has always believed these marks were not divinely bestowed at all, and that kings use tattoos to rationalise their right to rule. The mark's appearance not only proves him wrong, but means he will have to start being serious and stop partying. So he covers it up and carries on.

Unfortunately for Ashamet, his life is only going to get more complicated. He scandalises court with his relationship with Keril, treating him as a lover and friend rather than a slave. But Ashamet is vindicated when Keril saves his life against a murderous plot. But what will Ashamet's destiny bring him, and just what part does Keril have to play, and who does he really serve?

The setting and language of *Ashamet, Desert Born* is very beautiful, with only the odd anachronism to jar (i.e. “unearthly”: this is not Earth). Billed as “adventure fantasy with [...] elements of same-sex romance”, it is clear said romance is a key plot device; nonetheless the relationship between Keril and Ashamet builds slowly, and a veil is drawn over other encounters before they begin: this is not classic erotica.

Many taboo subjects are addressed in *Ashamet*: slavery; female segregation; the grooming of “cubs”. The romancing males of this story are not human, and it's interesting to see how Jackman plays with ideas of sex and gender set against the background of privilege, hierarchy, segregation and sexual slavery, but I felt that whilst Ashamet's lazy, leisured life is keenly painted, I wanted more conflict to be heaped onto his narrow shoulders, and more to be made of these taboos.

Ashamet is an appealing mix of entitled playboy and charming prince, and Jackman clearly has skill with character and setting. It would be good to see Jackman take these characters further in another installment as the world of *Ashamet, Desert Born* has potential beyond a tale of seduction.



***Fencing Academy* by AW Freyr  
(Uruk Press, 2015)**

**Reviewed by Susan Oke**

This is the debut novel of AW Freyr, the first in the *Dark Water* series. The book opens with Lyza returning to Rotham, clutching her father's sword, determined to kill the Duchess in revenge for her father's execution. Lyza risks a duel to the death with one of the best swordswomen in the city in order to raise the fee to attend the Fencing Academy. At the Academy she will have access to the Duchess, who is a student there. Against all the odds she kills her opponent and is accepted into the Academy. Lyza's first training bout is against the Duchess—here is her chance to fulfil her oath!



All this takes place within the prologue. From a structural perspective, the pacing would be more effective if this section was broken down into chapters and entitled 'Part One'. Chapter one opens two years later, with the Duchess still very much alive and infatuated with Lyza. Lyza is now a hired killer for Madam Picot, owner of all the brothels in Rotham and, so we are

repeatedly told, a very powerful and dangerous woman. This is an irritating aspect of the novel, where the reader effectively has their nose rubbed in plot points that were clear in the first telling. For example, Lyza continually questions herself over why she hasn't fulfilled her oath to kill the Duchess; she is then dragged off to attend a play that dramatizes the predicament that she finds herself in.

Uruk Press is a publisher of erotic SFF. Given the nature of this sub-genre, the sexual awakening of Lyza and the young Duchess is graphically represented. The majority of the sex scenes involve girl-on-girl action and, over the course of the book, become decidedly repetitive.

I was happy with the swashbuckling, felt hat with ostrich feathers, quills dipped in ink world that was initially created. The appearance of reporters with flash photography, electric light bulbs and the installation of new-fangled telephones really jarred. Apart from the use of incriminating photos towards the end of the book—something that could be worked around—the introduction of modern technology does not add anything of value to the story. This is especially true when it becomes clear that magic is a key element, with victims drowned in the river (revenants) returning to haunt their killers, and one important character is revealed to be a practising necromancer.

Lyza finds herself haunted by a pack of revenants (though why she chose to drown her contracted 'kills' is not clear), but instead of being killed herself she becomes a channel for the revenants to vent their fury.

There are a number of scenes that are well done such as Lyza in drunken despair and the sexual tension between Lyza and fellow student Tom. Overall, however, the writing feels rushed, with typographical and continuity errors. The story line has real potential; what the book needs is a thorough, professional edit. The resultant rewrite may well be worth reading.



