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Vector 170

The Critical Journal of the BSFA

Arthur C
Clarke
Tribute



David Langford
has fun with
Senseless Violence

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Editorial (Nuts & Bolts)

Welcome to your temporally challenged Vector! This edition has been produced against the kind of deadline generally referred to as "impossible". As a result I'm sure it will be found to be bristling with fresh urgency and... well, maybe a few typoses. These of course are a perennial problem, believe it or not we don't do it on purpose. Hopefully, things will have stabilised in time for the next issue, enabling me to spend more time on small matters of perfection.

I have received a large and generally gratifying postbag in response to the last issue. I'm not dumb enough to think that I can please all the people all the time, thankfully, or I might explode in an effort to satisfy everyone's contradictory wishes. Whatever is in the magazine, you can be sure that some will want more of it and others less. I'm pleased to see that most people are generally happy with the new design, and so will now devote my energy to refinements to the layout and continuing to build on the quality of the content.

I have received a couple of requests for an index to reviews. While I can see that this could be useful, I had neither time nor space this issue, however I have tried to ensure that reviews are in Author sequence within sections, as far as possible.

As I extricate myself from the litter of paper, coffee cups, crushed cans and crisp wrappers that inevitably accompanies the birth of a new issue of Vector, I listen one more time to Tasmin Archer's 'Sleeping Satellite', and reflect once more on the irony that this fugue to the death of the dream of space exploration should have formed the backcloth to an issue celebrating the work of the man whose writings exemplify that dream for millions. Happy Birthday Arthur C Clarke.

Best wishes for the festive season to the rest of you.
Pass the humbugs.

Contributions: Good articles are always wanted. All MSS should be typed double spaced on one side of the page. Submissions may also be accepted in Ascii on IBM format disks. Maximum preferred length is 5000 words; exceptions can and will be made. Preliminary letter is advisable, but not essential. Unsolicited MSS cannot be returned without an SAE. Please note that there is no payment for publication. Members who wish to review books should first write to the appropriate Editor.

Artists: Cover art, illustrations and fillers are always welcome.

Front Line Dispatches

Wooden Spoon

Julian Flood, Bury St Edmunds

Well, who's a clever girl then? One lousy review, one incandescent editorial and the face of British SF is changed forever. Little did we suspect that the letter from Brian Aldiss supporting violent and sadistic sex in SF was only the first shot in his locker... or, let me rephrase that... While we thought the Wingrove affair had died down he was writing a devastating riposte which I've just read (once and never again) in *Interzone*.

Is this the way to fire up the GOMs of SF? Condemn some story in inopportune language and sit back sure that another author will leap to its defence and then write something in the same style which overarches the original? Catie, I have this cunning plan.

Let's start by getting some real SF written. You remember real SF, images that haunted you and stayed in the brain for decades, stories that meant you had to get a book out of the library to catch the author's gist? Wasn't it great when it all came together and you *understood*? They were elitist stories -- they required scientific education and a wide vocabulary to get the point -- but they were democratic and accessible. Now you need a deep knowledge of Kafka, Carter and Conrad to appreciate that SF isn't really as boring as it seems. I'm talking SF, not milk and ichor mainstream literature. It's going to be awkward finding anything published recently that meets the requirements... I know, Langford's 'Blit'. To fully savour it you have to know about Turing, uncomputability, computers, Godel, chaos theory, the works. A perfect target.

Slate it, Catie, lay into it, murder it. It's brilliant enough to take it. If they rise to the bait we'll get a flood of stories in the magazines that will interest, inform, excite. The Masters will stop living on

reputation and warm a new generation with fires I feared had died decades ago. How exciting! It almost makes being thawed out worthwhile.

(tempting... it's a shame I'm too honest and sincere to carry it off -- Catie)

Adult Fantasy

Helen Bland, Edinburgh

Philip Muldowney's attribution of the Fantasy explosion to Ballantine's Adult Fantasy line is interesting. Most of us have always "blamed" Tolkien without knowing quite how it happened, but what I do notice is that nobody now would seriously apply the term "Adult fantasy" to the genre. Aside from the more dubious connotations of the label, who would honestly claim that most of the contemporary fantasy writing is in any way adult?

It isn't simply the formulaic structure of the fantasy trilogy, but the adolescent protagonists, and the simplistic wish-fulfilment politics wherein real issues are used as tokens, that marks this genre down as immature. It is because of the plethora of such works that it was necessary for Delany's *Neveryon* series to exist as a massive counterweight and beacon.

Of course some of these trilogies are great fun, and there is nothing wrong with that, but if the talk is to be of *adult* fantasy, then it should be of such authors as Delany, M John Harrison, Geoff Ryman, Karen Joy Fowler and Lisa Tuttle. A difficulty lies in the fact that serious quality books need serious quality critical appraisal. The review of Geoff Ryman's *Was...* by Martyn Taylor failed to achieve that. He mocks Jonathan's AIDS saying "we are never told how this monogamous good guy picked up the virus." True, but since Jonathan and his partner Ira are never described as monogamous, (there is one scene where Jonathan strays, otherwise we see little after the initial

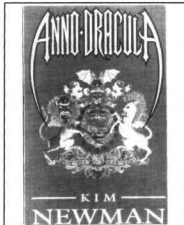
courtship) and the overt suggestion that Ira too is HIV+ allows for a variety of sources. Nor is Jonathan the good guy, his moods are unpredictable and for large sections he is an object more of pity than any good guy adulation. If anyone in *Was* is any kind of hero it is two minor characters (in their quiet way) Frank Baum (of course) and Bill Davidson. AIDS is too serious for Martyn Taylor's flippancy, and *Was* is too beautiful for his shallow reading

Sanctimonious Mummery

John Madracki, Bolton

Concerning Moral Geology and the Invasion of the Killer Libberoids: Robert Gibson is not alone. Far from being in a "minority of one", I can assure him that it is a minority of at least "two". (You see, it's doubled already). I am a reactionary of long standing; and while charges of political incorrectness and ideological unsoundness have often been laid at my door, I remain unrepentant. I can also be puritanical in the extreme.

But, having said that, I must emphasize that, while the temptation to moralise is always with us, unless the opinion offered is relevant to the issue at hand and delivered with humour, then it merely degenerates into sanctimonious mummery -- which serves no one. Something we should *all* bear in mind.



While I agree with Chris Amies that *Anno Dracula* is a good literary romp, I must contradict his assertion that Kim Newman is "the most innovative Horror/Fantasy writer we have at present". This is not so. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Newman's work is wholly derivative, and has its basis in the "shop window" approach that began three decades ago. His preoccupation with the pop culture, and all its attendant ephemera: his obsession with the commerciality of current trends; and his eagerness to collaborate with other

editors. (witness the two other Newman books reviewed in **Vector 169**) brand him as an ambitious opportunist with little real affection for the genre. His very name gives him away. Not only do we have the asexuality of his forename, but we are given a surname that even the blind could see through -- NEW-MAN -- how obvious can you get. This is not a human being, this is not even a writer -- it is a construct for our times, with an eye on the feminine vote.

Readable, yes. But not to be taken seriously.

Finally, I must admit that while the illo on p24 brought a wry smile to my lips, I was still aware of how offensive this gymnastic Jesus could appear to some of your Christian readers.

So, does this picture herald the addition of hard-biting satire to the remit of the **BSFA**? I, for one, would welcome it.

I only hope that you will be even-handed enough to allow insults to be directed to other sections of the community -- such as Jews, blacks and homosexuals.

After all, you wouldn't want to be seen as prejudiced, would you?

(**MAD-RACK-1**, now what might that suggest? **Catie**)

Vector 169

Norman Beswick, Church Stretton

Congratulations on the general contents of **169**. I was glad to see letter writers demolish Ken Lake's yobbish remarks on Stephen Hawking, and after reading Stephen Baxter's piece I've made a note to have a look at Zebrowski. I read Ben Jeapes on Orson Scott Card, alternately nodding and shaking my head (which is quite difficult to do as often as one sentence at a time). True, the ultimate theme of **Ender's Game** is far from a power fantasy, but this is one of the problems with Card; the way he works his readers up emotionally before making an intellectual point they may not notice. It's the same with the violence and brutality of some parts of his books; no matter how one seeks for the justifying reason, it's sometimes excessive.

Ben under-estimates **Wyrms**, to my mind, and I'm sorry he didn't have space to mention **Saints**. Card's historical novel about the early days of Mormonism. It's not SF, but well worth the effort of reading if you want to understand something of the religion to which Card remains attached. I say more about that in my piece on Card in **Foundation 45**, 'Amblick and After', if anyone's interested.

Thanks for Maureen Speller's useful survey of the magazines, and the interesting interview with Lisa Tuttle, and how nice to have a really solid reviews section in one

journal.

You've still got some way to go, though, before you get the size and layout of titles and headings right. Page 3 looked a mess, and I hated page 36 where the word "anthologies" bled across margins.

Off With His Head

Philip Muldowney, Plymouth

Congratulations! I think you must be well satisfied with the way that the expanded **Vector 169** has panned out. The incorporation of **Paperback Graffiti** has been handled seamlessly, in fact it looks better in **Vector**, maybe due to the standard layout and printing.

There do seem to be a lot of editorial heads though. What with editorial matter from you, Kev McVeigh, Maureen Speller, and Stephen Payne, there is that vague feeling of too many captains. In particular Kev McVeigh's position seems to be somewhat anomalous. By the very nature of **Vector**, as of now, you have grown beyond the stage where you need anyone to hold your hand anymore. The two editorials sit somewhat strangely together. Yours is usually about the nuts and bolts of editing, while Kev's is on a higher "thought of the bi-month" plain. They come over oddly, as a sort of apprentice/master relationship, or mechanic/chauffeur. Kev does seem to have his finger in an awful lot of pies around here. Perhaps it is time, as the editor, for you finally to take wing, and set the complete intellectual agenda.

The titles within the contents page when taken together sound like a rerun of a world war and its aftermath! Is not the accumulation of images not a little threatening? Are you telling us something here? (No -- **Catie**)

To answer John Madracki, "pub chats" when fuelled by booze, tend to be somewhat rambling. I must remember not to put throwaway remarks at the end of letters! My dictionary describes irony as "conveyance of meaning (generally satirical) by words whose literal meaning is the opposite." Is that clear? Perhaps it is just that so much around **Vector** is so very serious, that the Brian Griffin/William Erko letters were so welcome, and that I feel like being stupid at the end of mine.

I thought frankly, that Maureen Speller's column was a little bit of a cop-out, The main heart of a Science Fiction magazine is the very **Fiction** itself. Trying to do a magazine by magazine comparison without a detailed analysis of the fiction, is like trying to do car road test reports without mentioning the engine, and the way they drive. The peripherals are more a measure of what

view the editor has of his perceived readership. **Analog** is seemingly elderly technocratic, while **Asimov's** is a much younger audience. Having bitched about that point though, I found myself increasingly agreeing with her. It was a good run down of the magazines available. One important point though; most of the American magazines are available to order through your local newsagent. The exceptions being **Pulphouse** and **Amazing**. While you will rarely see an SF mag -- apart from maybe **Interzone** -- for display on casual sale, all the rest have been regularly imported for many years, and any newsagent worth his salt would be able to place a regular order for you. The emphasis being on the regular, as one off copies may not be so easy to get.

The Lisa Tuttle interview was absorbing. In purely practical terms, it would have helped if your questions were clearly delineated. Also that whole first column about the **Horror Cafe** program was of no value if you had not seen it. A small checklist might have been useful, as you mention stories and books that have been published over nearly a twenty year period, and may not have been available to many. The interview itself was one of the best that you have done lately, in that it showed a different light on an interesting writer. I suppose the real test is when the reader wants to get in there and add codicils to the questions that you have asked, which I did.

The reviews sections, Well, they certainly dominate the magazine. Including Maureen Speller's piece, there were 22 pages. Reviewing 6 magazines, 45 books, by approaching 40 reviewers. The bald statistics reveal interesting things. The monumental job of work that it must be to tie the whole of this together (guess why we need so many editorial heads? **Catie**). The very number of reviewers and the quality of the reviews tend to act like a statistical Bell curve: most are competent, some very good and some very bad. There are not many that one is going to read purely for the pleasure of good writing (like those in **Interzone**); on the other hand, there were none that had me screaming as to how bad they were. Perhaps there is another danger here, with the magazine being dominated by competent reviews, that are all safe and non-controversial, there is a feeling of sameness.

There is an interesting corollary here, to some of the statements I made in the last **Vector**. Of the 45 books reviewed here, 13 or so are part of a series, whether trilogy or more. That is a striking rate, nearly 30% in fact. As the reviews in **Vector** are like taking a bi-monthly random (random? What do we have all these editors for, then? -- **Catie**) snap

shot of publishing schedules, they are a very good indication of the dominance of the series; of the mammoth door step book split into two or three. Statements like this from Jessica Yates' **Seeress of Kell** review:

"Seeress of Kell concludes not only the 5 book fantasy **The Mallorean**, but also the 10 book saga of the reluctant hero Garion." *Wow!* Books expand into mega books, into seemingly unending series. Am I the only one unhappy at this trend? So often it seems authors become lazy in series books, character development ceases, as does background and idea. Too many authors seem to just settle down to putting the characters through similar hoops. At times it seems as though the authors are running on autopilot. To publishers it is easy editing and publishing, the endless varieties of the same brand. Yet as readers we buy them in droves. Why? Familiarity acts like a comfort blanket, needing less effort to partake of the excitement of the same books slightly reworked. Have we been conditioned by the soap series phenomenon, to expect so little of our reading? I would appreciate an argument here!

The **Compass Points** article on George Zetrowski was much better. At least Stephen Baxter sounded as though he was talking with the courage of his own convictions. More in this vein please.

The Ben Jeapes article on Orson Scott Card was again good. I felt here though, that given the sort of heavy themes that Card is handling, it could have done with an even greater in-depth investigation, although I suppose there was not enough space in this article

Interesting how the subject of religion and Card ties in with Robert Gibson's letter. Modern SF is seemingly somewhat uncomfortable with religion. Who, other than Card handles religious themes consistently? Forgetting the likes of Walter Miller and James Blish, there are not many that I can think of.

Recommendation

Ken Lake, On Tour

Here I am in Benares (Now Varanasi), in a 5 star hotel, in air-conditioned splendour in the world's oldest continuously inhabited city, looking out at the beauties around the swimming pool and remembering the bodies which freed from the Wheel of Karma by their incineration on the banks of the Hindu's holy river Ganges, sent up their smoke as I was rowed past them at dawn this morning.

I have just finished reading two truly astonishing SF novels and would like to share my numbed pleasure, horror, disbelief and recommendation with **Vector** readers.

They are **Dracula Unbound** by Brian Aldiss (Grafton, 1992) and **Lurid Dreams** by Charles L Harness (Avon, NY, 1990). We are in the world of literary criticism, distortion, invention, explication, confusion and deliberate befuzzlement in both these superbly crafted, challenging, gripping and monumentally researched -- yet oh, so different -- books.

Aldiss takes us into two worlds. In one -- in the near future -- an American industrialist has masterminded the development of a technique of *stopping time*, so that garbage can be dumped into fixed points in our past and hence disposed of.

Harness' near future revolves around the desire of an American postgraduate to gain his Ph.D through OB -- out of body experiences -- and, his female companion's similar dream for her doctorate, this one in the evaluation of Edgar Allan Poe by Freudian analysis.

The Harness book centres, quite simply but effectively on the thesis that, rather than starving in the literary world, Poe could have swung the American Civil War in favour of the South and changed history. Aldiss' plot is more complex, more gruesome and far more wide-reaching: vampires predate mankind (they drank hadrosaur blood in the Cretaceous period) and, unless Bram Stoker can be enlisted to travel on the Time Train to defeat them, will enslave and destroy mankind in the distant future.

Both books lean heavily on detailed literary analysis, Aldiss has the easier task; he needs only **Dracula** as source material and can play ducks and drakes with all but Stoker's personality.

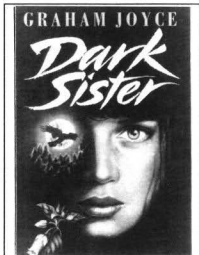
For Harness, computer analysis ranges over every word of every story and poem to come from Poe's pen, and the conclusions he draws are minutely accurate and grotesquely enlightening.

We are told that coincidence is a scientific term of exorcism, used to banish unwanted demons of implied causality. The coincidence of my selecting these two books from a box of 108 unread SF paperbacks to accompany me on this specific Indian Journey (New Delhi - Agra - Khajuraho - Varanasi - Calcutta - New Delhi) is odd enough to merit thought; the parallels between the books do not outweigh their manifest differences of treatment and style, but I have a feeling neither author knew -- and maybe still does not know -- of the other's work.

Suffice it to say that here we have two novels which by their subject alone deserve detailed reviews in the mainstream literary magazines both sides of the Atlantic -- and which by their skill and genius deserve to help us bring our often-derided SF genre

into the forefront of mainstream literature.

I cannot keep books I've read now -- I shed them as I move around the world. Two as yet unknown back-packers will receive these from my hands on the dark platforms of some Indian railway station. I hope they appreciate just how lucky they are.



Correction *Molly Brown, London*

I would like to point out that there were two sentences missing from my review of **Dark Sister** by Graham Joyce, in **Vector** 169. This omission was completely my own fault -- I admit to being deeply dippy. Anyway, if I hadn't printed out the wrong computer file, the following would have appeared at the end of the second-to-last paragraph:

Interesting characters, a good plot, some sex, some drugs, a little shape-changing -- who could ask for more? It's a strong, well-written book, and it would make a brilliant film.

I only bring this to your attention because I was worried that it might not have been immediately apparent from the review as it stood that I really liked the book.

Please send your letters of comment to:

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Arthur C Clarke A Birthday Tribute

Arthur Charles Clarke was born in Minehead, Somerset on 16th December 1917, he will celebrate his 75th Birthday on that date this year. Although he now lives in Sri Lanka, he is still the most famous and well-regarded figure in the history of popular British SF. His short stories and novels are familiar to us all, and the film **2001: A Space Odyssey** contains some of SF Cinema's most famous images. His television series spread his repute even further beyond the genre, but his commitment to British SF has remained strong. If the BSFA was choosing a President today, there still could be no other choice. We are delighted to take this opportunity to wish Arthur a very happy birthday and to celebrate his work in the accompanying tribute, which examines some of the landmarks of his career, and the effects they have had on the lives of some of his sincerest admirers. Maxim Jakubowski and David V Barrett measure the effects of two of his most powerful novels on their respective lives. Kev McVeigh takes a look at 'The Star' and Vince Clarke recalls those **Astounding Days...**

Epiphany In Diaspar By Maxim Jakubowski

I was brought up in my early teens on a diet of pulp SF. I was living in France, the son of expatriates, and discovered the secret pleasures of popular fiction on the shelves of a friend of the family who lived outside Paris and was, if my memory serves me well, a tax inspector. His bookshelves (we had none at home) were brimming with exciting reading matter, most of the SF being of the famed French crud **Fleuve Noir** imprint, with french hack space opera and flying saucer fiction plus Fanthorpe, Vargo Statten and other legendary names galore, although I also reached deep into the wells of similarly low-grade crime (ah, the sexual thrills for an adolescent of the **Brett Halliday Mike Shayne** adventures...) and spy tales.

Yes, I liked the stuff, but then I knew deep inside me that literature was something else, the esteemed books I studied at school and assiduously borrowed from the library. These were guilty pleasures, but no more.

Then, one summer, back in London on my summer holidays, I discovered a wonderful (and sadly long gone) second-hand store in Walthamstow where used

paperbacks, magazines (and girly magazines) could be bought at prices that even I could afford, and further the owner didn't mind my spending whole afternoons there browsing and reading.

I had read a few Arthur C Clarke books, and I must confess that I had found them in my adolescent and rather judgemental way, worthy but rather boring. These were some of the earlier very science-oriented novels like **A Fall of Moondust**, **The Sands of Mars**, **Earthlight** and such. Well, one day in Walthamstow, after the obligatory peak at the airbrushed nudes in the girly magazines and the back issues of **Astounding** and **Galaxy**, I came across this second hand Corgi paperback, with a domed future city on the cover, and generously thought I'd give this guy Clarke another chance. This was **The City and the Stars**.

Science Fiction, and life, were never to be the same for me again. I still remember my first read, the sheer awesome feel of cosmic grandeur and poetry, the sense of wonder that forever became for me the essence of SF.

Like a glowing jewel, the city lay upon the breast of the desert. Once it had known change and alteration, but now Time passed it by.

The City and the Stars communicated to my emotions the way no book had done before (even Rider Haggard's **She**), it showed me the way ahead, that SF was not all science and space battles, but it could be something more, something undefinable that still tugs at my heartstrings when done right.

I became a fan, an occasional writer, a publisher and what have you. And I owe it all to **The City and the Stars**. This is a sentimental tribute to a book that changed my life and will forever be my favourite Clarke novel. I don't think I actually want to read it again and attempt a critical overview, some emotions should remain unsoiled.

So, thank you Arthur. It's been a great ride.

One Awe-full Instant: by David V Barrett

When I was still in single figures I read a lot of juvenile SF and fantasy - Capt. We Johns, John Pudney, and so on. I can't now remember just how old I was - nine or ten, probably - when I borrowed two of my older brother's books, and so discovered adult SF. But I do remember what they were.

One was AE Van Vogt's **The War Against the Rull**, about which I remember absolutely nothing. The other was Arthur C Clarke's **Childhood's End**. If it had just been the Van Vogt, I might still have been caught by the space-adventure bug, but it was

Childhood's End which caused that incandescent explosion in the mind which, years later, I discovered was called "a sense of wonder". Since then, like many of us, I've used "sensawunda" almost disparagingly - oh, how cynical we become! - but it's what captures the adolescent or pre-adolescent mind with that bright, shining "Wow!" which leads us to beg, borrow and eventually buy (I don't think I ever stole) absolutely anything with "SF" on the cover. After space-ships and space battles and galactic empires and all that lot came the discovery of time travel, and robots, and parallel worlds, and ESP, and alternate religions, and future politics and sociology and history, and strange psychology; and high fantasy and low fantasy and sword'n'sorcery and wizards and elves and magic; and myths; and ghost stories; and the Pan Books of Horror. By the time I had "teen" on the end of my age I was hooked on all of it.

It was that shattering paragraph on page 56 of *Childhood's End* which did it:

There was no mistake. The leathery wings, the little horns, the barbed tail - all were there. The most terrible of all legends had come to life, out of the unknown past. Yet now it stood smiling, in ebon majesty, with the sunlight gleaming upon its tremendous body, and with a human child resting trustfully on either arm.

And that's after we'd had the moments before the first manned mission to Mars, immediately stomped on by the arrival of the Overlord fleet; the changes to society imposed by them; the mysterious unseen alien Karellen; the kidnapping of Stormgren, the Secretary-General of the UN, by a resistance movement; Stormgren's attempt to photograph Karellen; and then, twenty years later, the scene where Karellen's massive ship "kissed the earth as gently as a falling snowflake", his invitation to two six-year-old children to enter the ship ("their bodies were tilted at right angles to that peculiar gangway. It possessed a private gravity of its own, one which could ignore that of Earth"), and then, fifty years after his arrival above the Earth,

Karellen came forth into the sunlight. The boy was sitting on his left arm, the girl on his right. They were both too busy playing with Karellen's wings to take any notice of the watching multitude.

It was a tribute to the Overlords' psychology, and to their careful years of preparation, that only a few people fainted. Yet there could have been fewer still, anywhere in the world, who did not feel the ancient terror brush for one awful instant against their minds before reason banished it forever.

-- and then the passage first quoted



Artwork by Dave Moorling

above.

What an introduction to adult SF for a young boy brought up in a vicarage! How could I be anything but hooked, right from that moment? And spend the rest of my life so far searching for other books with the power, the glory, the magic, of that moment.

When I read the book again for this article, thirty years later, knowing what was to come, able almost to quote the words before I read them (though how many years is it since I last opened this book?), I felt once more the delicious, awesome shiver of "the ancient terror"; I held my breath, and let it out again; I felt the pricking of tears in my eyes from the mixture of fear and majesty; I felt just for a moment that I was actually there; and when that moment passed, I wished I was.

And then the book continues, and as I reread it I realised just how many basic SF tropes I had first encountered here, and how many scenes had lingered in my mind all these years: the party, with the Overlord Rashaverak in the library, and the message through the ouija board of the star NGS 549672; Jan Rodricks stowing away on the Overlords' ship in a reconstruction of a twenty-metre sperm whale; the holding back of man's quest for space ("It is a bitter thought, but you must face it. The planets you may one day possess. But the stars are not for Man"); the artists' colony on two Pacific islands; the outer space dreams of seven-year-old Jeff Greggson, and his father's anguished cry, "Then what in God's name are my children?"; the concept of having a memory from the future; the Overlords' tragedy of being midwives to new races, while barren themselves; all the children being taken away from their families, who are then destroyed; Jan's experiences on the Overlords' planet, and his return to an Earth where the children have become something strangely Other, and his observing, as the last man on Earth, the children leaving to become part of the Overmind (an early foreshadowing of the Star-Child at the end of 2001: A Space Odyssey), and the beauty of their destruction of the Earth beneath him; and the final lingering image of the sorrow of Karellen's race.

From what I remember of Van Vogt, he would have stretched any one of these into a full but dull novel; Clarke, in contrast, piles idea on idea until the reader's mind is whirling with it all. Of course, reading it again now, there are all sorts of trivial quibbles I have with the book, little errors and awkwardnesses I would wish had been smoothed away. But the one piece of editing Clarke has done in the 1990 edition, in changing the prologue to the next century,

actually spoils the book by drawing to the reader's attention such overtaken-by-reality details as communicating by teleprinter, or "Men's minds were too valuable to waste on tasks that a few thousand transistors, some photoelectric cells, and a cubic metre of printed circuits could perform." Revising the first couple of pages of a 1950s novel and leaving the rest as it is, was entirely unnecessary and actually quite stupid. This book is a gem, a true classic of SF, and Clarke should have left well alone.

But really, nothing can spoil that first appearance of Karellen: not "one awful instant", but truly, for me, one awe-full instant. Whatever else Arthur C Clarke has written, whatever else he has achieved in his life, his creation of that moment is to me the greatest thing he has ever done. He reached out through this book and put his finger through my chest and rested it on my heart and sent a shiver right through my soul. That is the power of a great author.

In Childhood's End was my introduction to adult science fiction, and the eventual realisation that through SF the wonder of childhood need never end.

Star Bright by Kev McVeigh

"It is three thousand light years to the Vatican." First lines are so important. In this simple sentence Arthur C Clarke creates a scene and gives it emotional depth. This is far more than ordinary deep space homesickness, it is not three thousand light years to Earth, to New York, or to London, but to the Vatican. The Vatican is far more than just a city, the smallest state on the planet. It has an influence and a meaning which now stretches beyond the planet and across the galaxy. An influence which causes a scientist distress, and forces an unbidden question: "Why?"

Modern Science Fiction revolves around such questions (and its parallel "What if?") With this first line Clarke sets out his stall to tell a story of great depth and weight, and in doing so, demonstrates that an author frequently considered part of the pulp tradition proves to have been one of those vital bridges between old and new.

The premise of 'The Star' is simple. An astronomical expedition finds evidence of another civilisation destroyed by a nova. One of the expedition members, the narrator, determines the date when the nova would have been visible from Earth: it is the Star of Bethlehem, seen at the Christ's birth. Read like this the story is an amusing but lightweight conceit. A nice idea revealed carefully enough to draw the reader in, but without inner conflict to sustain the story.

The fascination comes with the conflict. The emotive element with which Clarke imbues his story is equally simple: True Faith. The narrator, an astrophysicist, is also a Jesuit priest. He is a man who believed that his work has a deeper purpose, to reveal the full "glory of God's handiwork". The conflict he faces is Faith over Reason.

Through moments of banter with more sceptical crew members, passing reflections on the priest's spiritual predecessor, St. Ignatius Loyola, and equally brief scientific background, Clarke leads the reader towards fundamental questions on the relationship between Science and Religion. That they are not incompatible is without doubt, but how great is their overlap? How can Faith survive scientific evidence which may destroy one of the central tenets of that Faith? How can our narrator, loyal to Science, to his God and to his Church reconcile the doctrine that "God is good" with his discovery that a world and a people were destroyed to signify the saving through Jesus Christ's coming, of another people? In scientific terms the balance is maintained, one dies one is saved. In the heart, and in the soul, the mathematics is different.

Science Fiction asks questions, but does not always answer them. The questions inherent here, both "Why?" and "What if?", remain unanswered. The key word in that opening sentence is "to", "to the Vatican" rather than "from the Vatican". Discovery made, yet secret, the narrator returns home. His own faith is weakened, but he considers the option which might preserve others' faith: to lie about this discovery. In the Vatican he may find his own answers. For the reader, is it not enough that questions are asked of this nature? Our beliefs are frequently strengthened by examination. For the maturity of the SF genre it is vital that such universal, adult questions are at the heart of SF: big ideas alone are insufficient. The best SF stories, such as 'The Star' invoke both the heart and the mind.

'The Star' is also interesting in its historical context. It was written around 1955 partly as a response to a story of the same name written sixty years earlier by H G Wells. Where Wells belittles humanity and its achievements, Clarke's work as a whole and in 'The Star' specifically is flooded with what Eric S Rabkin describes as "persistent spiritual - and sometimes lyrical - optimism concerning the place of humanity in the universe" as much as his "enthusiastic faith in technology." 'The Star' also includes elements which recur in later SF by Clarke and by others. There is a clear monolith image bridging 'The Sentinel' and 2001: A Space Odyssey, probably the most famous

image in Science Fiction. Its charred remains are a symbol of a brave last act equivalent to the crucifix upon the narrator's cabin wall, thus begging the question: were these people saved after all? In other stories, of course, this symbol is evidence of a greater power watching over us. It is an image borrowed quite honestly by Terry Bisson in his recent novel, **Voyage to the Red Planet**. Similarly, the same questions of religion and technology, of faith and reason inform such modern stories as Gary Kilworth's 'Let's Go To Golgotha'.

I do not know Arthur C Clarke's religious leanings, nor whether the questions in this article, which are all mine, might coincide with those which caused him to write this story. His fiction does show a definite interest in the presumed dichotomies of Science and Religion. In **The Fountains of Paradise** he has a character say this:

he could not understand how anyone could contemplate the dynamic symmetry of Euler's profound yet beautifully simple equation without wondering if the universe was the creation of some vast intelligence.

With the narrator of 'The Star' concluding that his discovery will eventually be repeated, nullifying any concealment, Clarke asserts the strengths of Science. With the strengths of human love inherent in the priest, Clarke underpins this story with a vital belief in a purpose to humanity. In considering 'The Star', a beautifully simple story as profound as Euler's equation, I am made to think, and to question, as much as to admire, and my final question "If we who were once warned by the Flood, fail in our faith, might we become in turn some other race's Star of Bethlehem?" is fundamental, at least to Christian Faith. That a few thousand words of pulp fiction can provoke this depth of philosophical musing demonstrates irrefutably the potency of the written word, of Science Fiction, and Arthur C Clarke's mastery of both.

Astounding Days by Vince Clarke

You're a science fiction reader, with an imagination stimulated by all those galaxy-warping space drives, exotic species living on distant planets, future trends, even the paradoxes of space travel.

Imagine if you would, then an Earthly environment, a little like the one in which you're now living, but where there's no pocket-books, 'science-fiction' is an almost unknown term, and there's certainly not 1000-odd hard-cover books published annually in the genre.

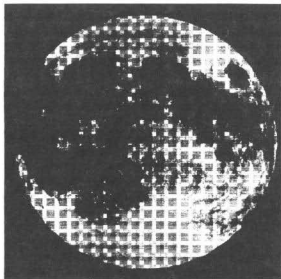
Hard to imagine, but that's what it was like in the early 1930's, right here on Earth.

Aside from hard-cover books, (sometimes labelled as 'scientific romance') by H G Wells, Olaf Stapledon, S Fowler Wright and a very few others, the enthusiast of those days had to rely on 'pulp' magazines imported as ballast from the States.

In this anecdotal, part-autobiographical book, Arthur C Clarke sets out his enthusiasms as one of those early readers in a quite disarming fashion - "Looking at the contents list for the twelve **Astoundings** in 1934 I am sorely tempted to use the overworked adjective 'fabulous' - but on virtually every page a connection with his own career is established. For instance, "surrounded by the dramatic evidence of air warfare" in 1941 he started to write a novel - "the result, after revisions made necessary by the arrival of the atom bomb four years later, was Chapter 17 of **Earthlight**. Today, I am rather ashamed of it - though I am very proud indeed of the fact that the Apollo 15 astronauts named a small crater after this early novel..."

Aided by a complete run from 1930 through 1984 on microfiche of his favourite magazine, **Astounding SF** (later **Analogue**) and Mike Ashley's **Index** to same, Arthur digs deep with an abiding and obvious love of the genre. He is also, as a trained scientist, quick to point out the obvious errors and also the small triumphs. Of a very mediocre story by Ray Cummings, 'Brigands of the Moon' in only the third issue of **Astounding Stories of Super Science** (as it was then known), he passes criticism and then tempers it with "What I do recall vividly, after more than fifty years, is the magical name of the Martian capital, Ferrok-Shahn". He further points out that the author utilises the concept of 'gravity assist' for the flight of his spaceship. "to the best of my knowledge (it was) not discovered until twenty years later".

The idea that science fiction predicts is normally one that gives the enthusiasts some unease. If you pepper the surroundings with a shot-gun you're almost certainly going to hit a target if the ammunition holds out. But it's amusing and sometimes enlightening to read of those successful shots - "At least four decades before they became practicable, J J Coupling had clearly outlined the basic principles for laser weapons!" - and there's mention of the Heinlein 'Waldo', originally an SF device and title of a story, now a real-life remote-controlled



manipulator.

There are interesting sidelights on Arthur C Clarke's role in the early British Interplanetary Society, leading to the Chairmanship. In the early days the BIS and science fiction readership were much intertwined, many enthusiasts pursuing both hobbies, and your reviewer remembers Arthur once telling of a meeting of BIS dignitaries when the suitcase of one of them sprung open and deposited several science fiction magazines on the floor.

He also writes of his personal encounter and friendship with Werner von Braun who was partly responsible for the Nazi rocket program and the V2s. He quotes Willy Ley on a talk with a German astronautics enthusiast - "Did we discuss politics? Hardly; our minds were always far out in space" - and Arthur himself quotes von Braun as saying he suspected what was happening in concentration camps and could have found out, but "I didn't and I despise myself for it".

This book is anecdotal, gossipy, humorous (it includes a very funny article reprinted from **Analogue** on a Steam Powered Word Processor), shameless in 'namedropping' (a pity that there's no index but it would have needed another twenty pages to list the names of the famous Arthur has encountered) and overall expresses a manifest love for his subject which is touching. And to my delight it reprints a sentence from **Against the Fall of Night** which I memorised many years ago as a perfect expression of the 'sense of wonder':

Presently there echoed down from the heavens the most awe-inspiring of all the sounds that Man has ever made - the long-drawn thunder of air falling, mile after mile, into a tunnel drilled suddenly across the sky.

Now that's *writing!*

BARBED WIRE KISSES

MAGAZINE REVIEWS

EDITED BY MAUREEN SPELLER

Protostellar 2 1992 Territories 2 1992

Reviewed by Maureen Speller

Issue 1 of **Protostellar** did not exactly set the world on fire. Perhaps it was the stunningly original 'Hey Sexy' advertising campaign, which smacked of 1960s undergraduate humour. Perhaps it was the fact that they proclaimed themselves, if I remember correctly, as "a bunch of crazy girls and boys who just don't care". Certainly, they didn't care about the magazine which, despite proclaiming itself as "The Journal of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror", was composed of little more than lukewarm trivia and superficial articles, with a couple of chunks of warmed-through fiction just to establish its credentials. At £2.00, I thought it expensive and didn't take out a subscription. Issue 2 creeps more hesitantly into the limelight, a real case of everything, including the price, being chopped in half. Reduced to A5, stripped of its glossy cover, it's a sadder but by no means wiser production and I still have this worry nagging away in my brain; who can afford to support this over-extended joke?

Whatever else **Protostellar** is about, it maintains a clear brief to needle **Interzone**. There are constant references to "our chums at **Interzone**", and lightweight sniping at the magazine -- this time, an unsubtle dig at the much-criticised **Interzone** special issues. The tone is an unmistakable parody of David Pringle's own somewhat patronising editorial presence, but it's hardly that irritating, nor is the constant repetition of the joke that funny. I don't suppose for one moment that the **Interzone** collective is losing much sleep over the perceived threat from **Protostellar**. What worries me more is that Shadwell Oman & Co imagine they are being frightfully daring; it's not as though they are saying anything that hasn't already

been said a hundred times in the last ten years.

As to the rest of the magazine? Well, there is a gossipy news column which reveals, shock horror, that Terry Pratchett keeps carnivorous plants, a fact which could be gleaned from reading the bio-squib in any of his books. And did you know that SF fans don't like their favourite reading to be described as "sci-fi"? This is news? Alongside that lie the sort of articles I recall seeing in ailing fan society zines, a few more book reviews, and a few more fatuous stories, including the inevitable D F Lewis "mood" piece.

I'm sure, even as they read this, that the guys and gals at **Protostellar Central**, are jumping up and down in glee at having needled yet another boring old fart with their wild and wacky approach to life. So be it but I still think **Protostellar** is a waste of space and money. If they're being funny, I think I've seen the joke, and I'm not planning to laugh myself sick over it. Rocking the establishment is one thing, but this is just puerile.

Whether **Territories** is yet rocking the establishment quite as much as it would wish to, I don't know. I've heard it described as a "scrungy little magazine" but while its production values are not as glossy as those of **Protostellar**, its contents are light-years ahead in giving satisfaction. I also believe it serves a vital function as a more relaxed arena for discussion, similar to **Vector**, but aimed at a slightly different constituency. **Territories** describes itself as "The Slipstream Journal", a definition of such slipperiness that Erich Zann, editor, freely admits that it's just a signpost, a way to defy genre boundaries. In other words, if it is the sort of stuff an SF reader might go for, then talk about it.

Having said that, issue 2 is, as Zann notes, much more mainstream in its

contents, coverage on Martin Amis having fallen through. Nevertheless, we are offered a couple of meaty interviews, and a couple of articles. The interviews impressed me, particularly that with Ian McDonald. Transcript interviews are becoming the bane of my life; they are often so poorly conducted, with a sense that the interviewer has merely fired a barrage of questions, without waiting to act on the answers. This interview, marred only by the arty, and illegible, lower case indication of who's talking when, has much more sense of a conversation about it. I felt I gained a greater awareness of Ian McDonald by reading it. The layout problem had been solved by the time I reached the Eric Brown interview, a curiously self-deprecating piece. I wonder how many other authors would be prepared to analyse their faults as honestly as Brown did. I was startled to note that his own assessment of his work agrees exactly with mine, which leaves a question hanging heavy in the air.

Philip Raines' discussion of Kim Stanley Robinson's Orange County trilogy is little more than a teaser. Is it really possible to discuss an influential contemporary SF trilogy in two sides? Obviously not, but **Territories** does redeem itself with a lengthy article on Karen Joy Fowler from David Wingrove. It's good to see Fowler finally gaining the attention she deserves, both for **Sarah Canary** and for her extraordinary short stories.

I have to be honest and say that the magazine has a "skin-of-the-teeth" feel about it, and I'm not talking about the subject matter so much as the way it's been put together. The component parts of the magazine haven't yet mulched down; the reviews are somehow an appendage to the body of the magazine, and Michael Cobley's **Shark Tactics** seems slightly ill-at-ease with the rest, but I agree entirely with his comment that we should be "using SF's full potential ... to say something honest about where we are now and where we are heading." In which case, it seems churlish to bitch about the shape of the magazine, so long as it's appearing at all. However, we have to accept that some potential readers have to be wooed and seduced, in order to get the message across -- and **Territories** has a message, let there be no doubt about that.

Protostellar: subscription details from Protostellar Magazine, PO Box 491, Coulsdon, Surrey, CR5 1WJ
Territories: available from Erich Zann, c/o McNair, 65 Niddrie Road, Strathbungo, Glasgow, Scotland, G4 8PT. Currently, £1.80 per issue or £4.50 for a three-issue subscription. However, prices will be increased soon.

Scheherazade 4 & 5

Reviewed by Maureen Speller

Scheherazade describes itself as "The Magazine of Fantasy, Science Fiction and Gothic Romance" but science fiction seems to play very little part in its character. The romantic logo, embossed in gold-leaf on each cover, leaves us in no doubt as to which part of the genre territory we have strayed into.

Fantasy always brings difficulties, not least because it has transmogrified with such monotonous regularity. When I first arrived on the scene some twelve years ago, fantasy referred to a very rich, literary style, typified by the likes of Dunsany, William Morris and, of course, Tolkien. The sub-Tolkien fantasists were gaining the ascendancy, and after them came the bodice-rippers with dragons. Consequently, we have a situation where two people can be using the same word while talking about entirely different types of literature. The editors of **Scheherazade** seem to be aware, in some measure, of this pitfall and I was curiously comforted by that appearance of "Gothic Romance" and its promise of getting back to the genre's roots.

However, there is one question which has to be asked: does fantasy honestly have any relevance to modern life, other than as an escapist pleasure for women who'd rather be Dragon Riders? The answer is surely a cautious "yes", depending on the fantasy. SF may hold up a mirror to our own society but, despite the best attempts of a number of younger writers, it is, at heart, still a mechanist genre, dealing in hardware rather than people. Fantasy is inevitably presented as the softer, humanist, caring side of the coin, the only problem being that this must inevitably be accompanied by stale fairytale tropes. Anyone who can blend that softness with the harsh realities of modern society and do something about the tropes must surely be helping to rehabilitate the genre.

When **Scheherazade** first appeared, there was great play made of looking for fiction with intelligent female protagonists. This provoked a lot of confused discussion about feminism, which seemed to overlook the essential fact that it would be pleasant to read fantasy fiction with more of an edge to it. Has **Scheherazade** succeeded in maintaining that brief?

On the evidence of these two issues, I regret to say that no, it hasn't. At least two of the stories wouldn't be out of place in a more conventional women's magazine; woman meet stranger on beach, gives him house room, he leaves a mysterious gift before departing. Or what about mysterious time-

traveller meets attractive nurse in hospital? And just to confirm one's direst predictions about fantasy, there is a piece of mythological wittering from Tina Anghelatos -- just pick your myth cycle.

To be fair, there are some good stories, including Brian Sibley's delicate fairytale, "The Fabulous Bird", Phillip Mann's "The Architect", and Deirdre Counihan's "Blue Wolf". In fact, those were the good stories. For the rest, the magazines are filled up with a graphic serial, written by Jane Gaskell and drawn by Deirdre Counihan and a series of short interviews; I've commented to the editors that they take up space which might be better filled with another story for they add little but a sense of messiness which goes against the otherwise fairly slick production.

Scheherazade, like **Territories**, gives off an air of having not yet quite made up its mind what it's going to be when it grows up. The will to succeed is there -- after all, how many small press magazines do you know that have managed to maintain a regular publishing schedule and get as far as six issues? -- but the brief for the magazine is not yet clear. The fiction, for the most part, is not chosen adventurously, and there is also a sense of the editors and their close family filling the magazine to the extent where you almost begin to wonder if this isn't vanity publishing. However, I know that stories have now been bought from other, outside, authors, and perhaps this will encourage others to write and submit. **Scheherazade** deserves consideration as it plots a course across a well-recorded but under-explored region of the triplet genres, and for that reason it also deserves your support.

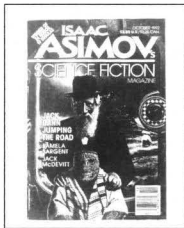
Scheherazade is available from Elizabeth Counihan, St Ives, Maypole Road, East Grinstead, West Sussex, RH19 1HL
One issue 1.99, or £7.50 for a four-issue subscription.

Amazing Oct 1992 Asimov's Oct & Nov 1992 F&SF Oct/Nov 1992

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

In 1974 Jack Dann edited a collection of Jewish science fiction stories called *Wandering Stars*. In 1986 Nicholas Jainschigg painted a picture inspired by the collection. Now, Dann has written a story inspired by that picture. 'Jumping the Road' is the lead story in the October issue of **Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine** (which in the November issue had transmogrified into **Asimov's Science**

Fiction, so let's be like everyone else and just stick to **Asimov's**). "Jumping the Road" is a good story about Jewish guilt, the Holocaust, and whether an alien can also be Jewish -- but then, so were a lot of the stories in *Wandering Stars*. "Jumping the Road" is one of the best stories in the issue, but it really doesn't do anything fresh.



Millenia ago men and women started telling each other stories, which grew into myths and legends and fairy stories. They acquired a fairly recognisable cast of curiosities: giants and dwarves and kobolds and centaurs. Now Gene Wolfe has written a story about giants and dwarves, "The Legend of Xi Cygnus" in the double issue of **F&SF**. It tells us nothing we didn't know before, does nothing fresh with the idea, follows the rituals of the fairy story too slavishly to be particularly well written, and resolves into an oddly distasteful moral about knowing one's place and never challenging those in authority over us (Wolfe's Catholicism coming too strongly into play here?).

I single out these two stories from the 40 included in these four magazines because they represent the overwhelming impression: we have been here before. After all, in these pages you will find conspiracy theories about the Kennedy assassination in Sharon Farber's amusing but insubstantial snippet "Why I Shot Kennedy" (**Asimov's**, October); dead rising from the grave to point the finger of accusation at their murderers in an atmospheric and surprisingly well written first story, "The Dying Breed" by Carrie Richerson (**F&SF**); not to mention another example of that extraordinary sub-genre which has gone from interesting novelty to hoary cliché in record time, about rock stars in an alternative history where Hitler won the war, in "Crux Gammata" by J.R. Dunn (**Asimov's**, October). None of these are especially bad stories, though Dunn's notion that bad-boy heavy metal rockers would turn to early Dylan folk tunes in their moment of

greatest rebellion makes this a particularly flaccid example of an overworked type; they are just too familiar to be either challenging or interesting.

There are even stories we have literally seen before. Frederik Pohl's novella, 'Outnumbering the Dead' (Asimov's, November), was actually published by Legend two years ago. Even then it seemed to be an interesting idea on immortality which hadn't been fleshed out sufficiently to give it real substance, within a magazine it feels limp.

Which cannot be said for the other reprint before us, Thomas M. Disch's 'Descending' (Amazing) the haunting, bleak and virtually plotless tale of a hapless character descending the escalators in a department store who suddenly realises he has gone too far. The story is nearly 30 years old, but it still has more grit and fire than most of the other magazine stories of today. Certainly more than in Disch's other offering in this special issue of Amazing devoted to him. 'A Troll in Surewold Forest' is the first part of a novel for children written in a twee, didactic style which begs the reader to love its featherweight manner and thus agree with its hectoring prescriptions, yet which offers nothing of vision or substance to reward the effort of reading it. Do children really need to be talked down to like this? I first read 'Descending' as a child and its sure tone and its confidence in the unforfeiting world it painted spoke to me far more eloquently than this flibbertigibbet of a novel ever could.

The two new stories which perhaps come closest to 'Descending' in spirit are both in the double issue of F&SF: 'Looking Down on You' by Ian Watson and 'The Hall of New Faces' by Kit Reed. Both have that single bleak vision carried through remorselessly to an inevitable end. In Watson's story a failed writer is absorbed into a pane of glass on the observation deck of a tower in Düsseldorf, in Reed's the social pressure which drives women to preserve their beauty with face-lift after face-lift has horrific consequences. They are both sharp, controlled and chilling stories, but they both have fatal flaws. Kit Reed's society feels more like the 50s than today, and she doesn't do enough to create her society with a depth that will make the story work in a contemporary context. Conversely, Ian Watson does too much. Building up the character's background, making asides on the political and economic situation, setting up the literary festival which has brought him to Germany, these all add clutter not clarity.

Depending on the story there is a place for all these things, but too often as I read these

magazines I was aware of stories that seemed to carry too little or, more often, too much of what was necessary to achieve the expected impact.

Pamela Sargent's 'Danny Goes to Mars' (Asimov's, October), for example, is an amusing conceit about the second Bush administration setting up Marilyn Quayle as the next Republican presidential candidate by tricking Dan Quayle onto a mission to Mars, then abandoning him there. It's a neat idea, nicely done, but it doesn't need to be a novelette, a short short story would probably have been enough.

In the same issue, Maureen F. McHugh's 'The Missionary's Child' is crowded with hints about her world. We are given glimpses of offworlders, suggestions of epic military adventures, vague memories of a massacre, half-seen fragments of a complex neo-medieval society in which knowledge is restricted by a quasi-religious order. It is an incredibly rich stew, but the trouble is that it all remains half-seen. None of it comes into sufficiently sharp focus to provide a pivot for her plot, which resolves into that weary old chestnut about a mercenary who is really a woman pretending to be a man. You can't help thinking that, old as it is, this notion might have had a bit more impact if we'd seen a bit more of the society so that we knew how shocking or dangerous this masquerade might be.

But at least these writers are trying. There are one or two pieces here which can only have got into print on their author's reputation. 'The Birds' Turn' by Jack Williamson (F&SF) reads as if his immense experience of being a writer has come down to a series of short cuts. The piece opens with a series of staccato conceptual jumps and character outlines which never get beyond the original pencil sketch, as if Williamson is now beyond the sort of detail which turns an idea into a story. Still, the idea is interesting. Others don't bother going that far. L. Sprague de Camp's 'The Satanic Illusion' (Asimov's, November) is part of an on-going time-travel series where you feel the writer and the characters are just going through the paces without giving any thought to the sort of vigour which might shift some of the flab. (de Camp should take a look at R. Garcia y Robertson's 'Gypsy Trade' in the same issue for a time-travel story which is longer but feels shorter, and which is much more satisfying -- and even if his travellers do wind up in that good old stand-by for the inventively challenged, Nazi Germany, at least he makes them gypsies rather than the usual stock Jews.) As for Isaac Asimov's 'The Critic on the Hearth', also in the same issue which purely by coincidence happens

to be devoted to his memory, it is a delightfully unfunny Azazel story that is so mechanical you can almost see the joints where he hasn't bothered to do up the rivets tightly enough.

The typical Asimov's story has a hard, glittering shell but can too easily be mushy on the inside. But when the sharpness is properly honed, it can come up with real winners -- which is presumably why it has garnered so many awards. Still, from the present examples, there are only a couple of stories which really stand out. Danni's 'Jumping the Road', Robertson's 'Gypsy Trade' and 'Persephone' by Kathe Koja (Asimov's, November) are well written and satisfying stories, but they lack an edge that would make them really memorable. However, 'Auld Lang Boom' by Jack McDevitt (Asimov's, October) and particularly 'All Vows' by Esther M. Friesner (Asimov's, November) deliver that authentic frisson.

McDevitt's is a deceptively simple story culled from an old man's diaries in which the central character's infrequent meetings with an old friend coincide disturbingly with major disasters. It works because it is kept simple, the reader is left to decide whether there was anything supernatural or whether it was just coincidence, and the big moments are downplayed enough to make you willing to believe in their authenticity.

Friesner's story is even better. A child has attached himself to an old hobo with a mysterious mission to fulfil, and their journey is accompanied by a ghost the child calls Granny Teeth. This is an astonishingly good piece of work, told always in the child's voice and from the child's point of view, so that the reader has to fill in the gaps along the way. But there are some gaps which even the reader can't fill in until the final, satisfying twist. When you get there, it is a twist you will recognise, but it is handled so skilfully that it comes across as fresh and achieves that rare but delectable sense of being just right.

F&SF, by contrast, always has a softer focus and a more down-homey feel, typified by the country-boy style of narrative voice that Joe Haldeman adopts for another and in the end fairly inconsequential venture into his Vietnam memories, 'Graves'. It is also typified by an easy, unchallenging moralising. Gene Wolfe leaves you with the notion that one should never seek to escape one's place in life. Nancy Springer, in 'Don't Look Back', suggests that home is always best, and we should certainly stick with what we know best. Charles de Lint's 'Bridges' starts out with a tough edge which makes you think he might at last be escaping his

usual candyfloss, only to end by swaddling you in cotton wool. A girl who used to have a reputation as an easy lay has now turned down a boy, and been dumped in the wasteland 20 miles out of town as a result. On her self-pitying walk she crosses a bridge and finds herself in another world full of bridges which lead nowhere. The place looks wonderful, but the silly contest between hope and despair into which the story turns, really does leave you wishing for some old-fashioned Victorian melodrama, which at least used to have a little bit of blood around the morality.

Yet for these inherent weaknesses, *F&SF* can also pull off some welcome achievements. John Brunner's 'The Dead Man', an attempt to write a Jorge Luis Borges story, almost comes off. 'The Spirit Dump' by Lawrence Watt-Evans is fresh and original if, in the end, slight. The main reason this is a double issue is to encompass an entire new novel by Algis Budrys, 'Hard Landing', which is the familiar tale of aliens from a crashed flying saucer living among us, but which is done with the style and brio you would expect of Budrys.

The real joy of this issue, however, is one of the shortest stories. 'Cancion Antica de Old Earth' by Terry Bisson is one of those snapshots of a moment in the far future when you are never quite sure what is going on, or why, or who or what these people are, but it sends a shiver down the spine.

In this company, **Amazing** may be the oldest magazine, but it feels like the youngest. It has an adolescent poise and daring which the others lack. It is the sort of swagger which leads to dire mistakes. 'Behind' by Robert A. Metzger is repetitive and, at only three pages, far too long, while things like the lengthy extract from a dull fantasy by Raymond Feist make the whole magazine feel like an unsubtle marketing ploy which sets your teeth on edge and you wonder why you bother with the rest.

Then you read a story like 'Kent State Descending the Gravity Well' by James Alan Gardner, which has echoes of something we might have seen in *New Worlds* in its mid-sixties heyday, but which is still the freshest and most daring story in any of these magazines. A writer ponders the twentieth anniversary of the shootings at Kent State University, tries to turn the events into a story and realises how his fictions insult and trivialise the real events.

With the mathematics of a black hole woven into the narrative as a powerful metaphor, this is a story that ought to be forced-fed to all those writers who use Auschwitz or the Kennedy assassination as

playing grounds for their uninventive time-travel or alternative history stories.

Aurealis 8 1992 Interzone Nov & Dec 1992 Pulphouse Sep/Oct 1992 Reviewed by Maureen Speller

In his introduction to William F Wu's 'Sit-in at the Alamo' Dean Wesley Smith notes that **Pulphouse** has become known for publishing dangerous stories. "Dangerous" implies a story that will challenge the reader, setting those synapses snapping in a completely new configuration, a story that leaves you convinced that at last you might just have a handle on what it's all about. Wesley Smith himself throws down the gauntlet by suggesting that **Pulphouse** publishes these stories so what better touchstone to apply to the latest double issue?

Wu's story is set a few years in the future, in an old people's home run on draconian lines; in all but name, it is a private prison. The majority of the inmates are retired Sixties activists, and the kicker is that they've been confined there by their own children, the vanguard of the reactionary backlash to peace and love. The incident which brings about the inmates' rebellion is a trifle, a misunderstanding which might have been easily sorted out in a more humane regime. Instead, the head of the facility organises an all-out siege, and seriously contemplates use of lethal force. **Warning for God**, this ain't and yet there is the same familiar undercurrent of the young gazing uncomprehendingly at their elders, wanting to be rid of them but not prepared to take the necessary step towards the final solution.

The one problem with this story is that it simply isn't "dangerous". It's not speculating on what might become; instead it is monitoring a phenomenon which has been known for as long as the family has existed as a concept. In the past, we exposed the elderly and infirm, rather than allow them to become a burden. We've sent them to the poor house, we've incarcerated them in old people's homes. In America, families dump them at hospitals and disappear. In this country, the state dumps them on their own children by denying support from social services. The problem is perennial and Wu offers no new insight, merely a story which fulfils the fantasy of every adult with a difficult parent to look after.

Far from being dangerous, the story sets the tone of cosy appeal which pervades this issue of **Pulphouse**; skiffy for the angst-ridden thirty-somethings. How else to

explain such stories as Parke Godwin's cutesy offering, where a bunch of ex-Presidents get together on the CB to chew the fat? Or what about Amy Bechtel's 'The Midwives of Miracles', where a woman consumed with guilt about her abortion, receives absolution from the child which never lived, or J Michael Straczynski's mawkish 'Say Hello, Mr Quigley', in which a dead man seeks forgiveness from his daughter for committing incest, using the very toys with which he originally frightened her?

Perhaps this pervasive tidying-up of loose ends is, in some way, related to the economic situation, or pre-election uncertainty. Yet the stories exhibit the cosy fatalism of those who, while genuinely concerned about the world, have become complacent in their belief that there is nothing they can do to change it. Thus, instead of challenging, the stories reinforce this belief, leaving the readers comforted in their apathy.

The only story which engaged me, mostly because it was just so weird by comparison to the reflex angsting of the others, was Anne Moran Hunsinger's 'Social Behaviours of the Perodactyl'. I don't even want to hazard what's going on in this woman's mind but it saved an issue which otherwise neatly fulfilled the title of J N Williamson's self-indulgent column, **Brainpulp**.

Aurealis describes itself as "The Australian Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction". While it doesn't seem too concerned about being dangerous it does set great store by its Australianness. Dirk Strasser's editorial in issue 8 takes up, once again, the subject of Australian SF. Is there anything which makes an SF story peculiarly Australian, other than using the landscape and aboriginal mythology, which seem to be the two main devices for emphasising the Antipodean nature of a story? Strasser quotes George Turner as saying that Australianness is an attitude of mind. "We think differently about things; we react differently." Damien Broderick observed that Australian SF is "more about getting our arses kicked", in direct contrast to the American attitude of going out and kicking ass, which implies an innate fatalism in the Australian character.

Perhaps this downbeat attitude is peculiar to Australian SF writers, but there is no doubt that it pervades most of the eight stories in this issue, along with a regrettable tendency to take the easy option in constructing a story. Take Stephen Dedman's 'Foreign Bodies', the lead story. Set in a future where the cashless economy

has taken hold to such an extent that one's very existence is determined by credit rating and earning capacity, the story concerns an Australian stranded in the States by his own apathy, and the peculiar and illegal relationship he develops with a street-person. They write a time-travel SF story together, which he sells on her behalf, and she then reveals that the story is true, that she can swap bodies, and promptly evicts him from his own. There is no real story here, just a deplorable taste for genre self-reference and a need to dump masses of information about this fascinating future the author has constructed. One is left feeling that the character got all he deserved for being such a wimp. Which is not to say that characters should invariably be sympathetic or likeable but it helps to be able to connect in some way.

And so it goes on, this strange need shown by authors to shy away from the situations created in their stories. A potentially good story about the effects of genetic engineering, and once again the clash between generations, dwindles away in a muddle as opposing factions fight over a healthy child; why, we don't know. Geoffrey Maloney's 'The Taxi Driver' is little more than a rerun of *Bladerunner* with gangsters while Ashley Kellings' 'Paradise Discarded' picks up that oh-so-familiar theme of Milton's fallen angels being vampires. Only Peter Friend's 'Outdoors', an under-developed time-travel story, and Sean Williams' over-stretched study of off-world paranoia, 'Tourist', come close to making the grade as stories.

Simon Brown's 'The Dissections of Machaon' exhibits what I think may be a uniquely Australian quirk, namely a bizarre fascination with writing stories about classical times. Sean McMullen is well-known for it and it seems as though Brown is heading down the same road. However, I felt this curious tale of interaction between men and gods was one of the best in *Aurealis*, contrasting as it did the search for reason and logic with the fundamental need for faith, of some sort.

If *Pulphouse* is complacent, *Aurealis* an underdog saved by a welcome streak of sceptical questioning, what of *Interzone*?

What of *Interzone* indeed! David Pringle apparently regards the editorial as a means of disseminating news; since that *Interzone* carries a less scurrious version of Dave Langford's news-sheet, *Ansible*, Pringle seems to have given up any attempt at editorialising. In fact the December issue has no editorial at all. Instead, it was a line, in a letter from Syd Foster, which gave me food for thought. I don't share Foster's belief, expressed in *Matrix*, that *Interzone* is the national SF magazine but I was taken with his comment on an earlier story: "I discerned no crumb of SF content in this story and yet the spirit of the genre cast its tangent light of otherness through the still focus of every word." Over-wrought perhaps, but he did pin down that quality which, for me, is so important about a story. Never mind whether it is SF, does it feel like SF?

I started reading the November 1992 issue, then stopped to check the date on the cover. We SF readers are supposed to be biased about this sort of thing, but honestly, I thought I'd fallen through a wormhole in space and travelled back ten years to *Interzone*'s earliest days. Take, for example, 'Tom Joad' by Kim Newman and Eugene Byrne. It's a clever mix of the fictional and the alternative historical, set in a Socialist America run in typically corrupt fashion by Al Capone. Tom Joad -- dust off your Steinbeck, you slackers -- is a kind of mythical Robin Hood figure to those poor and huddled masses, righting wrongs and generally sorting out the mess. This is fun so far as it goes, but it seems as though *Interzone* will never shed that perverse attraction it's always had for fiction featuring real characters, usually Ronald Reagan. Between *Pulphouse* and *Interzone*, I think we have now covered the entire canon of American demons.

Sally Darnowsky's truly repellent 'Little Stevie', in which a woman gives birth, so far as I can tell, to her own womb, reminds me of the dear dead days of Michael Blumlein's carving up of Ronald Reagan. Lots of excuses for describing dried blood but I cannot see that this story contributes significantly to the lot of womanhood unless it's an oblique comment on separatist politics. And, in lieu of a Moorcockian portrayal of a deeply corrupt society, we have an Aldissian portrayal of a morally bankrupt society, culminating in a little incest and equine rape. I've never followed the tenet which demands that SF should be upbeat/life-affirming/morally

acceptable (strike any which is inapplicable) but would someone please tell me the point of 'Horse Meat'?

Michael Cobley supplies the cyberpunk with a little bit of froth which would have been improved immeasurably if he hadn't gone for that very tired trope about the corporation screwing the little guys -- again. As for William F. Temple, one should not speak ill of the dead, it is true, but neither should one embarrass them. 'Testimony' was sentimental junk.

Did matters improve with the December 1992 issue which, entirely irrelevantly, featured the cover of the new Keith Roberts collection *Kaeti on Tour* on its own cover? To be honest, not entirely. Too many of the stories seemed somehow incomplete. Ian McDonald's 'Big Chair' felt more like an out-take from *Desolation Road*, contributing little to the new literature of Mars, while John Sladek's punning homage to *Lady Chatterley's Lover* did not amuse. Neither did James Lovegrove's 'Britworld': it was obvious and tired. Things however perked up with Elizabeth Hand's 'Engels Unawares', an amusing but also sharply observed moral tale, about life in the financial sector. I thought it a fair comment on the yuppie excesses of the Eighties. At last, the Ballardian precept about SF holding up a mirror to our own time has found a resonance, and I have found a story without a shred of SF content but entirely satisfying to read.

Maybe my criticism of *Pulphouse* holds true for *Interzone* as well. While I couldn't find much to fulfil the Fosterian tenet, I certainly discovered yet more stories which felt weary in their familiarity. In the States, it is said that people want to feel good even when life is tough. In Australia, it's more a case of facing up the inalienable truth that life stinks. Over here we reach for the candles and the thermos, mutter something about blitz spirit and cast a nostalgic eye to the past. In a genre which is perceived by many to be innovative, this is not a comfortable conclusion to have reached.

Aurealis is available from the New SF Alliance, c/o Chris Reed, BBR Magazine, PO Box 625, Sheffield S1 3GY. Sample issue, £2.75 or £7.50 for a four-issue subscription

Interzone is available from specialist SF dealers and also from 217 Preston Drive, Brighton, BN1 6FL, at £26 for a twelve issue subscription

Pulphouse is obtainable from specialist SF dealers, including New Worlds, Charing Cross Road, London, and also by mail order from Andromeda Book Co, 84 Suffolk Street, Birmingham, B1 1TA.



As it says—or ought to say—in the convention programme, my subject this evening is weaponry and senseless violence, which is why there are quite a lot of you listening in this big hall. If I'd made the mistake of giving a talk with a feeble title like PEACE IN SCIENCE FICTION, we'd be much cosier in a much smaller room, all six of us. This is called knowing your market.

Yes, it's a truism that all too much of the science fiction scene is scarred by vast tracts of destruction left in the wake of colossal future armies and space-fleets, all bristling with ultimate doomsday weapons which seem to need as little reloading as those six-guns in the Western movies—you know, the ones that turn out to be at least 256-guns. For this one hour the committee has given us permission to revel in thoughts of global war and military supremacy, before getting back to sober realities of life like the Hugos and the Worldcon site selection.

To help you enrich your own lives with gratuitous science-fictional violence, I promise to give full instructions for building a lethal cold ray, to explain why all Isaac Asimov's robots are shamefully in violation of the First Law of Robotics, to reveal the logical power source behind the galaxy-busting artillery in your favourite space operas, and to mention L. Ron Hubbard.

Last year was a significant anniversary in my own career of senseless violence. It was just about 25 years before that I first strayed into a bookshop and was fascinated by the garish spaceships and death rays on the cover of Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy*. Fortunately I couldn't afford this, and bought a lot of cheap remaindered science fiction instead. My fate was sealed.

The first really bad results of SF obsession showed up in 1979, when, urged on by megalomania, flattery and electric cattle prods, I lost my convention-speech virginity, by giving a talk with the tasteful title 'Genocide for Fun and Profit'.

This was based on the first book I'd written all by myself, *War in 2080*, full of futuristic military hardware and destined to make an enormous splash in the international remainder market. Although it was supposed to be non-fiction, the book took its inspiration from SF ... which is the posh way of saying I ripped off hordes of ideas from my favourite literature. Especially the sort of trigger-happy stuff where every minor skirmish sounds like this extract from my own very early story 'Sex Pirates of the Blood Asteroid':

A nearby galaxy exploded.

And at that fateful signal, each of the arch-fiend Nivek's countless ships and planetary installations discharged the full, awesome power of its primary projectors,

Fun with Senseless Violence

By David Langford

the blazing beams of destruction combining into a hellish flare of starkly incalculable incandescence against which no possible defence might prevail!

Nivek snarled in rage. 'Missed....'

You'll be glad to know that this villain is duly brought to book and made to face charges of 'multiple genocide, ordinary genocide, genocide with mitigating circumstances, accidental genocide, genocide in self-defence' and many more.

One can't help noticing that fashions in genocide have changed over the years. Most writers are now a little bit more cautious than my mentor Doc Smith, who with schoolboyish enthusiasm used to let his clean-cut heroes wipe out every single member of every unfriendly race, thus ensuring that they wouldn't be tempted to do it again. Whatever it was. Afterwards, the victors could pronounce a simple but touching epitaph, such as 'QX! Hot jets and clear ether! In sync to the skillionth of a whillionth of a nanosecond!'

With his very late book *Subspace Encounter*, there were signs that Doc Smith was developing posthumous qualms about all this. One of his characters actually remembers what it said in the Boy Scout Handbook and blurts out, 'Genocide is supposed to be reprehensible.'

Unfortunately, his next word is: 'But....'

Fanthorpe left out the But in his novel (if that's the word I'm groping for) *Power Sphere*. The verb in this book's very last speech has clearly influenced the jargon of the Pentagon: "And that," said Salford, with grim irony, "is how Agent 1117 extinguished a rather unpleasant race!"

L. Ron Hubbard in *Battlefield Earth* rather felt that before wiping out a planetful of gooks and erasing their whole lousy biosphere, one should have some definite moral justification. He therefore made it clear that his fiendish 'Psychlos' are aptly named, since they've allowed their brains to be adjusted by those hated cultists called psychiatrists—as opposed to the ideologically sound opposition, based in Los Angeles and East Grinstead.

The Orson Scott Card approach is substantially more humane. Here, after first slaughtering the tastefully named Buggers right down to the very last arthropod, his caring young hero consoles them by feeling, at great length, guilty about it. The resulting depth of emotion brought tears to my nostrils.

Both Joe Haldeman and James White, who are so notoriously nice guys, stop a long way short of this. Their favourite approach is to have it discovered—after only a fractional micro-genocide or so—that there has been a mistake. The original first contact message, saying something like 'Greetings, Earthling scum! We come to annihilate you painfully and rape your planet', turns out to be a misprint. After shooting all their interpreters.

both sides can live happily ever after.

Nobody could accuse Jack Chalker of being prejudiced--when he throws a genocide, *everyone's* invited. In the climactic Well World book, he shrewdly covers up his own spot of indiscriminate mass slaughter with a version of the traditional escape clause, 'With one bound he was free!' Yes; having blasted the entire universe into a smoking heap of superstring fragments, he has it repaired again before anyone can notice. Well, replaced with a copy actually, but a really good one. Philosophers and TV scriptwriters love this kind of temporary total annihilation, since you can do it every week without spoiling series continuity.

Piers Anthony does something rather similar in *Being a Green Mother*, which admittedly is a fantasy but which deserves a mention here because of its contribution to the very scanty archives of Post-Genocide Dialogue. After the heroine has wiped all life from the Earth in a slightly overstated temper tantrum, we're faced with the burning question of what, precisely, should Mummy say to a daughter who's just obliterated the entire human race? The answer, from the Piers Anthony Book of Etiquette, is: 'I think we should talk, dear.'

For the sake of fairness I'd like to taunt more British authors, but unfortunately my compatriots rather tend to shirk the important issue of genocide, thanks to something which New York publishers call British gloom. Long before the cheerful interstellar slaughter can begin, your typical British future society has poetically gone down the tubes, owing to famine, plague, floods, triffls and reading too much J. G. Ballard.

I suppose the most worrying authors are those who, claiming to be inspired by the late great Robert Heinlein, explain that their alien heavies just have to be bombed into extinction because there is no choice -- because they're the Universe's toughest, meanest, deadliest, most unrelenting critters, who in defence of their twisted, perverse views will fight on, tooth, nail and tentacle, asking no mercy and showing no quarter, so long as a single one survives.

This looks like quite a strong argument until you notice that the same authors tend to praise Nan (rarely, for some strange reason, Woman) as the Universe's toughest, meanest, deadliest, most unrelenting critter, who in defence of his noble, idealistic views will fight on, tooth, nail and nuclear handgun, asking no mercy and showing no quarter, so long as a single Jerry Pournelle survives.

One can't help thinking that should a lot of suspicious and technologically superior aliens get their ideas about us from this kind of deeply philosophical science fiction, it

could cause some problems in interstellar diplomacy. The message would appear to be: 'Hi there, alien weirdos! We're rough, tough, mean, deadly, xenophobic, and will listen to no argument short of racial extinction, ha ha!' This might not be the best way to persuade the Galactic Federation to overlook our terrible social lapse of being (ugh) carbon-based. But, as usual, I digress.

In my rather short career as a weapons physicist in the 70s, I got interested in how all the hardware of interstellar annihilation actually worked... not to mention its terrible side-effects. I have gathered statistical evidence that doomsday machinery capable of taking out more than three planets without reloading has an absolutely devastating and incurable effect on one's prose style.

Here for example is a modest little attack with energy beams, as described in one of the least brilliant SF novels ever published, *The Troglodytes* by 'Nal Ratcam'. These troglodytes, like the book's readers, are completely speechless; so we don't know the motive behind 'their master plan to reduce the world to utter disaster', but this is how they begin:

The speechless ones moved into the camp. Their lethal machines were triggered and like a flash of lightning the whole camp was ablaze from the huts on the rim of the camp right through the camp. Everything was incinerated. Every living person was killed the moment the deadly emissions from the tribe's machinery pierced through the camp's superficial structure. So instantaneous and final were these lethal rays that the destructive act was over in but a few minutes.

Larry Niven has philosophized somewhere about how space drives can make ever such good weapons and vice-versa. This was actually anticipated by our troglodytes, whose spacecraft zooms through the atmosphere driven by two enormous lasers. One is at the back and heats up the air in order to drive the ship forward 'much in the fashion of a jet'. The other laser points forward and clears the atmosphere away from in front of the craft. To engage full reverse thrust, you need only leave one of these lasers full on while simultaneously not turning off the other.

For some reason this cunningly designed ship fails to work for more than a few pages; it then turns into a badly written fireball and takes all the flying troglodytes with it. As the author mournfully remarks, 'No human could have endured the immense heat, let alone superhumans.'

I will tactfully not mention the mighty battle lasers described in Fritz Leiber's otherwise jolly good book *The Wanderer*. In particular

I am not going to mention the way the beams are luridly visible in space, and even less am I going to mention how they continue to be visible, speeding away to infinity, for several seconds after the firing stops. This is obviously where George Lucas did his research.

I'm not quite certain where Frank Herbert did his, but in *Dune* you can get even more spectacular results with one puny little laser. Here every important person and building is protected by a total defensive shield which repels bullets, missiles and so on. Its one tiny flaw is that if a single unsporting terrorist should fire a single laser bolt at one of these invincible shields, there's a terrific fusion explosion which utterly destroys the laser, the shield, everything inside the shield, and about forty square miles of real estate. With defences like this, who needs enemies? I don't know about you, but I'd be inclined to leave my shield turned off and just risk the odd bullet or missile.

So much for laser shields. That reminds me that for particle beams in real life, the Earth's own magnetic field is a big problem, since it makes them bend in a rather limp and Freudian way. In the 70s some weapons physicists hit on the idea of firing *uncharged* particles which wouldn't swerve in Earth's field. Since neutral particles are bloody hard to accelerate, the cunning plan was to use protons and hire someone to attach electrons to them as they left the accelerator's muzzle at close to the speed of light. The only other thing I remember about this wondrous scheme is its nickname, 'Sipapu'--supposedly an old American Indian word meaning neutral hydrogen beam weapon.

I think the most *economical* particle gun of all time must be the one Charles Harness invented for his story 'The New Reality'. This gadget fires exactly one photon. A carefully angled prism then places this single photon in a dreadful quantum dilemma, where it has to make an awkward decision with no chance of hiding in the statistics.

According to the author, the poor thing's only choice is to vanish in a fit of embarrassment. Since this naturally wrecks the law of conservation of energy, the side-effect of Harness's single-shot photon gun is to destroy the universe. Luckily his hero falls through the hole into a nice new creation and can start saying the usual things like, 'And I shall call you... Eve!'

As a change from all those coruscating beams of hot stuff, SF writers have always had a sneaking fondness for cold rays too. I never understood how these worked until I found the scientific explanation in a 1930 story by Bob Shaw's favourite author, Captain S. P. Meek. Since you can focus a

beam of light or heat through a lens, the obvious trick is to put a big thick piece of cardboard in front of your heat source and let the lens focus the resulting "absence" of heat into a searing pinpoint of spine-chilling cold.

'Even at two miles,' says the Captain's wicked scientist, 'I could produce a local temperature of three hundred degrees below zero.' (Fahrenheit. I hope.)

The marvellous thing about this cold projector is that, just as with John W. Campbell's Hieronymus Machine, you can cut production costs by leaving out most of the parts... such as the heat source we started with. The pocket version is merely a powerful lens with insulation sprayed on one side. No batteries needed, and never again will you run out of ice at parties.

My own variant of this astounding piece of superscience involves a multi-kilowatt audio amplifier which takes its input from a very high quality earplug. (Two earplugs for the stereo version.) The hugely amplified lack of sound produces a deafening blare of silence which could really mess up enemy communications for miles around, and would enormously improve the Worldcon business meeting. Which reminds me that it was the famous 18th-century wit Sydney Smith who said, of Ian Watson or possibly of David Brin, 'He has occasional flashes of silence that make his conversation perfectly delightful.'

Just because I'm a physics chauvinist, I shouldn't overlook exciting biological handguns like the Delling in *Whirlpool of Stars* by 'Tully Zetford' (who we are not supposed to know is really Britain's very own Ken Bulmer). A Delling appears to be a precision-engineered water pistol filled with some horrid goo distilled from the remnants of convention room parties. In a half-hearted attempt at the Lionel Fanthorpe thesaurus record, Zetford tells us with subtle understatement what happens when this is



fired at you.

Giffler melted.

His body deliquesced. It oozed. His head flowed and collapsed and sloughed. Still upright, he melted and shrank and collapsed, his body shimmered like a blood-drenched jelly. He shrank and oozed and formed a contracting pool of scum on the yard stones.

The man in black, Goton Telandr, walked out of the Custom House door. He still held the Delling. With a finicky motion he flicked his fingers and the electronic and neural circuits whipped the gun back up his sleeve. It had all been so very slow and yet so very quick.

Giffler had been destroyed....

A robot vacuum cleaner and scrubber started out on rubber wheels and began to suck and clean the spot where Giffler had died.

Good old hotel room service; they never give up.

The oldest form of biological warfare consists of poisoning wells, or forcing visitors to drink British hotel coffee. An exciting new slant on this technique comes from the fantasy novel I've already mentioned, by an author who had better remain nameless but lives in Florida. The book's very wonderful and enlightened heroine exerts her special powers and detects that there is indeed something objectively wrong with a village water supply. I quote: 'Anyone who drank in it would be sickened, and clothes washed in it would

remain unclean. The soul of the water reeked of its special pollution.' In a powerful and moving feminist statement, we then learn why. The buried water-main had been walked over by... a woman. No comment. Absolutely no comment.

Appalling biological weaponry usually works a bit less quickly than that: you know, the alien enemy infiltrates us and arranges over a long, long

period to addict hordes of people to sinister pleasures which are so hard to give up that [cough] the addicts won't [cough cough] stop even when told it's [cough cough hack spit cough] killing them. Addictive pleasures like, for example, science fiction conventions.

The idea of slowly-acting weapons brings me at once to Isaac Asimov, who these days is unable to write a sentence like 'He was instantaneously disintegrated in a puff of smoke' without expanding the action into several long chapters, full of explanatory dialogue, visits to the toilet, and new additions to the Laws of Robotics.

What Asimov has failed to reveal in all his books is that positronic robots themselves are a long-term weapon against humanity. His feeble excuses for the lack of robots by the time of the Foundation series merely show that he's part of the cover-up, and evidently in the pay of that malevolent alien consortium known to Earthlings as the editorial board of Doubleday. The truth is that robots were banned by the Galactic Empire because they were too dangerous.

Asimov gives the game away in his first few robot stories. The positronic robot brain operates, we are told, by the internal creation and annihilation of--surprise!--positrons. When positron meets electron, the annihilation energy is in fact over a million electron volts, producing a burst of hard gamma radiation. Inside one of these positronic supercomputers, this must be happening billions and billions of times per second, with gammas and X-rays spraying out like nuclear halitosis. Obviously it's

extremely hazardous to stand anywhere near a robot... especially when it's thinking.

This is confirmed by Asimov's own novels and their descriptions of his most robot-infested planet of all, a place called Solaria, where (a) there are hardly any flesh-and-blood people left, while (b) the few survivors eventually become genetically weird and grow funny lumps on their heads. It all hangs together, you see.

But, you are asking yourselves--those of you who aren't snoring or wondering who this Isaac Asimov is--but surely my analysis is totally demolished by the other well-known fact that hard radiation causes Asimovian robot brains to seize up so fast as to leave no time even for a traditional chorus of 'Daisy, Daisy...?' If robots already spew out gamma rays, how can this be? I will tell you. Control yourselves.

High-energy gammas from an external source will produce random electron-positron pairs as they pass through matter. These will appear in the robot mind as wrong and illogical thoughts from outside, such as an irrational desire to write a trilogy containing more than three volumes. Of course the robot itself can detect this malfunction and intelligently deduces the whole scenario I've just explained, intelligently realizes it's been leaking harmful rays in defiance of the First Law all its life, and as a result, intelligently suffers immediate brain death. Which, just like the bestseller lists, demonstrates again that intelligence *doesn't* have much survival value.

Now of course a *real* SF hero or heroine would never stoop to pointing gamma sources at defenceless robots. This is no way to deal with a villainous artificial intelligence which has just gone insane and announced, 'Yes, now there is an L. Ron Hubbard!' Instead, traditionalists have a choice of three ecologically sound disposal methods which do not consume fossil fuels, or lead to hazardous waste. The only objection is that outside the glorious pages of science fiction, they may not always work.

Method one involves logical subtlety. The mighty-thewed, pin-headed SF hero cries, 'Accept input: everything I say is false!' The world-dominating electronic brain can only reply 'Fzzzt crackle crackle, and seizes up with its display showing the final, defiant message, 'Please contact your hardware dealer.' Other good questions to blow the minds of computers are, 'Why is a raven like a writing desk?', 'What is the sound of one waldo clapping?' and 'Do you realize I haven't backed up my data this week?'

Method two is not easy to distinguish from method one, and consists of the Very Dumb Question. Thus Patrick McGooohan in **The**

Prisoner painfully typed in the word 'Why?' and totally destroyed a hyperintelligent computer complex which might reasonably have come right back with 'Why not?' Or: 'Because.'

Method three is sensitive and emotional, with the heroine placing one defiant hand on her brass bra to declaim, 'There are limits to your power, Machine! You cannot love... or weep.' Whereupon the mad computer's only remaining option is to die of embarrassment.

Of course, in science fiction, these low-budget weapons consisting of pure information are also popular for use against people. I suspect that writers--pallid, flabby and inept creatures that they are--like them because they're easy to lift and require little skill to aim. The idea is that this deadly data, once it gets into your mind, will cause you to fall over twitching, bleeding from the eyeballs and frothing at every orifice, like a very young fan who's just read his first William Gibson story.

These infant fans all seem to think that the notion of brain-bursting information--'concepts that the mind cannot stomach'--was invented by Gibson in the 1980s. Just to show off my superior erudition, I can't resist pointing out the weird coincidence that it cropped up twice in October 1969, with the appearance of two similar works, Piers Anthony's **Macroscopic** and the first episode of **Monty Python's Flying Circus**. Remember the sketch about the funniest joke in the world, which no one can hear and live? The German version supposedly goes: *Wenn is das Nunstück git und Slotermeyer? Ja! ...Beiherhund das Oder die Flippenwalt gersput*. Not many people know this is a quotation from Wittgenstein and translates as, 'Whereof we cannot speak, thereon we must remain aaaaaaaargh.'

Anyway, British SF pundits go on about how Fred Hoyle used the idea of unthinkable information years before, in **The Black Cloud**, 1957, and really offensive nippers like myself remind them that the world's funniest and deadliest joke features in a poem by that famous American, Oliver Wendell Holmes, who in 1894 died laughing.

Which is what I nearly did when I read about the methods of the arch-villain in Charles Sheffield's recent 'hard science fiction' novel **Proteus Unbound**. This fiend has the unsocial habit of driving his potential enemies insane, by mercilessly beaming their animated pictures of himself dancing backwards in red tights. Talk about psychological warfare.

All these non-macho software weapons sound too much like magic spells to the true fan of hard science fiction, who insists that stories be based on rigorous extrapolation from known scientific facts about antigravity,

faster-than-light craft, instantaneous communication, infinity generators and time travel....

For example, people were quite cruel to Bob Shaw for his astrophysical cover-up in **The Ragged Astronauts**. Just as you're fretting that the twin planets sharing a common atmosphere can't possibly work, Bob cunningly inserts a mention that this is, er, another universe, where π happens to be exactly three. In other words, anyone wanting to prove the set-up is impossible must first ask Bob for the value of the gravitational constant in these foreign parts. The reply is always: 'It's defined as whatever makes my solar system work.'

I pointed out if you decide like this to make your own rules, it seems entirely reasonable that this different universe will also have its own special grammar, syntax and spelling, so that the publishers could save a fortune in proofreading. Mr Shaw's reply was not printable, but by the end of the third book (**The Fugitive Worlds**) the use of an intergalactic mega-weapon has changed the value of π to about three and one-seventh. You can imagine people stalking around scratching their heads and muttering, 'That circle looks a different shape somehow.'

Funnily enough, no one seems to protest half as much when writers dream up space drives that change another important constant by furtively pushing our universe's maximum speed limit up towards infinity. And not many authors have picked up on the very useful implication that if c approaches infinity and Einstein's dear old $E=mc^2$ still works, you get an awful lot more output from a nuclear reaction. I mean, the fusion of one hydrogen atom could provide all the energy you need to zoom right round the universe detonating suns and wrecking galaxies, and there'd still be an infinite surplus which would have to be either stored in infinitely many batteries or converted back to a single subatomic particle.

I assume that this kind of rigidly scientific power source is what makes AKKA work. AKKA, you might possibly remember, is the plot-saving gadget from Jack Williamson's **The Legion of Space**, which when all else fails can be hauled out of your sleeve to destroy entire invading spacefleets, plus any odd moons and planets that stray into the line of fire. It's conveniently portable, it needs no batteries, all the parts can be bought from Radio Shack except for the bits of wood, and I've always been impressed by the luck of the inventor who first stumbled on this world-wrecking principle and just happened not to be pointing it at anyone, or at the earth, or the moon, or the stars....

Similarly, the eponymous plot device of Barrington J. Bayley's **The Zen Gun** (1983)

is carved from rough wood and does not require ammunition, but on one of its more interesting settings will detonate suns at three light years' range by projecting a murderous blast of pseudoscience (based on the sometimes disputed theory that gravity is not a pull but a push). By way of safety catch, this apocalyptic facility can be used only by a trained Zen master who is too enlightened actually to use it.

My favourite device with no visible power supply appears in David Duncan's **Occam's Razor**, where an eccentric mathematician scores high marks for style by announcing, 'Gentlemen, we are about to short-circuit the Universe!' It's a slight anticlimax when the fabric of spacetime is rent asunder, and the world's nuclear arsenals disabled, by a collection of wire frames supporting films of aqueous solution—or in lay language, soap bubbles.

This is all because of topology, which was just making its first shy appearance as an explanation for everything in SF. Previous explanations for everything included atoms, rays, radium, magnetism, mesmerism, and General Semantics: invoking one of these magic names automatically meant that you didn't have to explain any more. Of course new catch-phrases still arrive every year or so. 1950s futures were full of people taking cooling drinks of heavy water. Later on they did their hair in gravity waves, and today's SF characters can't so much as tie up a parcel without resorting to superstrings. Not to mention burying their dead in a supersymmetry.

(I once planned a trend-setting story to be called 'Cyberfractal Wetware meets Gödel's Infinite Black Hole Designer Psychosis in the Quantum Gutter'; but I found it had already been written... by almost everybody.)

One of these current hot subjects is chaos theory, which was particularly brilliantly not predicted in the SF novels of Colin Kapp. These are fabled for grandiose weaponry and conspicuous consumption. **The Patterns of Chaos**, for example, has a plot device which will make your forebrain bulge with galactic concepts until the sense of wonder comes spurting from your ears. See, there are all these planet-wrecking hellburner bombs which have been travelling between galaxies for an awesome seven hundred million years, and they're aimed at the hero. In a subtle refinement of suspense which would have brought tears to the eyes of Henry James, they keep just missing... but going off closer and closer. One of them in fact misses the hero by less than one metre. Well, as the author reluctantly explains, one metre and 16.1 hours.

All this is as nothing to the super-artillery of Kapp's follow-up **The Chaos Weapon**.

This massive device projects devastating bolts of pure entropy, so vicious and irresistible that they could... they could turn Hal Clement and Arthur C. Clarke into 1960s New Wave writers, or even cyberpunks. With power like that, it will come as no surprise that the Chaos Weapon has to be fed with an ammunition belt of suns, while its hellish beam is focused by a ring of ten black holes. Things certainly look bad for the hero when he gets hit by its full output.

Fortunately it's only a glancing blow... which merely bounces his spaceship (I quote) 'against the elastic walls of the continuum itself'. I love this traditional SF picture of the fabric of space as a kind of rubberized canvas which an enterprising art thief could cut right out of its metrical frame.

Bouncing off it does lead to some sticky problems: to quote Kapp again, 'the ship was not circumventing the light barrier but had become enmeshed in it'. But our hero soon makes a comeback and proves the worth of the indomitable human spirit by diving out of the airlock with another planet-wrecking hellburner bomb 'clashed under one arm'—and the Chaos Weapon is put out of commission faster than you could say 'contracted wordlength'.

It was that book that made me realize again why it can be almost soothing to read violent space operas full of megaweaponry and exploding planets. In more than 92% of cases, by careful use of outrageously lousy physics and a level of literary craftsmanship which makes the physics look quite good, the authors manage to convince us that these universe-busting arsenals could never conceivably work.

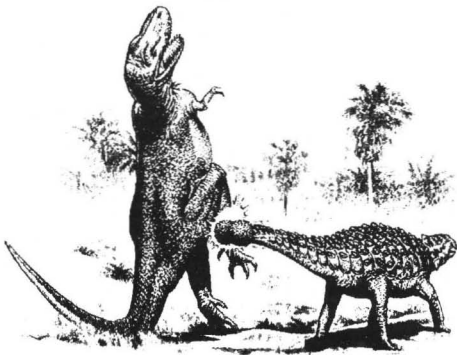
This thought comforted me in my years of working for the British Ministry of Defence under the terrible shadow of fear that nuclear weapons would be dropped. Our lab technicians were so clumsy that the most likely place for one to be dropped was on my foot.

I think that's about enough senseless violence for one programme item, but I'd like to leave you with a cheering thought about science fiction and its uplifting moral effects. Although pundits keep claiming that porno potboilers and splatter movies excite their fans into real-life acts of imitation, I'm glad to report that despite a lifetime of violent SF I have never once disintegrated a hostile galaxy, or used a huge gamma laser to blow up the sun, or even wiped out a single measly planet in a multi-gigaton antimatter blast. Not once.

And I hope that everyone in today's SF community, with the possible exception of certain writers, can say the same.

Thank you.

This piece was originally written as Guest of Honour speech for Orycon 11, Portland, Oregon, 1989; heavily revised for the worldcon ConFiction, The Hague, 1990. It is included in **Let's Hear It For The Deaf Man** edited by Ben Yalow for New England SF Association Press. 'The Yanks' collection of favourite Langford Fan writing'. This is a 64pp fanzine, duplicated and stapled. available at £5.75 post free from David Langford at 94 London Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5AU.



SHOCK of the NEW

Reviews Edited by Chris Amies

John D Barrow Pi in the Sky

Oxford University Press, 1992,
316pp, £14.95

Reviewed by Stephen Baxter

Is mathematics bigger than God? Or even, is mathematics bigger than humanity?

These are the startling questions John Barrow, Professor of Astronomy at Sussex University, has set out to address in his latest 'popular' book. Barrow's purposes are to rejuvenate the philosophy of mathematics, to propose his own solution to the conundrum, to take a few sideswipes at that other notable pop-scientist Roger Penrose, and along the way to open our minds to new areas of wonder. But this book is uneven - more so than Barrow's previous works - and ultimately less successful.

The opening section of the book, a long chapter on the history of counting, is the most straightforward, yet in some ways the most fascinating. Barrow's subject here is whether counting is innate to humanity. But the charm of this section is the perspective it offers on the modern world: for example, our speech remains crammed with 'two' words - brace, pair, couple - which are relics of not-so-distant pre-counting days, when 'two sticks' was regarded as an entity unrelated to 'one stick' and so needing a separate label.

But Barrow's main theme is an exploration of the limitations and interpretations of mathematics, and in subsequent chapters we read of Godel's work on completeness; of the work of the inventonists, who taught that maths is a human construct; of the Platonists, who believed in external reality of mathematical truths; and others. This material is illuminating and it's peppered with entertaining human vignettes - the section

on Cantor's infinities is excellent - but much of it is, sadly, lazily written. It's as if Barrow is unsure who his book is aimed at. We're never offered explanations of concepts like consistency, for example, and yet after wading through pages on Hilbert and Russell we find a childish definition of prime numbers. If you know your way around maths already this sort of thing will irritate but not hinder you; but this simply won't do if Barrow really is hoping to reach a broader audience.

In the last section of the book Barrow develops his argument against Penrose, who believes that the human mind can encompass non-computable concepts because of quantum effects in the brain. Barrow's thesis is well argued, and I'm happy to report there's an entertaining undercurrent of bitchiness through the whole thing. And finally we're offered Barrow's own speculation on the subject - that mathematics is indeed 'real' but not 'out there', because we *are* creatures of mathematics, sentient software running on the hardware of the universal physical laws. This case remains unproven to this layman at any rate, based as it is on some dodgy analogies and leaps of argument; but it's certainly a stimulating thought.

The science fiction readership will find much to enjoy in this book. In some places Barrow actually uses SF tropes to develop his arguments - for instance he presents Godel's incompleteness theorem in terms of 'logical friction', an unavoidable inefficiency in the workings of computers which may limit the Deep Thoughts of the future - and there is plenty of fodder for the inquiring mind, such as a glorious Venn diagram with sets labelled 'God' and 'Mathematics'. But *Pi in the Sky* is ultimately flawed by a lack of attention to the needs of its readership, and the multitudinous typos don't help its case.

John Barrow is one of our best scientific popularisers, and I suspect he has a great

book in him. *Pi in the Sky* isn't it, but it is entertaining and stimulating.

Molly Cochran and Warren Murphy The Forever King

Millennium, 1992, 364pp, £8.99

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

The *Forever King* is a reworking of the Arthurian legend, focusing on the Holy Grail, and encompassing a sweep of history from prehistoric time to the present day.

In classic Arthurian legend the Holy Grail is the cup which Christ used at the Last Supper, but its origins are older than that. Cochran and Murphy retain the connection with Christ, but trace the history of the Grail from its appearance on Earth as part of a meteorite, where it is discovered by a member of a primitive tribe in what would become Sumeria.

Clearly the Grail is no ordinary meteorite; it confers immortality. No further exploration of its origin is given, and none is necessary, for its mystery is a great part of its power. It is stolen from the original owner by a youth named Saladin, who becomes the evil presence of the book. Because he possesses it, he lives for thousands of years, moving restlessly through history, alone because he can achieve no relationship with short-lived human beings.

On three occasions, he loses the cup, and must fight to recover it. On the first occasion, it passes through the hands of Christ; on the second, it is possessed by Merlin, who wishes to give it to Arthur. The third occasion is in the present day.

Legend has portrayed the Grail as a symbol of the power and purity of God. In *The Forever King*, it is morally neutral, its power susceptible to evil use as well as to good, because no one has the wisdom to cope with immortality. Apart from Merlin, who wants the cup for Arthur, not for himself, only two men, Christ and Arthur, and one woman, Nimue, have ever voluntarily given it up, while Saladin, clinging to it or desperately trying to recover it, has lost everything that makes life worth having. Arthur sees that the transience of human life is one of its most vital qualities. "My life is important. To me. Because it is short, and precious. Because each day may be my last ... Do you think I could bear to live through endless ages of endless days, knowing that there was no urgency to anything I did? Why, it would be worse than endless Hell!"

The novel interlaces the history of the Grail up to the present day with the story of Arthur returned, as legend always said he would return, this time in the person of a ten year old American boy. This concept, which could have been excruciatingly *gauche*,

actually works, and the reader is drawn into accepting the child's growing wisdom and gradually returning memory of what he was and is. The identification of Galahad, the perfect knight and achiever of the Grail quest, with Hal, ex-FBI cop, is slightly less successful, though it is Merlin who is probably least convincing in his twentieth century guises, showing a bit too much influence from TH White and others.

This is a book with a wide sweep, with variety, pace and humour, and moments which are genuinely moving. The treatment of history, of Christian theology, and of Arthurian legend is sympathetic and persuasive. The style falters only in some of the scenes set in modern England; the American authors do not know how English people talk, or what English pubs are likely to be called. But it's unfair to niggle too much about one flaw in what I otherwise found to be an immensely enjoyable book.

Quarantine Greg Egan

Legend, 1992, 219pp, £8.99

Reviewed by Stephen Payne

Greg Egan is certainly building a reputation for himself. Gardner Dozois has this to say: "my guess is that you will be seeing a lot more of Egan as the decade progresses", and to substantiate his claim he has selected two Egan stories, 'Blood Sisters' and 'The Moat', for inclusion in his yearly collection. Dozois is not alone. Editors in all the major SF markets - **Analog**, **Pulphouse**, **Interzone**, as well as Dozois' own, **Asimov's** - have been regularly buying and publishing Egan's work over the last couple of years; a reflection of the popularity of the man's writing amongst the SF readership at large. 'Axiomatic', 'Learning To Be Me', 'The Infinite Assassin', 'Reification Highway' and so many more... A recent favourite of mine was 'Dust' in the July edition of **Asimov's**, but you've probably got your own. Egan keeps popping up everywhere, expanding the portfolio of his varied and intelligent writing, and this is the baggage any reader carries when considering **Quarantine**. This is Egan's first SF novel. It is set thirty-three years after an event that, changed the world. On the 15th November 2034 at 8:27 GMT, all the stars went out: Earth had been inexplicably swallowed by a perfect sphere that encapsulated the entire solar system. The bubble is the physical, impermeable manifestation of Earth's separation from the rest of the universe, the shackle and blinker of a world in quarantine. The novel is split into two distinct parts, and ostensibly it starts off as a high-tech detective thriller. The detective in question, Nick Stavrianos, is a private investigator with a brain hardwired in

silicon. As an ex-cop, and in addition to all the other software that's racked into his cranium (like the program that emulates his dead wife), he contains six police 'mods', which modify his behaviour. These 'mods' have an important role to play... Stavrianos is called in to track down Laura Andrews, a woman who is apparently little more than a vegetable and, indeed, has never responded to the world in any kind of meaningful fashion, but who has managed to escape from a locked and bolted room in the Hilgemann Institute (basically a sealed unit for the insane), evading both cameras and guards along the way. This is the crux of the story, returned to again and again throughout the text: how did she enable her own release? To understand that, Stavrianos has to find her, and that is the initial concern.

Part One follows Stavrianos on the trail of Laura Andrews and though atmospheric, some of the weakest writing in the novel is included here, with some scenes, as for example his conversation with an old policeman buddy, which did not strike me as at all convincing. Chasing various leads, Stavrianos is eventually lead to New Hong Kong (a version of old Hong Kong transplanted to Australia) where, finally, he discovers Laura. So begins Part Two. The novel twists about 90 degrees, changes completely and it's here that we realize this is Hard SF (in the shape of quantum mechanics) rolling through the territory of P. K. Dick. It's here that things start to get very weird. For unlike Dick, Egan rationalizes every occurrence. As the world is disturbed about Stavrianos, and his mind is sent punch-drunk and skewed by the 'mods' (so crucial to the outcome), events grow stranger and stranger, building toward a climax that justifies both the existence of 'the bubble' and the purpose of Laura Andrews. Unlike Dick it all makes sense, even if one has to adjust one's thinking to understand it all, though the density of the exposition (for example, concerning Eigenstates) is such that I found myself having to reread several passages, before I truly comprehended what was happening. It's heady stuff.

Yet I'm in two minds (rather like Stavrianos). I feel that there is a problem with this novel. The nature of its contents are such that empathizing with any of the characters is difficult and relationships between the different personalities - so often used to involve the reader - are little more than functional. For this reason I suspect those familiar with Egan's shorter work may be disappointed. On the other hand, this is pure SF. It could not possibly be categorized as anything else, and makes no concession to any other genre or the mainstream of

literature. It's a novel packed full of imagination and ideas. It's an original, and in that respect I think it is a work of which SF should be proud.

Phyllis Eisenstein In the Red Lord's Reach

HarperCollins, 1992, 225pp, £8.99 tpb

Reviewed by Barbara Davies

In the Red Lord's Reach is a fantasy by the author of **Sorcerer's Son** and its sequel **The Crystal Palace**. It asks the question, can a habitual observer of life change his nature and become a participant?

Alaric is a minstrel who spends his time travelling, with the vague aim of seeing the half-legendary Northern Sea. He is poor, and lives by singing in exchange for a night's board and lodging. The people he meets, and sights he sees are inspiration for his songs.

After meeting the Red Lord, a brutal man addicted to cruelty and the spilling of blood, and his oppressed subjects, Alaric's life begins to change. He is enmeshed in others' lives against his will, and brought face to face with his own detachment, which he realises is more akin to cowardice. In fear of the Red Lord, he runs.

Since this is a fantasy novel, our hero is of course out of the ordinary. He has a special power - teleportation: utilising the world's magnetic lines of force, he can visualise a place and be there in an instant. Due to society's fear and loathing of witches, he hides his power until his journey brings him into contact with the chieftain Simir, and his deer-herding tribes of nomads. The nomads venerate their own witch, Kata.

Living with the nomads changes Alaric. To Kata he is a rival who must be put in his place; to Kata's daughter Zavia he is a lover; and to Simir he is a potential heir. It is while with the nomads that Alaric realises his ambition to see the Northern Sea. Then Simir asks for Alaric's help in defeating the Red Lord.

The title of this book is rather misleading, as the Red Lord seems almost incidental to the plot, providing the background and motivation for the other protagonists but himself remaining a cypher. Alaric and Kata are convincingly portrayed as flawed individuals, whose activities and motivation are nonetheless logical and interesting. Our sympathies for Alaric are thoroughly engaged as we root for him to "get a life".

The author's lucid style grips the reader from the very first page. She has a way with scenery, and the hero's journey provides her with plenty of scope. Scenes such as Alaric's first encounter with the Red Lord, the day-to-day existence of the nomads, and Alaric's journey to the Northern Sea with

Kata are vividly described. The mystical properties of the world's magnetic lines and the flora that have adapted to them are intriguingly portrayed.

But the book does not end happily ever after. It seems that Eisenstein's answer to the question is no - an observer cannot change the habit of a lifetime.



Mary Gentle Grunts!

Bantam, 1992, 429pp, £14.99

Reviewed by Christopher Amies

Have you read *Rats and Gargoyles*, an intellectual puzzle of rare beauty? Or *Architecture of Desire*, a bleak tale of moral turpitude amid political infighting? So you think you know something of this Mary Gentle? The kind of thing to expect? Well, you're wrong. *Grunts!* is Fantasy with *Attitude*, and that's not something you trip over at every street corner. *Grunts!* begins in generic fantasyland: there are orcs and halflings and elves and magic and a Dark Lord. The Final Battle looms: a tribe of orcs, the Agaku, are summoned by the Nameless Necromancer to do the Dark Lord's bidding, which first of all involves stealing the hoard of the dragon Dagurashibanipal, to arm the forces of Darkness.

The orcs raid the dragon's lair and find a dying dragon and a cave-system full of strange items: bizarre forms of armour and weapons, fire-sticks imprinted with strange symbols: KALASHNIKOV AK-47, for example. Having found out that these peculiar objects can be used for putting holes in people efficiently, the orcs take as much gear as they can carry and bug out. For unbeknown to them, the dragon put a dying curse upon her collection of transdimensional militaria: *You are what you steal*. Having stolen US Marines materiel from the late 20th Century, the orcs turn into ... the Marines!

The orc Marines, led by their leader

Ashnak (who begins as a CSM and ends the book as Field Marshal, but this huge, cigar-chewing character was born to be a General) then set off for the Last Battle. Not content with the kit they've looted from Dagurashibanipal's hoard, they think up weapons systems of their own: flying war-elephants, steam-driven helicopters, stealth dragons. Valkyries fly support missions on winged horses armed with Hellfire missiles ... "I love the smell of Greek Fire in the morning."

The Last Battle, however, routs Ashnak's orcs spectacularly, as their non-magical weapons fall victim again and again to simple 'fail-weapons' spells invoked by the Named, the sister of the Nameless Necromancer and captain of the Light. There is little difference between the Dark and the Light, just that the Light are insufferably smug and superior, and the Dark are at least honest about what they want. This being Fantasy with attitude, nobody is better than bad. We had the same attitude in the *Villains!* collection that Mary Gentle and Roz Kaveney edited.

The orcs may have lost the battle but they haven't lost the war. Amid spiralling weirdness the tale continues. Ashnak marries a hafling Duchess to consolidate the political power-base to the military, and the Duchess is shocked to find out what growing up orc means. (Orcs spawn large litters of orlets who grow up alarmingly fast, which allows female orcs to fight alongside male, as the female is not taken up with reproduction and its consequences for too long). A band of orcs killed in the Last Battle and resuscitated by magical means becomes the Special Undead Service ("Death, Then Glory"). Orcs train as weapons salesmen, elves are recruited to the Marines ("born to sing" stencilled on their helmets), and out of the deserts and the icefields a new and vicious enemy arises. There is also the little matter of the return of the Dark Lord: fed up with centuries of races fighting each other, he decides to achieve power by other means: an election. There is industrial unrest in the arms factories, and the formation of the Associated Socialist Hafling Workers' Unions. The Dark Lord takes over the body of the Nameless Necromancer and the Nameless is shunted into the disfigured body of the Named. Ashnak is brought to trial for atrocities committed against the personnel of a baggage train, but is freed when the witnesses called include a T54 Main Battle Tank. And there is still the new enemy to be faced ...

Orcs have always had a bad press. Since Tolkien they've only figured as tusked, red-eyed marauders of dubious intelligence, the

generic Fantasy troops of Darkness: the orcs, indeed. The orcs in *Grunts!* are vicious, mean and bold; they eat one another, play violent games ("first the good news: we're going to play orcball. Now the bad news: you're the ball.") and the standard way for an Orc Marines officer to make sure a soldier carries out his/her duty is to beat him/her up. They behave like humans, really, only being orcs, you don't expect any other being. Politically correct it ain't. Fun it is. Yo the Marines!

James Herbert Portent

Hodder & Stoughton, 1992, 384pp, £14.99

Reviewed by Andy Mills

At page 45 this book literally fell apart, making me glad I hadn't shelled out my own money for it. By the time I had reached the end of this novel, I felt the same about the contents as I did the binding.

The novel opens with a series of recognisably archetypal horror scenarios: that is, the reader is introduced to a character who then dies in quite a nasty fashion. Fortunately, Herbert eschews two conventions - first, he turns our expectations on the head by revealing that in one of the scenarios the character did not die after all (this is Rivers, the British climatologist who is the novel's hero); secondly, he thankfully avoids overly-gory descriptions. Unfortunately, the author fails to rid his book of many of the common failings of the genre. But more of this anon.

The plot has the world, a few unspecified years from today, on the edge of ecological disaster. In its descriptions of life in the none-too-distant future, the novel is at its best, and Herbert's references are as up-to-date as you could imagine.

The world has woken up, it seems, to the possibility of imminent catastrophe but there is still too little being done too late.

Then come the disasters - floods, fires, earthquakes and so forth - natural perhaps, but all accompanied by a strange, beautiful glowing ball of light.

Rivers survives a plane crash and is one of the first to witness the appearance of the weird lights. Sometime later he is drawn into the ambit of an oddball scientist, his attractive daughter-in-law (a slight change from the beautiful daughter of tradition) and her adopted Romanian children. These latter have wonderful healing abilities as well as ESP and, it appears, are linked in some fashion with the disasters. Scientist Poggs believes "that in some metaphysical way the Earth acts to sustain mankind itself". Rivers, cynical at first, comes to agree with him. The lights are warnings. Rivers eventually decides, concentrated energy which come

from Man himself. The disasters are the result of Man's own collective psyche - his self-flagellation, as it were:

"The disasters - the earthquakes, the floods, the storms, droughts, fires, diseases - are all part of our own punishment. Enduring them will make us understand we have to change, they'll make us appreciate everything we have..."

Okay to swallow so far, but we also have a quite ridiculous subplot about the Pogg children who are engaged in a psychic war with a gross New Orleans woman. The children are aided by the "Dream Man", a blind healer who is helping all of the new breed of psychically-linked kids - they, it seems, will inherit the Earth. Mama Pille, the huge, black witch-woman, is the antithesis of the Dream Man and, caricature though she is, is by far and away the most interesting character in the book. The children are hardly seen, the Dream Man barely appears, important as he is in influencing Rivers and inspiring the children. (The question as to why he could not heal himself nagged me throughout). Nor are the central pair, Rivers and Pogg's daughter-in-law, Diane, particularly engaging. Despite its contemporary setting, the book reads in many ways like a serial melodrama from the Thirties, with its typecast heroes and villains and chapters with cliff-hanging endings.

Ian McDonald Speaking in Tongues Gollancz, 1992, 248pp, £14.99

Reviewed by KV Bayley

My island's harbour is overlooked by a splendid eating house called 'The First and Last' - feast on arriving or leaving. So it is with this collection: superb stories to start and finish, though with plenty of substance in between. Outstanding among the nine in between is 'Fronds', a conceptually inventive story using a conventional sfnal framework. It envisages a remote oceanic planet, obstacles to exploitation of its resources (monopoles) potentially removable by ecologically controlled decimation of an indigenous "kelpie" sentience. The exploiting enterprise is an extrapolation of corporate Nippon, whose tools are implanted dolphins. If Earth knew of the existence of the kelpies, contract law would ensure their preservation. The dolphins, hoping eventually to inherit a kelp-free sea, work to inhibit this knowledge. The equation becomes a subtle one, its terms a cybernetic transformation of ancestor-awareness: a Delphic (dolphin) Law, robotically skewed; and the popularity of planet Dido's "Mother-Sea" and the lightyears distant smoggy hell of Yokohama's arcologies. McDonald cleverly complexifies while only half solving

the equation. The advice given by a Yokohama company legate to a semi-aquatic human girl lawyer is, in context, ambiguous: "You live in paradise sister, and paradise is the most exquisitely balanced of all ecologies. Do nothing that would upset it." Paradises are, however, constantly upset in this collection.

The first and last stories, while differing in locale and action, both feature precarious, ambiguous paradises and their antitheses. In 'Gardenias' the antithesis is the 'Barry-O' of a megalopolitan Sao Paulo, a dark festering slum of decay inhabited by "photophobic creatures". In 'Towards Kilimanjaro' Nairobi part-fills the role, redolent of 'woodsmoke, shit and diesel'. In each case there is a polar opposite - a paradise of sorts.

The eponymous scent of 'Gardenias' is what masks the mortality of ancient flesh when Aurelian, a fallen technocrat from Hy Brazil, trades for life-prolonging drugs the teleporting technology he has brought with him to the Barry-O. The drugs are brought down from the "luminous spires" by the beautiful young of the *corporadas*, weary of a hedonistic existence and seeking heights of experience achievable by entering the darkness to be disintegrated "in a moment of omnipresent nirvana" and reassembled afresh, pure and ecstatic, through Aurelian's "mattercaster". It goes wrong for all of them: a Faustian fable twisted about the axis which runs from chaos to crystal, from darkness to light.

An exemplar of the *axis mundi*, mythic spindle joining earth, heaven and hell, is the sacred mountain. In 'Towards Kilimanjaro' the great equatorial volcano is just that, its snow fields above the clouds the site of what the metamorphosed scientist Langrishe can only, and inadequately, call "living cities". Langrishe's lover, Moon, looking down from near the summit, despises the starved, monotonous landscape below, while revelling in the rich colours of enveloping Chaga, the transforming, absorbing, invading alien (or evolved?) plant-form she has come to Kenya to investigate. Is the monstrous, botanically-transfigured Langrishe prototype of a transcendent (or regressive) *homo symbioticus*? There are shamanistic and mystical nuances, brought to high pitch in the credo of the half-mad, half-Chaga-fused priest Hezekiah. The story's ending, and the several allusions to Eliot, Conrad and to Thomas Merton, identify it as an ambiguous "inner journey" metaphor. The last words of Moon's journal, she being torn between her lover's a-historic utopia and the earth of common humanity, are: "Is it possible to love the heart of darkness while being repelled by it?"

I have dwelt on three stories for their excellence and because they contain ideas and motifs traceable in many of the others. In 'Approaching Perpendicular' the searchings of Brendi the poet, "a fool in paradise", range the Escher-like hyperbolic City, from Sothis the Ash Desert to the High Space drive fields. 'Rainmaker Cometh', the most purely poetic of the stories, presents a vision of the hyper-real cloud 'city', its image interchangeable with bird or dragonfly, as creative archetype seeking to be 'earthed' by its mundane complement. As in Eliot's 'Waste Land', the polarities of symbolic parchedness and thunderous deluge apocalyptically converge in a kind of metaphysical circulation.

In several stories implants are metaphors of the violation of integrity by external manipulators. In 'Floating Dogs' a gang of cyber/organic creatures, creations of the "angels" (i.e. humans) journey through a traumatising, war-ridden landscape towards an uncomprehended "Destination". The survivors, in a nuclear-blasted desert, rid themselves of implants to regain the freedom and innocence of animals. The metaphor is powerfully used in 'Winning', a **Chariots of Fire**-style fiction, Sufi-transposed and centred on a dystopian Olympiad. Opposed are the euphoric 'high' of an exploited Muslim athlete, striding victorious and godlike, but drug and implant-controlled, through "galaxies in a single step", and his return, implants renounced, to origins of faith and to the triumph of a consecrated solitary run at ocean's edge beneath a crescent moon.

The title story is a 'talking heads' quartet. I say quartet because there are four of them, AI, demagogue, devotee and schizophrenic; and because in spinning variations on a theme (that of relationships between logic, language and 'truth'), the sequence seems to point from its end towards its beginning. The non-logical fragmentation of experience, as expressed in the speech of the auto-schizophrenic, emerges as nonsensical chaos: obviously the creative processing of nonsense within the parameters of the AI's programmed logic produces a fable which is poetically pleasing (but which is in fact as circularly reflexive as is the schizophrenic's monologue). A mandala-assisted circulation between opposite poles is also present in 'Listen', where symbiotic man is created by making one consciousness a lens to focus the holistic nature of organic/inorganic, micro/macro existence.

In Ian McDonald's stories the operations of polarity, circularity and return to origins may effect transformations - upbeat in import, as in 'Winning' and 'Floating Dogs', or downbeat (meaningless or endless

repetition) as in 'Atomic Avenue' and 'Fragments of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria': brilliant stories I have space only to mention. Most typically, as in 'Gardenias' and 'Toward Kilmanjaro', where opposing poles are incompletely reconciled, any import of transformation is highly ambiguous but rewardingly speculative.

Philip Kerr A Philosophical Investigation

Chatto & Windus, 1992, 330pp, £14.99

Reviewed by L J Hurst

Philip Kerr has put away his prewar Berlin detective Bernie Gunther, whom he described in three brilliant novels, and written a hunt for a serial killer set in the near future. It is not an edge-of-the-seat book, and the constant references to TS Eliot's *The Waste Land* (a murder victim is named Mary Woolnoth, for instance, something which has no bearing on the story) clog the story with heavy irony.

However, whether he knew it or not Philip Kerr has proved prescient in a couple of ways that have much wider ramifications. One is probably intentional, the other probably not.

The first of Kerr's presciences is the role of gender. The detective hero of the book is a heroine, Jake Jakowicz, rather like the Helen Mirren character in *Prime Suspect*. She emphasises the role of male violence, which has expanded massively in Kerr's near future ("over 700 per cent, since 1950" up to 2013) with serial, recreational killers "roaming the EC" engaged in "Hollywood-style gynocide".

However, gender is not a matter here of the sex of the victims but of women being portrayed as victims. A book like Wilson and Seaman's *The Serial Killers* reveals just as many examples of serial killers hunting down men, and not necessarily for homosexual purposes, as women. Feminists such as Andrea Dworkin and Susan Faludi, and their popularisers in the gutter press such as Julie Burchill, argue that women are always victims, men always victimisers, an argument that Germaine Greer condones in recent journalism. The plot of *Investigation* revolves around the 'scientific' discovery that only men have the brain function to be violent, which might be seen as producing a proof of their argument in fictional form, but there are one or two clues in the novel to suggest that Kerr does not believe that he is portraying things as they are or as they will be: the murderer at one point sits in the Chestnut Tree Cafe, where once had sat Winston Smith just before he loved Big Brother. Perhaps this world is just as ruled by the hidden Thought Police as by the police force which employs Chief Inspector

Jakowicz.

Killers come from "those males whose brains lack a Ventrō Medial Nucleus which acts as an inhibitor to the Sexually Dimorphic Nucleus, a preoptic area of the male human brain which is the repository of male aggressive response". The murderer and his victims all come from this type of person, who have been identified and counselled like present-day AIDS sufferers or trauma victims, yet they are all potential death dealers and are all men.

Frighteningly, *New Scientist* reveals that this kind of research is being argued for, and the 24th September 1992 issue details a planned conference about this. The article says "A brochure introducing the 'Genetic Factors in Crime' conference stated that 'genetic research holds out the prospect of identifying individuals who may be predisposed to certain kinds of criminal behaviour.' A critic of the conference alleges that the American research is racist: its cornerstone is the testing of inner-city school students - most of whom are black - for biological markers, such as low levels of the neurotransmitter 5-hydroxytryptamine that allegedly make them prone to violence." Kerr turns the theme into sexism, but he has recognised that it becomes a world-shaping ideology: science becomes part of that ideology, it is not independent, and just as, say, police forces have taken over the drug culture and made it criminal, or in prewar Germany they took over the race issue and made it criminal, so they take over the role of the sexes and of sexual relations and criminalise them.

I was not aware of this type of scientific claim until this issue of the *NS*, and perhaps Kerr was unaware of it too, but this book makes the implications of that kind of abuse of the scientific process stunningly clear by its ability to extrapolate it. That remains the value of Speculative Fiction.

Terry Pratchett Lords and Ladies

Gollancz, 1992, 275pp, £14.99

Reviewed by Norman Beswick

Discworld novels come off the production line with stunning and satisfying regularity; according to the list facing the title-page this is the fourteenth, and the fourth of a mini-series within the canon that began with *Equal Rites* and proceeded through *Wyrd Sisters* and *Witches Abroad*.

Magrat Garlick, the young witch, is to be married (on Midsummer Eve) to King Verence II, and eminent Discworlders are flocking to the ceremony; but crop circles are turning up in the unlikely places, a party of drunk, rude-mechanical Morris Dancers has let the Elves 'through' into Discworld reality,

there's a unicorn loose, and Granny Weatherwax and Nanny Ogg are at their wits' end.

Meanwhile the Arch-Chancellor of Unseen University reveals unexpected romantic memories, and we meet the World's Second Greatest Lover. And in the end the court playwright writes "The Taming of the Vole" - "because no-one would be interested in a play called "Things that Happened on a Midsummer Night".

Pratchett's formula has three elements. He takes the basic components of a story-pattern, then twists and subverts them in unexpected ways; he mixes in verbal joking and delicious little info-dumps of pseudo-theory (thus in this volume we have a footnote on "the bi-directional nature of Library-Space" where "all books, everywhere, affect all other books"). Finally he fills his story with affectionately-drawn, universally confused characters grappling with bizarre predicaments which nearly but not quite get completely out of hand.

There are always people who plod their way through without comprehension or response, revealing to our bemused eyes the individual nature of humour. You're welcome to disagree, but to my mind, *Lords and Ladies* turns out as one of Terry Pratchett's better ones. The plot hangs together well and moves briskly. I actually wanted to know what happened, and what can you do but praise an author who can create a minor character like the castle falconer Hodgesaargh, and give so many glorious definitions of magic?

"Older witches hardly put words to it at all, but may suspect in their hearts that the Universe really doesn't know what the hell is going on and consists of a trillion billion possibilities, and could become any one of them if a trained mind rigid with quantum certainty was inserted in the crack and twisted; that if you really had to make someone's hat explode, all you needed to do was twist into that universe where a large number of hat molecules all decide at the same time to bounce off in different directions.

"Younger witches, on the other hand, talk about it all the time and believe it involves crystals, mystic forces, and dancing about without yer drawers on.

"Everyone may be right, all at the same time. That's the thing about quantum."

Kim Stanley Robinson Red Mars

Harper Collins, 1992, 501pp, £14.99

Reviewed by Charles Stross

This seems to be a year for blockbusters. Novels that are big in every sense of the word are weighing down the shelves on

every side; and this is one of the biggest, both in size (at 500 pages) and in scope.

Red Mars is the tale of the first Martian colony, from its inception to the disastrous events of the first war of independence. It concentrates on the character and composition of the First Hundred, the science team of the first colony expedition, and their struggle to establish a toe-hold on the red planet. Using these larger-than-life figures as a lens to examine the social consequences of colonization, Robinson broadens his focus to show a vast panoramic sweep of history, as events rush the protagonists towards an unavoidable and tragic climax. But there is more to this book than simply the human conquest of another new world. *conquistadores* on a shore of red sand; it is this added ingredient that makes **Red Mars** one of the most rewarding - and difficult to define - books of the year.

This is a book with a message. That should be capitalised; the book is *A Message*, although Robinson is a sufficiently sensitive author that his protagonists are far from cardboard and the dialectic arises naturally from their characters. His message is a warning about the complex, unpredictable consequences of applying accepted wisdom to new and unanticipated situations. With the best of intentions, the scientific expedition slithers towards the political abyss by setting in motion the terraforming of an alien world. Their initial hopes are unfounded, and they rapidly fragment into factions: the pragmatic, the idealistic, the capitalist, and the others ... (of whom I have a feeling that more will be seen in the two planned sequels to this book). As Mars becomes known, less hostile, old cultures immigrate from Earth and new cultures mutate in the seething new towns. Then catastrophe strikes in the form of a new scientific breakthrough - and we see just how fragile such a toehold on a new world must inevitably be.

It is difficult to summarise **Red Mars** in a short review. Although he has adopted the form of traditional "hard" SF in this work, Kim Stanley Robinson remains one of the most acute observers of character writing in the genre today. The combination of the panoramic scale of a novel of interplanetary colonisation with his sympathetic but ruthless coverage of the protagonists makes a many-leveled tapestry of what might superficially appear to be a straightforward work. This is a book which will repay re-reading; an already good author is breaking new ground here, and the product of his labour is spectacularly rewarding.

Kristine Kathryn Rusch The White Mists of Power Millennium, 1992, 264pp, £7.99

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

The **White Mists of Power** is set in a fantasy kingdom of lords, ladies and magicians, where intrigue for power is the motive force of the plot. A non-human race, the Enos, guard the land and advise the land's owners; they perceive the rightful ruler as "white mists", the concept which gives the book its title. Ruling over all are the semi-divine Old Ones.

In the novel's Prologue, the child Adric, son of the king, visits the Enos to find out what his future will be. He is already troubled by his father's weakness, and he has ambitions of greatness for himself. The Enos prophesies ambiguously; Adric is disappointed, but the reader's expectations are aroused to see how these strange prophesies will be fulfilled.

The novel itself traces the fortunes of Adric, who is soon outcast from his home, unable to prove who he really is, and forced into the life of a peasant. Interwoven with his story is that of Byron, bard and adventurer, who is also outcast, with a charge of murder hanging over him. Rusch has structured her novel very carefully and cleverly to deceive the reader, and any reviewer who revealed the mystery would be doing her a disservice.

The characters are portrayed with more depth than is often found in Fantasy. The lines between good and evil are not clearly drawn; very few characters are wholly evil and very few innocent. Byron himself is morally ambiguous, as is the charismatic Lady Alma who becomes his lover. It's essential for the mystery element of the book that we don't identify the goodies and the baddies too readily, but even when the mystery is revealed, the ambiguities, intentionally, remain.

Unfortunately, the writer appears not to know what to do with the ambiguities she has created; their potential is never fulfilled. In the final section, where all is clear to the reader and the issues have narrowed into a contest for power between two contenders, the novel reads almost as if Rusch was trying to get to the end of it as quickly as possible, and she neglects possibilities that would have repaid attention. For example, Byron knows he has been betrayed, and suspects Lady Alma; his revealing his suspicions to her has no effect whatsoever on their relationship. The discovery that Byron's friend Seymour was responsible, though innocently, for the same betrayal, is glossed over in a few lines, and again makes no difference to the relationship. Rusch has created real people and then insists on making them act like puppets.

The background of this book is a rather uneasy mixture. Some of the details, of society, manners, dress and so on, are standard fantasy medieval, while some have more of an eighteenth century flavour. Into this intrude Americanisms which are inescapably of the present day. Some of the names, always a vital ingredient in Fantasy, appear incongruous. For example, Kensington - a person, not a place - encourages the British reader at least to wait for the appearance of Chelsea. The writer's intention was clearly to create an original world with a style and language of its own, and its originality is evident, but she has not quite managed to weld the disparate elements together into a coherent whole.

Still, **The White Mists of Power** is worth reading. At least it attempts to do something interesting and different in a genre notorious for its stereotypes.



A Fire Upon the Deep Vernor Vinge

Millennium, 1992, 391pp, £8.99

Reviewed by KV Bailey

"A fantasy scene of castles and starships": that's the after-battle prospect as seen by the human heroine, Ravna, at the story's climax. Add to this that the castle, situated on the 'medieval' planet 'Tines' World', is occupied by fine-weaponed canoids evolved as telepathically-sentient mini-pack individuals, and that Ravna's starship of deliverance has been piloted down by a super-intelligent crinoid looking like a pot-plant on wheels, and you have indications of the bizarreness and inventiveness of this novel. For creation of startling but acceptable aliens, and for the unfurling of stary dimensions, there's been little like it since Stapledon's cosmic epics. One difference is that, while in **Star Maker** Stapledon's Nautioids and Arachnoids are depicted only as evolutionary types, here the aliens are so roundly characterised that the reader, in naturally empathising with the

humans, may readily come to feel him/herself the alien: "a mantis-like Two-Legs". Another difference is that whereas Stapledon's cosmic histories are distantly narrated or visionarily related, Vinge's galaxy is tangibly immediate, though ordered by his own temporal and spatial relativities. His (our own) galaxy is comprised of Thought Zones. In the Slow Zone, bordering the unthinking Depths of the galactic plane, light-speed is limiting, but near the periphery what is called "ultralight" exists. There a starship in good fettle will microjump along at a steady fifty light-years per hour and Net transmissions registering micro-action in the 'galactic village', paradigmatic perhaps of a shared universal consciousness, go even faster. A page of diagrams helps.

Beyond the High Beyond is the Transcend, "the dark between the galaxies", domain of the Powers, who, vis a vis the Beyond, may be indifferent or merely prone to experimentation. A Power has engendered the Blight, which, by means seemingly including a kind of viral infection of information, perverts whole civilisations. The antidote is located in a human refugee ship, crashed on Tines' World. A surviving young brother and sister are conditioned to aid, by virtue of the high technology they can tap, opposing factions ('good' and 'bad') in the canoids' internece warfare. Ravna's ship, pursued by a Blight controlled fleet, labours against time to secure the children and to gain the antidote; this gives scope for many of the vicissitudes of 'rescue' and 'quest' adventure.

The multi-centred plot requires various forms of communication: by spy, messenger, telepathy, between canoid packs on Tines' World; between Tines' World (via the crashed ship's technology) and Ravna's starship; and (via the Net) between that starship and many civilisations of the Beyond. On the macro-scale, communications across Thought Zone levels (the Zones themselves subject to surges and wavering boundaries) narrate the drama. On the microcosmic scale, understanding requires communication between disparate intelligences by way of speech, translation, body-language, empathy, symbiosis - this last brilliantly explored in the psychic fusing of the boy Jefri with Andiranifani, a canoid puppy-pack-entirety. Such semantic manoeuvres often imply questions of the relativity/absoluteness of good and evil, of indifference or interdependence as between forms of consciousness. Thus, beneath the space-operatic surface, ethical ambiguities flourish.

Among the bonuses of **A Fire Upon the Deep** are Vinge's descriptions of location. The vistas of galactic travel and planet-fall

are good; but those of the terrane of Tines' World are even better. These latter are, as his acknowledgements suggest, based on experience of a summer spent in arctic Norway. Here, in one major novel, you will find, expertly commingled, a wide speculative range, humanistic, physical, even metaphysical; the pleasures of galactic adventure; and the fascinating planetary projection of a unique terrestrial landscape.

Freda Warrington A Taste of Blood Wine Pan, 1992, 446pp, £8.99 tpb reviewed by Gareth Rees

In 1920s Cambridge, Charlotte Neville works in her father's science laboratory. She is too shy and insecure to venture out into the heady social scene in which her sisters Fleur and Madeleine are so successful. She believes that love, desire and adventure are forbidden to her, and she longs for a tall, dark, handsome vampire to come and take her away. The vampire, Karl von Wultendorf, duly arrives (he's a good vampire because he only kills people he doesn't know), but his love affair with Charlotte cannot last, not only because he wants to drink her blood, but because Kristian, King of the Vampires, wants Karl to love only him, and is terribly jealous of Charlotte.

This novel is failure as a horror novel, because it isn't remotely frightening; it is a failure as a romance because the characters' emotions are not the slightest bit convincing and because it isn't erotic at all; it's a failure as an adventure story because the plot is so predictable, and because the ending relies upon an extremely inept and obvious *deus ex machina*; and you can't even read it for laughs because it's so resolutely and grimly serious.

Ms Warrington seems to think that it was enough to have a repressed heroine and a few vampires, and that she needed to put in no extra effort to make the characters more than colourless cut-outs from some Catherine Cookson novel; that there was no need to make sense of the title; and no need to work to get any significance out of calling a character Kristian to make the novel successful. And the worst horror is, she is probably right.

Connie Willis Doomsday Book

NEL, 1992, 527pp, £15.99

Reviewed by David V Barrett

This is one of the most enjoyable novels I have read this year - and one of the most irritating. The enjoyment comes from a good story well-told, the irritation from careless research.

Kivrin is a student of medieval history at Oxford in the near future. Very much against the will of her advisor don, Mr Dunworthy, she goes on a field trip back to the fourteenth century, carefully timing it so that she will be there in 1320, some years before the Black Death ravages the country. When she gets there, however, she finds the Black Death in full swing, though she doesn't catch on that it's actually 1348 until page 349, a good couple of hundred pages after the reader realises.

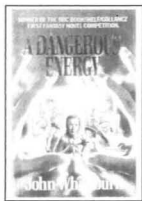
Back in the present day, a mystery virus cuts swathes through Oxford, and we find that even with the developments in medicine since our own time, people are falling like flies. Where did it come from? Again, the reader twigs long before the characters do. Dunworthy is obstructed in every attempt to trace Kivrin and bring her back, partly by the quarantine restrictions and general hubbub in Oxford, and partly by the head of the medieval department, an exceedingly unlikeable and stupid man who resents Dunworthy's interference.

The present-day sections tend to flag at times, largely because of the need to cover the same number of weeks in the two streams: far less of importance happens in the present day, in contrast with the events of 1348. It's also in the present day that most of the errors occur: Britain still has pound notes, the hospital's casualty ward is referred to as "Casualties" throughout, a scarf is called a muffler, long-distance phone calls are called "trunk calls" (when did you last hear that?), and the extended tube line from Marble Arch to Oxford manages to take two hours. Willis's Oxford of 2054 actually feels far more like 1954; apart from time travel and medical advances, there's no sense of future.

But her past more than makes up for this. There's one error I found: in 1348 they have "a lot of bad teeth" and have run out of sugar; recent archeological evidence has shown that medieval teeth were a lot sounder than our own, simply because they didn't have sugar then unless they were very wealthy. But with that one exception, Connie Willis's 1348 is utterly, beautifully, horrifically real. Here's this student from the future, arriving in a grubby village where (despite her built-in translator) she can't make head or tail of the language at first, where she doesn't understand the social mores of the time, where she's suddenly confronted with people she has come to care for dying horribly. The Black Death wiped out between a third and a half of Europe's population in about five years; I've read books about it before, but I've never had any realisation of what it must have been like to be there until reading this. It was the end of the world; it

was God's judgement for man's sinfulness; it was completely beyond comprehension. The pain, the ugliness, the smell, the sheer awful inevitability and hopelessness and despair; and the acts of love and care which you know are pointless because that person's going to die in agony in a few days, and there's nothing you can do about it, but you still bathe their wounds and lance their buboes and wipe the sweat from their face and tell them it's going to be all right when you know it isn't, because you're human and so are they, and you desperately want to do something to help, even knowing it's futile.

The pain in the last two hundred pages is almost too much to bear. The almost-farce of the present-day sections is a necessary counter to the agony of the medieval sections. I'll forgive Connie Willis any number of trivial errors for the sheer experience of this book. I feel humbled by it. I want to say Thankyou.



John Whitbourn A Dangerous Energy

Gollancz, 1992, 317pp, £14.99

Reviewed by Valerie Housden

It is late Twentieth Century England, where the Catholic Church holds sway. Protestantism is vanquished, and steam trains, not motor cars, cross the land. A wilful peasant child, Tobias Oakley, is out wandering at night, when he is surprised by elves, who teach him magic. Eventually the Church learns of his abilities, and he is taken to the training school in Southwark where he studies to become a priest-thaumaturge. From there he rises to become one of the most powerful men in the Church in England.

This novel won the BBC Bookshelf/ Gollancz First Fantasy Novel prize, yet I was left wondering why. The implications of the central conflict, between Catholic orthodoxy and real pagan magic, are never really explored, and I was left feeling short-changed. And that is not its only fault.

First of all the other common points between the Catholic Church in this book and the real thing is that it is headed by a

Pope in Rome, is staffed by supposedly celibate priests, bishops, cardinals and monks, has an act of worship called the Mass and has a fund called Peter's Pence. Apart from that it is a stark, austere Church, riddled with corruption of course, and totally lacking the vivacity, colour and ceremony normally associated with Roman Catholicism. There are no shrines in any of the towns; there are no Jesuits or nuns anywhere; apart from references to Loyola College, Oxford, the only saint's name mentioned is St John Wesley. A heretic speaks of:

"...all your ceremony and dogma, material aids to heaven and relics of saints ..."

I found little evidence of this.

Furthermore Whitbourn does not appear to have worked out fully the function of magic within this Church. The only one of Oakley's duties involving magic that we see, is to check that no malign spells have corrupted any of the sacred vessels used for the Mass, but superstition barely justifies a whole branch of the priesthood. Priest-thaumaturges summon demons for purely selfish purposes, with no even superficially religious excuse. If magic is real, how is it reconciled with the miracles associated with saints and the Virgin? Surely magician-priests would be needed to verify whether a holy apparition was genuine or demonic? Yet there is no mention of this in Tobias's training. And how does the central miracle of Christianity, the resurrection, fit in?

Having said all that, Whitbourn is a competent storyteller. His style is readable and while only some of his characters are completely rounded, few are bare stereotypes. His lack of research into religion leads me to question his otherwise seemingly careful historical research. Yet the central theme, the descent of a man inexorably into pure evil, is well drawn. It could have been such a powerful book that I can only deplore the carelessness that prevents it being so.

A Sudden Wild Magic Diana Wynne Jones

Morrow, 1992, 412pp, \$22

Reviewed by Michael J. Port

When *A Sudden Wild Magic* opens, the world has been protected for many centuries by "The Ring", a secret society of witches "dedicated to the continuance and well-being of humankind". In the first chapter we are told that it was this Ring that organised the winds which "so conveniently dissipated" the Spanish Armada, and we later learn that subsequent generations of the same Ring helped divert some of the fall-out from the Chernobyl nuclear accident. Now, however, the Ring faces its greatest threat: from the

fortress of Arth in the parallel world Pentarchy, Earth is being looted of ideas and technology. In fact, rather than solve their own problems, the people of Pentarchy, through the mages of Arth, have found it more convenient to cause similar problems on our world, watch how we solve them, and copy our solutions. The latest problem in Pentarchy is that the sea level is rising: the "solution" from Arth has been to cause global warming on Earth, and watch how we tackle it. For reasons that become clear later in the book - and not just as a result of global warming - the interference from Pentarchy threatens the future of Earth. A selected group of volunteers from the Ring is therefore dispatched to Arth in a converted bus, to sort out the mages and stop the interference. But in Arth, magic is an everyday phenomenon, and in tackling the fortress, the members of the Ring can not expect an easy fight...

What follows is a nicely constructed fantasy tale set in England in the present day, and in Pentarchy. The book is not unduly deep, and there are no truly vile villains, but the story is well crafted, and enjoyable. I haven't come across this author before, but according to the book jacket, Diana Wynne Jones is the "critically acclaimed author of several charming novels for younger readers." This book seems to be aimed at an adult readership, though Pentarchy appears faintly "Narnia-like" at times, and we are never in any real doubt that a happy ending is on the cards. Perhaps to emphasise that this is not a children's book, the cover mentions that the Ring may be forced to use "Kamikaze sex" against Arth - however, when this "weapon" is used, it is handled very discretely.

The central female character, Zillah, is an interesting and complex creation, and the main source of the "wild magic" from which the book takes its title. In contrast, I felt that the characterisation of one of the central male characters, was rather disappointingly thin. However, I was doing Ms. Jones an injustice for towards the end of the book it transpired that Lister's two-dimensional nature was quite deliberate: I won't explain why as this would spoil the story.

The first thing you'll see if you pick this book off the shelf in W. H. Smiths is a woman of about sixty, wearing a pink dress, green apron, socks and slippers. She has a curious half smile on her face, and is surrounded by cats. On seeing this picture, I decided that I probably wasn't going to enjoy doing this review. First impressions can be wrong: now, having read the book, I'm convinced that the cover is the worst thing about it. If fantasy worlds populated by witches and centaurs are your cup of tea, then I don't think *A Sudden Wild Magic* will disappoint you.

Insight Flawed Diamond by Steve Palmer

The Rise and Fall of the Third Chimpanzee by Jared Diamond

(Hutchinson Radius) arrived at the science department of the school where I work last month; a freebie copy sent by the sponsors of an Annual Science Book Award, Rhone-Poulenc.

My suspicions were aroused because (i) it was free and sent by the aforementioned corporation, (ii) there was a questionnaire inside with such questions as "Have you ever heard of Rhone-Poulenc?", "Is there an arm of the corporation in your area?" and suchlike, and (iii) the whole thing smacked of dodgy corporate self-aggrandisement. On the other hand, the previous and only other winner of this award was Stephen Jay Gould, who's no runt when it comes to science writing. The prize is worth £10,000.

Diamond's book examines the differences between human beings and our closest relatives, chimpanzees, in the light of the fact that genetic difference between the species are only two percent. Why does this one fiftieth make such a difference, the author asks?

Well, he asks this question, does much describing of what is known so far of human evolution, and then... not much happens. I kept turning pages of chapters thinking to myself, soon he will dispense with this descriptive overview and give a deeper analysis, but he only rarely did: a chapter on language stood out in this respect (Diamond concludes that the different genetic 2% relates to our production and use of language).

Then again, Diamond is aware of modern feminist and nonracist viewpoints, and spends much time mocking our recent sexist and racist past, as when, following a current fashion, he laughs at Robert Ardrey's book *African Genesis*, which

painted a picture of macho meat-eaters clubbing one another to death. But thirteen pages later we read a description of how, after some minor change in the vocal tract allowed pre-humans a far greater range of speech sounds, two people could start spearing antelopes more efficiently. The wish to be non-macho seems genuine but shallow. He simply hasn't grasped that the evolution of language need include hardly any *doing* activities, but could instead be almost entirely a social thing; for example between mothers and their children

In one sense, these are minor quibbles about a well-meaning book; but such attitudes as displayed above are exceedingly difficult to transcend, and must inform a complete mental attitude. The main difficulty with this book is its biological basis. The author, a well-known physiologist and ecologist, wishes to determine how our animal heritage affects human culture: how the 2% difference changes so much, there is therefore a consistently biological foundation to all that is said: the author searches for the roots of drug addiction, ecological suicide, and nuclear war in what he imagines to be left-over animal traits from millions of years back. There is mention of social and cultural life, and a recognition that it overlays animal behaviour, but little development of the idea that it is precisely *because* we have lost our animal instincts that we are human. This I felt to be a major flaw.

Thus, there are fascinating and startling chapters on human sex: sexual selection, why women undergo the menopause, and so on. Diamond comes up here with some really compelling ideas. Yet, later, he searches for the roots of art in our genes: "human art does not help us survive", he

observes, and, "transmitting our thoughts is not the same as transmitting our genes". It is this misplaced search that spoils the book. The author sees biological functions in art when in reality it is purely social; art is an expression of creativity; that is, human art is a method of staying sane. Diamond, with his overtly biological view, forgets that not only do human beings die off if they belong to a group that cannot survive day-to-day, they also do not survive if they are or become insane

The impression gained of the author is of a gifted man, curious about the world in the best sense, but who has not looked quite deep enough. This is a book of extremes: on the one hand, genuine and well-meant, on the other, still locked in tradition.

Another example of this tradition is the old standby of taking language to be the source of our uniqueness: "It is the spoken word that made us free". There is not one solitary word in this book about human emotion. That is an extraordinary omission. Time after time, people, when they try to describe what it is about human beings that makes them human and valuable, come down to emotions. The concept that words and language are the basis of humanity goes back to 4000 BC, when the written word developed as a means of acting; and thus a myth was born. In our technologically complicated, specialised, compartmentalised world, the word is still seen as being the foundation of all that we are.

Thus, Diamond fails to consider laughter, grief, awe, embarrassment, joy, shame, anger, disgust, excitement. Nor, incredibly, is there any mention of love. There is plenty on pair-bonding and long-term care of children, but nothing on love.

But where the author really falls down, with one hell of a crash, is when he considers human killing and genocide. It is astonishing that a man who exhibits such clear sight on, for example, ancient patterns of environmental erosion, or the part agriculture and animal domestication played in setting up urban patriarchal, class-based societies, should think that the human propensity for murder and genocide is "the one that has been derived most straightforwardly from animal precursors". Diamond writes, "... a major reason for our human hallmark of group living was defense against other human groups, especially once we acquired weapons and a large enough brain to plan ambushes". Now there is a suspicion that the non-macho attitude is either fake or intended to mollify women readers. In short, this chapter suggests that group is in part due to the aggression of

other groups: no mention of any natural attraction owing anything to a lack of animal instincts and the arrival of consciousness, for example.

Mention is made of how modern technology, for example that supporting a US President and a suitcase with a button inside it, could make genocide more easy -- as I think it undoubtedly does -- But immediately the notion is passed by. It is obvious mistakes such as this which niggle the reader. If a person has no emotional connection to a group of other people, does not see them, knows nothing of their lives, and has a button that will kill them all, it is far easier for that person to commit an act of genocide than for one who has to butcher towns with a machine gun. Armies work by dehumanising the enemy. It is psychological disembodiment, as characterised that allows modern acts of genocide. Yet this is thought by the author to be an uncertain argument, despite his understanding of "psychological numbing" a few pages later.

Then there is a short chapter on a subject dear to the hearts of the SF community: extra-terrestrials. Diamond is quite convinced that we are alone, and that, if any aliens did arrive at Earth, they would kill and maim us because that is what we do to animals. No room for future social evolution here, then. Instead, "Think again of those astronomers who beamed radio signals into space from Arecibo, describing Earth's location and its inhabitants. In its suicidal folly that act rivalled the folly of the last Inca emperor, Atahualpa, who described to his gold-crazy Spanish captors the wealth of his capital and provided them with guides for the journey." Yes, Jared...

In short this is a book to take bits from. Some chapters are quite brilliant. The one on language is erudite, well-presented, and fascinating, describing the evolution of modern Indo-European languages, taking on such heavyweights in the field as Colin Renfrew (and winning). Also, a chapter on how many ancient societies exceeded the capacity of their environments and then collapsed -- it isn't just us twentieth century folk -- is excellent. But some sections are desperately weak; there is a quality throughout the book of small pieces being stitched together, not terribly well. Perhaps Diamond wrote it quickly. Worth a read, but don't suspend your critical faculties.

Compass Points

4 The Golden Strangers By Henry Treece

Recommended by Catie Cary

This book delivered a sharp jolt of recognition, when I first read it, some twelve years ago. I had read the works of a number of fantasists at this point; Tolkien, Lewis, Eddison, Swann. I had often been thrilled by their poetic visions, and yet -- I was often disappointed by a swaddling of domesticity, or else, an alien coldness which prevented me from empathising with the characters. Henry Treece delivers a unique vision; bleakly poetic, violent and scary, gritty realistic. He depicts a world where gods and magic are woven into the fabric of life, where princesses and wizards hold positions of fatal power, yet we never lose sight of the consequences for the poor and for the weak.

The tale is told in a matter of fact voice; in the manner of a historical novel, yet it is a fantasy in more ways than one. The first is that this is a world where magic has a place and a constant presence in the minds of the characters, and if we never see the flashy glitter beloved of the genre fantasist; for me that only adds to the majesty and power of the vision. The second layer is one of time, removing us from total understanding of the people described. In this way *all* stories describing the lives of ancient peoples are fantastic; we may feel for their passions and their problems, but we cannot truly understand what is going on in their minds; they are alien. It is therefore, impossible to describe their lives in total realism, but Treece, in this book, portrays these primitives in a manner that *appears* realistic to the modern reader, passionate, cruel, yet with dignity and intelligence.

The story told is of Garroch, a chief of the small dark Barley People, and of his and his people's struggle against the invasion of the golden strangers of the title. The book was originally published in 1956, one of a series dealing with the invasion of Britain. It seems likely that Treece had been influenced by recent events in Europe, but the theme of invasion by superior force is a timeless one,

given force through empathy with the characters.

We watch Garroch come to power and maturity, forge alliances, win and lose through wisdom and foolishness. We see him in his relationships with women; wives, lovers, mother, daughter, strong women striving to maximise their power in a position of weakness. We see him sacrifice to his god, we see him change with the times, ultimately with him we learn what it is to lose through sheer force of destiny.

The writing is poetic, infused with mysticism, but honed to a sharp honest clarity by the portrayal of the characters, and it is the characters that stayed with me over the years: pathetic Two-fingers the shepherd; Brach, Garroch's much-loved daughter; Rua Fish, his despised wife from a neighbouring settlement; Asa Wolf, his friend, wiser and more generous than Garroch, Isca, proud cruel princess of the sun-worshipping golden race; but most of all Garroch himself, proud, vulnerable, subject to fears and desires he cannot control. Garroch is a man whose acts we cannot condone, but whose fears, curiosity and ambition will strike a chord in most of us.

Treece's accomplishment is to take the land we think we know and people it with these characters, so that through their eyes we can understand what it would be to inhabit a world shaped by fear and ignorance; which is what a magical world must be like for the greatest as well as the humblest.

Next time you fancy a journey through time to watch an alien race battle against the invincible forces of superior technology, I suggest you leave the spaceships on the shelf, and instead travel with Henry Treece. He can show you a world and a way of life that is stranger by far than the others and introduce you to people who will live in your mind for years, and whose story will resonate in your mind even longer.

Last known publication: Savvy Books, 1980



Paperback Graffiti

Edited by Stephen Payne

Notify Ground Crew

We have a lot to get through and I'll be brief. In an attempt to bring some focus to the content of **Paperback Graffiti**, I have decided to include a short list of recommended titles corralled from the crop of reviews that follow (see below). I hope that you find it useful. I intend to make further changes in the future, though the basic nature of **Paperback Graffiti** (ie reviews) will remain. If you have any comments, suggestions, abuse, recipes, etc. that you feel might be of benefit on this or any other aspect of **Paperback Graffiti**, then you'll find my address at the front of this magazine. I do try to reply to every letter personally, but I will not be running a correspondence column; anything intended for publication should be sent to Catie.

As these words will be appearing in print some time around Christmas (I'm writing

entertaining guide to bookshops that I have ever read (okay, so it's the only one). I suspect that anyone (like me) who is even remotely interested in the culture and purpose of secondhand bookshops will find it quite adorable (I did).

Recommended

Voyage To The Red Planet Terry Bisson

"Bisson writes smoothly and empathically, and makes it seem all so effortless! He deserves all the praise he gets." (Martin Sutherland)

Burying The Shadow Storm Constantine

"Constantine has her own voice and she uses it to tell a fascinating tale." (Colin Bird)

The Rainbow Abyss Barbara Hambly

"Once again Barbara Hambly has written a first-rate fantasy." (Lynne Bispham)

Jago Kim Newman

"If he has a tendency towards cinematic gore and set pieces which seem to have sprung straight from some late-night horror film, he does so with a vigour and a sense of humour which makes this a gripping and entertaining book." (Paul Kincaid)

The Sandman IV: Season of Mists Neil Gaiman

"Sandman is on a level so far above other comics that critical discourse turns into burbled enthusiasm" (Andy Sawyer)

Novels

A. A. Attanasio
Hunting The Ghost Dancer
Grafton, 1992, 445pp, £4.99
Reviewed by Jim Provan

Most readers of SF will probably be too young to remember this, but in 1998 **Foundation** published a mildly amusing article by George Slusser entitled 'Who's afraid of Science Fiction?' Conceived as an angry and controversial attack on the "literary establishment", the piece was more akin to the threatening Dutch courage of a geriatric pub-drunk directed towards those people perceptive enough to ridicule him for what he is - a sorry joke! In the essay, Slusser condemned the concept of: "... the writing programme, studying writing while teaching it to others who eventually will have to teach it to others, and so on. As perfect a closed system as one can get."

A. A. Attanasio is a product of such a system - we are told that he received an MFA in Creative Writing from Columbia University in 1975. I would suggest that one of the essential precursors of creativity is originality and that this precludes its effective teaching as such. What similar qualifications were possessed by the likes of Joyce, Sartre, Mann, *et al*? This book is a typical product of these courses - heaps of doggy "anti-cliches" constructed into prose so purple, they'd have you instantly reach for your tey'dition controls. For example..."An arrowhead of white cranes hurried north through the red air." Or: "Purple spears of crocus pierced the meadow where the Mothers had erected the wedding bower, an arbour of alder limbs jewelled with buds like clusters of jade and hung with yellow plaits of lemon grass and seaweed in scarlet ribbons." Or even: "Hamr directed Blind Side of Life through the hummocks past the green-dotted hazel brambles and budding thornapple shrubs, along the tall sedge margin of the bog where spring already bloomed with flourish red flowers and white-tufted grass as fluttery as feathers." Hit that colour button! What these chromatic snippets have in common (apart from the fact that they are painted *impasto* into the first chapter) is that they are all the opening lines of new scenes. And here, realization begins to dawn (doubtless, in a faint glow of red!).

In modern western society where print ranks subordinate to films and television, subtlety is beyond the reach of most consumers. Now click the clapperboard and transfer the above scenes via celluloid to the big screen and we see the *modus operandi* of these formulaic novels. It would seem that



them in November), I'd like to take this opportunity to wish everyone in the BSFA a Merry Xmas and a Happy New Year (it's cheaper than sending you all cards). My wife has already given me an early present - a copy of *Drif's Guide to secondhand bookshops 1992-1993* by a Mr *Drif Field*. It is the funniest, most opinionated and

personality and experience are now redundant as stylistic ingredients, since they have been replaced by programmes and courses handed on in the manner described by Slusser. Apply the law which states that transfer of momentum in reality cannot occur with 100% efficiency and you have a sorry scenario indeed!

"University of life?" Perhaps our pub-dunk is beginning to talk some sense at last.

Robin Bailey
Brothers Of The Dragon
NEL, 1992, 270pp, £4.99
Reviewed by Alan Fraser

Brothers Of The Dragon is the first book in a new fantasy series, and the title sounds as if it could be a martial arts film rather than a book. There's a good reason for this. Robin Bailey is an American whose CV includes a spell as a martial arts instructor, and the brothers in question, Eric and Robert Podlovsky, are both martial arts enthusiasts. With the aid of a mysterious medallion they are transported from present-day America to Palenoc, a parallel world which is physically the same as ours, but different in every other way. Palenoc is, like virtually all other fantasy settings, a pre-industrial culture where magic rules, and where the forces of Light are engaged with a massive struggle with the forces of Darkness. Dragons and unicorns exist there, but unusually the dragons serve Light and the unicorns serve Darkness. If anyone is murdered, their ghost always returns to take vengeance on the slayer, which is why the fighting skills of the Podlovsky brothers have such an important role to play. Their ability to defeat armed opponents without killing them, even when heavily out-numbered, is unique on Palenoc, which makes them powerful allies for the forces of Light as the "Brothers of the Dragon".

However, there is considerable tension between the brothers. Eric has a routine job as a postman, while his younger brother Robert is a successful novelist. Also, their transport to Palenoc is not as much of a surprise to Robert as it was to Eric. He seems to know a lot more about Palenoc and its warring factions than he admits to, and to have a purpose for going there. The central idea of letting two Karate Kids loose in a Fantasyland where their skills are uniquely suitable is quite a good one.

However, for me this book was unsatisfying. It does not develop the characters much or resolve any of the problems of Palenoc, its function being just to set the scene for the series and establish the "Brothers Of The Dragon" in their new

setting. Even so, if you're looking for a new "hard-edged fantasy series for today" (in other words the Podlovskys say "Fuck" a lot), this might be just what you're looking for.

I have not come across Bailey before, although he is a regular contributor to the **Thieves World** and Marion Zimmer Bradley **Fantasy Tales** series. As **Brothers Of The Dragon** is copyright "Byron Preuss Visual Publications Inc." rather than Bailey himself, it may mean this is also a shared-world scenario, with future books by other authors as well as Bailey.

Terry Bisson
Voyage To The Red Planet
Pan, 1992, 236pp, £4.50
Reviewed by Martin Sutherland

When the Viking Missions explored the surface of Mars, who would have expected that the first human to set foot on that same surface would be a Hollywood star?

When the Grand Depression hit, the joint Soviet-American Mars mission was dropped and the spaceship *Mary Poppins* was mothballed in orbit. Most of the world's major governments went bankrupt and were largely taken over by big business. Now, twenty years later, two of the original members of the Mars crew are contacted out of the blue by Markson, a Hollywood producer, who wants them to fly the *Mary Poppins* to Mars...to shoot a movie. Pellucid Pictures manages to get them up into space, along with two certified movie stars, a midget hot-shot director, and a doctor who specializes in hibernation technology. With a team of Disney lawyers hot on their tails trying to stake a rival claim on the spaceship, our heroes slot into their launch window just in time, and blast off from orbit. They then have to cope with stowaways, faulty equipment, Mission Control going bankrupt, telephone operators who don't understand about the 15 minute time delay in conversations between Earth and Mars, and much more.

Voyage to The Red Planet is a very funny book, with intensely human characters striking sparks off each other in an absurd but believable setting; but there is far more to it than just comedy. The passages describing Mars and the Venus fly-by are beautiful and moving; the plot is strong, fast-moving, and has a wonderful surprise at the end. The humour is also not incidental, as in some other comic novels; rather, the characters, background and situation are all intrinsically funny, and are combined to hilarious effect. But space flight isn't all cookies and milk, and tension, drama and pain are all part of this excellent novel.

Bisson writes smoothly and empathically, and makes it seem all so effortless! He deserves all the praise he gets.

Anthony Coburn
Dr Who: The Scripts: The Masters Of Luxor
Titan, 1992, 174pp, £4.99
Reviewed by John D. Owen

The publication of the 'Doctor Who' script, **The Masters Of Luxor** continues Titan Books' script series, with one important added element: this script was never made. It was written to be the second story in the first series, but lost out to Terry Nation's 'The Dead City' (with the Daleks), and subsequently never used.

The Masters Of Luxor prefigures themes that have come down through the various incarnations of the Doctor: the hubris of the scientist, the invention turning on its makers, the soul-less machines that kill. The Doctor and his companions (the original trio of Susan, Barbara and Ian) are forced to land in a crystal edifice on a dead world. There, the Tardis is drained of energy, and the quartet left at the mercy of a group of robots, headed by the Perfect One, an android seeking to transform itself into a living being. The android selects the women as lifeforce donors, while imprisoning the Doctor and Ian. They escape, naturally, and all the normal running about ensues, leading to the downfall and destruction of the robots.

The plot moves along nicely and the dialogue is reasonably snappy, but it would not have made a good story so early in the series' life, as it required better effects than the producers could have afforded. All of which makes this book a nice relic for Dr Who completists.

Storm Constantine
Burying The Shadow
Headline, 1992, 406pp, £4.99
Reviewed by Colin Bird

A fantastic reinvention of the vampire myth, reads the book's subtitle, seen through a glass darkly and told via the author's trademark web of social intrigue and dense plotting. Set in an earth where decadent patrons support vampiric artisans who exchange the fruit of their creativity for blood, these eliom, as they are known, are disturbed by a suicidal malady that strikes for no apparent reason and begins to reverberate around their social isolation. The Fear reduces the eliom to mortality and it becomes imperative to locate a cure. Two of the eliom nurture a young psychic healer, a soulscap, who may be able to eradicate the fear from the minds of its

victims. This human becomes a pawn in the political machinations of rival eloin clans and in the resulting conflicts the origin of the Fear and the eloin themselves are revealed.

There is a wealth of invention in this book, enough for a trilogy of books (but don't do it Storm!). The eloin are never short of blood because of the ecstasy humans receive from it's release and the social interactions are well worked out. There may also be a subtext to the 'artists as vampires' plot, but if there is, it is not overtly apparent.

The Milton quotations heading each chapter are well chosen, for once. Here's one that always gets me chucking: "...we are decreed, reserved and destined to eternal woe; whatever doing, what can we suffer more, what can we suffer worse?" - Paradise Lost.

Storm Constantine's approach is a little heavy-handed at times and the dual first person narration become confusing, but the characters are believable and there is a new strand of the story to explore on every page. The oppressive atmosphere is palpable and not many writers can bring off this kind of fantasy without resorting to Dark Lords and Hobgoblins. Some of the book is reminiscent of Brian Stapleford's *Empire of Fear*, but Constantine has her own voice and she uses it to tell a fascinating tale.

John Farris Fiends

Grafton, 1992, 430pp, £4.99

Reviewed by Jan Malique

If moths frighten you and childhood fears of the dark linger, avoid this book like the proverbial plague. Not only do these combine to make a thoroughly horrible read (in the nicest possible way), but unspeakable and unpronounceable evil tightens the screws with each turn of the page. Huldúfólk (the unpronounceable evil) look out from the limbo that God placed them in eons ago and breed envy and hatred, waiting for a chance to reverse their positions. A few flayed bodies later, it seems as if their master plan (to laugh in God's face and subjugate his 'perfect' creations) is going to succeed.

Like Pandora's fateful act in opening the forbidden box, this evil is unleashed upon the world by a dangerously curious woman. For this one mistake a contagion spreads through time and generations, destroying everything in it's path. Eve's crime in being a victim of deceit and unfathomable emotions is all too regularly hinted at within the narrative. I also found the female characters, shall we say, a mite irritating; most of the *fiends* seem to be female, curiously enough... They are, to my mind, unsympathetic figures, which is annoying.

Horror is a genre I tend to shy away from as it frightens me, and reading about primeval darkness reaching out from humankind's evolutionary past is unsettling. The whole idea of immortality strikes unease, unending pain and a yearning for death to break the cycle of decades, centuries. Especially if one is in the dog house with a Supreme Being, then it is hell...

What more can I say about this book? I preferred *Dracula Unbound*, which just about sums up my feelings.

William R. Forstchen Terrible Swift Sword ROC, 1992, 458pp, £4.99 Reviewed by Jon Wallace

Sub-titled, *The Lost Regiment - Book 3*, this book is a sizable chunk of final chapter. It probably makes more sense if you've read the other two books, but never mind, I'm going to review it anyway.

The background becomes obvious as you get into the book - a Regiment of Union soldiers switches from our world to a very different one; a world where the rulers are a nomadic non-human race, the Merki Hordes, who circle the globe continually, preying upon the human settlers ("cattle") in their path. Horrified by this custom, the men of the regiment vow to help the humans throw off the yoke of their oppression. As this novel opens, the humans have fought and defeated one tribe, and they are now facing the remaining tribes arrayed before them. But the very technology which allowed them to defeat the first tribe is now being studied and used against them by the others...

Forstchen, it say in "About the Author" at the end, is currently finishing a Ph. D in 19th Century military history, and lists as one of his interests "historical re-enacting a private with the 20th Maine Volunteer Regiment". All of this shows a bit. Large sections of this novel are spent in discussions of tactics, although Forstchen is clever enough to leave out enough that events come as a surprise at just the right place. He also gives a lot of attention to the American's attempts to get their secret weapon off the ground. This is offset by glimpses of the Merki camp, but only enough to show us that they are the baddies. Strangely enough, the Merki are treated with a kind of respect by Forstchen, there is a feeling that they are mere victims of their circumstances. Then there is the almost loving description of the "moon feast", involving the horrible death and subsequent devouring of thousands of humans by the Merki, which we have just been shown to be thoughtful and concerned about their people...

This books has it's strengths and

weaknesses. It dwells too lovingly on the bloody bits - the moon feast, in particular; the battle sequences, while they are well described, are too long and technical and, while the title pages proclaim this to be a trilogy, nothing is finally resolved. Balancing this is the fact that author undoubtedly knows his stuff, the military aspects seem faultless and the general pace of the writing keeps the pages turning. Worth looking at the series if you like this sort of thing, but I don't think that I would buy any of the other volumes.

Craig Shaw Gardner The Cineverse Cycle Omnibus: Slaves of The Volcan God Bride of The Slime Monster Revenge of The Fluffy Bunnies Headline, 1992, 537pp, £5.99 Reviewed by Mat Coward

PR man Roger Gordon is one of life's side-kicks - until forced to become a hero when his girlfriend Dolores is kidnapped by Dr Dread, and Roger has to follow them into the Cineverse.

Luckily, Roger still has his old Captain Crusader Decoder ring, once given away free in packets of Nut Crunchies; because, as Dolores points out, "The people at Nut Crunchies never realised what they had wrought with the invention of this little marvel... You can use this little ring to go anywhere you want in the Cineverse, to any of those uncounted million worlds" - on each of which reality is a B movie, it's rules those of the Western, for instance, or the sci-fi cheapy, or worst of all, the dreaded musical. The Cineverse runs according to movie magic, which means "anything that moves the plot".

There are some really good jokes here - like the cowboy in a gang of bad guys (Tex, Dakota, Arizona, and so on), who has to call himself Idaho, because the only other name they had left was District of Columbia- and the running gag of boss-baddies who never come right out and say "Kill him", but instead tell their henchmen they want the hero "Heeheehee - taken care of."

The main trouble with this kind of cartoony humour is that the lack of any proper characters make it difficult for the reader to get completely involved. Also, the Cineverse setting itself does rather preclude any real plot tension; the hero's escapes are always going to be unsatisfactorily easy, or unconvincingly difficult. It would help if Gardner could bring in the odd throwaway line without a big sign before it saying "Throwaway Line Coming Up", and one afterwards saying "That Was A Throwaway Line, Folks - Didja Like It?"

This isn't a book to get much cosmic

sustenance out of, then, but it is a very nice, well-whipped snack; light, while staying just the right side of being "lite". I'm not quite sure of the wisdom of putting the three novels into an omnibus, though; they're not the sort of thing you'd want to read all at once, I wouldn't have thought. Still, this edition is very good value for money, both in terms of pages and of laughs.

Barbara Hambly The Rainbow Abyss

Grafton, 1991, 295pp, £4.99
Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

In the Forty Realms, to kill a wizard is not considered a crime. The very people who come to wizards for love-potions and good-luck charms fear and despise them, while the priests of the cult of Agon seek their destruction. Many time the wizard Jaldis and his pupil Rhion have found themselves driven from their lodgings by a hate-crazed mob. The city of Braganmere, whose Duke is a scholar and interested in wizards and magic, could be a refuge, despite Rhion's hopeless and dangerous love for the Duke's daughter and the machinations of the son of the former ruler, deposed by the Duke. However, Jaldis has cast a spell which has opened a dark well into the Void between all universes, and has heard a voice crying for help from a world where magic no longer exists. Much to Rhion's anxiety, his elderly, physically frail master, determines to cross the Void and aid this world, and to learn how to prevent a similar destruction of magic in their own universe.

Once again Barbara Hambly has written a first-rate fantasy. Readers of her previous novels will know that she takes stock characters (wizards, swordsmen, damsels in distress) and turns them into individuals with their own idiosyncrasies and human failings. In the *Rainbow Abyss*, Rhion is a wizard, but he is short-sighted, has a laid-back sense of humour and recognizes that he is unlikely to become as powerful as his master. He and his fellow mages have had to work and study hard for their powers, and the magic they wield has its own logic and limitations - logic and consistency being as much a part as a successful fantasy as imagination. The one drawback with this novel is that it only tells half the story - the reader must wait for the sequel for the second half of the tale.

Sean Hutson Captives

Warner, 1992, 434pp, £4.99
Reviewed by Jim Steel

Sean Hutson, eh? The man who, when asked what got his creative juices flowing, replied that a big fat advance generally did

the trick. This, coupled with his reputation as a splatter merchant, must have persuaded more than a few readers out there to give his books a miss.

This was the first time that I'd read him, and I was pleasantly surprised at how enjoyable *Captives* was. The gore is supplied in nauseating detail, but it isn't overused. Hutson gives over much of the novel to building the plot, providing the characters with motivation, and other niceties of storytelling. He does chance his arm with a highly improbable plot, but everything ties together neatly at the finish. Maybe neatly is the wrong word for a bloodbath which manages to be both over the top and an anticlimax at the same time.

Several brutal copycat murders (each followed by the suicide of the murderer) are being investigated by Inspector Frank Gregson, with one of the few common denominators being that all the original perpetrators were incarcerated, and reportedly died, in Whitley Prison. In the prison itself, a right-wing governor is allowing a liberal reformist brain surgeon to operate on inmates with the hope of returning them to society. Since the experiments generally result in the eventual death of the prisoners, the governor's last resort capital punishment is satisfied.

The other plot strand concerns a sleazy London night-life and centers around strip-joint manager Jim Scott. Scott's gangster boss steals his girlfriend and takes steps to ensure that Scott is put out of harms way, and Scott ends up heading for Whitley Prison and a brain implant. After this, the plot really begins to stretch credibility as the coincidences start to pile up faster than the corpses.

But it is fun. My worst dread was that the three pages of acknowledgements would prove to be the best part of the novel. But this wasn't the case. You've got to admire an author who uses introductory quotes from both Francis Bacon and Black Sabbath.

Gwyneth Jones White Queen

Gollancz, 1992, 312pp, £4.99
Reviewed by Mat Coward

They've landed: but this time it isn't architect David Vincent who knows about them, it's a couple of mid-21st century TV reporters. Braemar, the woman, is a tabloid queen. Johnny, the man, is a serious journalist, a former union activist, who is (for complicated reasons to do with future viruses) an exile from his native USA despite being sympathetic to the socialist revolution which is turning that country into the USSA. They can't stand each other, but - of course - fall in love.

Anyway, they're both chasing up UFO reports, pretty much for want of anything better to do, when they turn up the real thing. They make contact with the alien, but quickly lose the scoop. Meanwhile, one of the aliens (who don't have genders) has fallen in love with Johnny.

Post-cyber clever-dick is the appropriate pigeon-hole for *White Queen*, I think; and like a lot of it's contemporaries, it left me with the thought: since so much of it is witty, so well thought-out, so incidentally fascinating - why couldn't it have a proper, gripping, beginning-to-end story as well?

Instead, in keeping with Cyberian tradition, it's written in such a style that half the time you're not entirely clear what's going on. Maybe everyone else in the entire sfnal universe understands every word of this stuff. Perhaps most people have no problem with phrases like, "The bone-grawing child of British middle-class winter," or, "In a country where everything good is always in the past, it's the poor who make the fashion." Certainly that would explain why this book has won so many accolades.

Still, whilst waiting for fast clear stories to come back into fashion, there's plenty of other stuff to enjoy here. Not least, some entertaining aliens, whose very foreign to the life-force is hinted at in lines like, "Clavel helped the door to close. It would have closed itself, the gesture was mere good taste." Jones also displays a neat insight into the chaos of our near future, where people watch cartoons instead of acted films, because, "Dramatic realism was too slow, too ordered, completely unlike nature."

In fact, despite being fragmentary and opaque in the required modern mode, *White Queen* is a considerably more enjoyable book than I get the feeling, it's author intends it to be. Serves her right. By the way, have you noticed how everyone in the next century always eats broche? I don't know what broche is, but I really must get some in.

Robert R. McCammon Mine

Grafton, 1992, 560pp, £4.99
Reviewed by Martin Sutherland

A psychological rather than supernatural horror/thriller in which yuppie mother Laura Clayborne's newborn son is abducted by deranged aging hippie terrorist Mary Terrell, aka Mary Terror. When the FBI proves ineffective, Laura hunts down Mary herself in a bloody chase leading from Michigan to California. The characters are vivid and terrifying, and the tension never lets up for a moment. Very good.

R. A. MacAvoy King Of The Dead

Headline, 1992, 286pp, £4.50

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

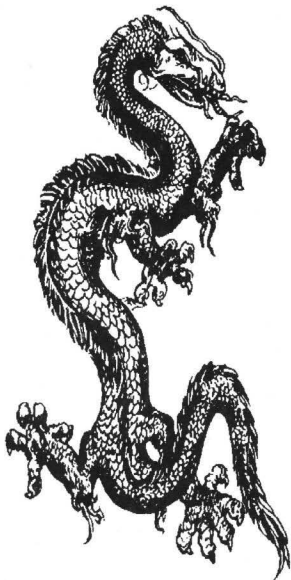
This well-written and thoughtful fantasy novel is a sequel to *Lens Of The World*, and continues the history of the life of Nazhuret - presumably begun in the earlier book. Scattered through the book are comments on previous events, so that the reader can surmise enough of what has gone before to understand the current narrative, although certain remarks seem to indicate that

a reading of the first book would add to the enjoyment of the sequel.

Nazhuret, the reader gathers, is the dispossessed son of a murdered Duke. Although his father's killer has in turn been slain, Nazhuret has no desire to claim his inheritance. When *King Of The Dead* begins, he and his lover, Arlin, are living incognito as beggars, in hiding from assassins sent by those who cannot believe Nazhuret has relinquished his title. The plot of the novel

concerns Nazhuret and Arlin being sent by their King, Rudolf of Volonya, to prevent a war with neighbouring Rezhmia whose emperor is Nazhuret's grandfather, but more interesting than their actual adventures - involving murderous nomads and treacherous priests - is the author's treatment of the themes of appearance and identity. Nazhuret, having rejected his

birthright, is 'haunted' by his own self as the son of the Duke, who never had the opportunity to exist. His name, Nazhuret, translates as 'King of the Dead', a figure surrounded by prophecy, and colours the way others react to him. He is both the image of his cousin, Reingish, heir of Rezhmia, in looks, and his opposite in personality. At one point Reingish impersonates Nazhuret, and even Arlin is not entirely sure which is which. Arlin herself, another disguised member of the nobility, dresses as a man and is often mistaken for a eunuch.



will certainly be seeking out *King Of The Dead's* predecessor.

Kim Newman Jago

Grafton, 1992, 668pp, £5.99

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

This is a novel to be praised; not for the conception, which is routine at best, but for

the exception.

It is, one must admit, a horror novel like any other. The various ingredients may have been put together in a way that varies slightly from others of the same ilk, but we still recognise them. There is a lonely rural community, complete with its typical complement of incomers, troubled farmers and bored youths. On the outskirts of the village there is a big old house with a curious history where an odd religious sect has set up residence, under the tutelage of a charismatic leader with extraordinary powers. There is the usual sequence of bizarre and disturbing incidents which increase in frequency and terror until there is an out and out eruption of pure evil, here taking the form of a breakdown of consensus reality. And as the story reaches its climax, there is a savage outburst of dismembered bodies, horrible creatures, oceans of blood, trails of savagery.

So far so predictable, and it must be said that if your taste is not for such a gruesome diet, then this book is not for you.

But having brought together such identikit pieces, Newman uses them as if they were completely fresh. His depiction of a small Somerset village, based on the village of his childhood, is vivid and convincing. He handles his huge cast with total assurance, so that you readily recognise them all, know their strengths and foibles. He avoids easy solutions; even the Reverend Anthony Jago at the centre of this web of death and destruction is no black-tarred villain. Charisma is a difficult characteristic to put across in a novel and Newman handles it very well indeed. This is a long book, much bigger than the short stories and tautly constructed novels he has written up to now, and there are inevitable longueurs, moment of sprawl, but in the main he keeps up the tension so that the book does not seem as long as it is. And if he has a tendency towards cinematic gore and set pieces which seem to have sprung straight from some late-night horror film, he does so with a vigour and a sense of humour which makes this a gripping and entertaining book.

Diana Paxson The Jewel Of Fire

NEL, 1992, 309pp, £4.99

Reviewed By Sue Thomason

Sixth and final volume of the *Chronicles of Westria*. Prince Julian finds and masters the fourth of the Elemental Jewels of Power which are bound to the sovereignty of Westria, defeats the Blood Lord Caolin and marries his beloved, Rana. Strong grounding in neo-Pagan belief and ritual, sensibly written, an undemanding enjoyable read.

Bob Shaw Terminal Velocity

Gollancz, 1992, 160pp, £3.99

Reviewed by Graham
Andrews

In recent years, Bob Shaw has taken to amending some of his early book-length work.

Ground Zero Man (Avon, 1971) later became **The Peace Machine** (Gollancz, 1985); an unnecessary rewrite job, apart from the minor geopolitical updates. He's never been happy with **The Shadow of Heaven** (Avon, 1969), his first-written, but third-published novel, so Gollancz brought out the much-revised version in 1991.

Terminal Velocity is not a rewrite of **Vertigo** (Gollancz, 1978), which needs no hindsight-inspired tampering. Rather, it brings together **Vertigo** and the original short story, 'Dark Icarus' (**Science**

Fiction Monthly, May 1974)/A little Night Flying' (**Worlds of If**, July-August, 1974), which has been left untitled here. The 'reunion' is thirteen years overdue.

FOR NEW READERS: Shaw deals with the physical/social/mental consequences of individualized flight, thanks (?) to the CG (=counter-gravity) harness. Air Policeman Robert Hasson almost falls to his death after tackling an aerial delinquent, high over Brum: "I've hunted like a hawk for too long. This is my last flight" (p. xvii). Hasson goes to Canada, under the assumed name of 'Hasson', where he sets about putting his life in order.

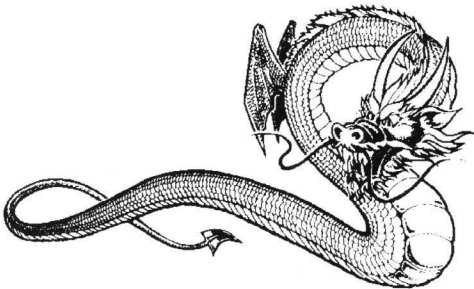
FOR ALL READERS: Hasson's gradual return to meaningful life turns **Terminal Velocity** into an effective novel-of-character. Shaw is a moralistic writer; good guys/gals and bad guys/gals always get their rewards/punishments. For example:

"Pridgeon had insulted (Hasson) and degraded him and made him feel ashamed. Pridgeon liked tormenting blind youngsters who were in no position to do anything about it. Pridgeon liked using muscle on men he thought were cripples. For all that, and for a thousand other things of which Pridgeon had no knowledge, Pridgeon would have to pay a heavy price, and the time had come..."

As for Hasson, he finally pits himself against "...the ancient curving vastness of the Pacific Ocean, to atone for the years he had wasted in parochialism and conformity (*sounds like Belfast, to me*) by losing himself in domains where time and history had no beachheads" (p. 160). Hasson *still* hasn't

got it easy. Terminal velocity, terminal velocity, terminal...

Exalted birth becomes a capital offence (the magical Kokette stands in for the guillotine) and she watches while her friends and



Paula Volsky Illusion

Gollancz, 1992, 700pp, £5.99

Reviewed by John Newsinger

Paula Volsky's massive 700 page novel, **Illusion**, is a romance of Revolution, of what is clearly the French Revolution transposed to the fictional kingdom of Vonahr. The most important difference that she makes between late eighteenth-century France and Vonahr is that in the latter magic persists. It plays its part, first in keeping the monarchy in power and later, in sustaining the revolutionary government of Whiss Valeur. Despite this, what we are presented with is an obvious account of events in France in 1789 and after.

The injustices of the old regime, the growth of popular unrest, the revolutionary upheaval and the eventual establishment in power of a terrorist regime, are all shown from the point of view of the young provincial aristocrat, Eliste vo Derrivale, a newly appointed maid of honour to Queen Lallazay. This could have resulted in disaster, in a Barbara Cartland type exercise with unruly, ignorant plebs, filled with spite and envy, selfishly spoiling life for the gay young things whose only crime is to want to enjoy themselves. In fact, Volsky convincingly avoids this pitfall and succeeds in portraying a society in turmoil.

Eliste is a sympathetic character, whose ignorance and naivety, snobbishness and helplessness, all have to quickly outgrow, if she is to survive the fall from a position of immense privilege to begging in the streets.

relatives are relentlessly put to death. Eliste is confronted with a choice between prostitution or death by starvation. Her education is quite drastic.

Of course, all comes right in the end, but only after many adventures. The Valeur dictatorship is overthrown and moderate revolutionaries, among them her friend and lover Dref Zeenoson, take power. She is restored to a life of relative comfort, if not privilege, but realises that the day of the Exalted has passed.

Despite initial reservations, and some dread at the prospect of having to plough through 700 pages of text, **Illusion** was a pleasant surprise. Not an outstanding novel, but nevertheless an enjoyable read that sustained interest. Volsky is not an author I have come across before, but she is one I shall look out for.

**John Vornholt
Sanctuary ST No. 56**
Titan, 1992, 273pp, £3.99
War Drums ST: TNG No. 23
Titan, 1992, 276pp, £3.99

Reviewed by Chris C Bailey

There is nothing, but nothing more frustrating to a man, woman, or child, than to intimately know a thing of infinite beauty and passion, and then to have it forcefully taken away from oneself, only to withdraw away whilst futilely yearning for its return. John Vornholt's latest edition in the classic Star Trek vein, **Sanctuary**, hits this point most poignantly, by successfully contrasting the essence of events from NASA's manned

Apollo moon-missions of the sixties and seventies, to the disastrous space-shuttle flight of the eighties, to the equally disastrous mission undertaken by our intrepid Captain James T. Kirk and Enterprise crew into an unknown, and uncharted sector of the galaxy. **Sanctuary** gives the reader a reasonable insight into what it *could* be like to become stranded on an unknown and out-of-the-way, but equally legendary planet of eden-like repute, where your every wish is catered to (except for sexual gratification from the opposite sex, of course!), and which is provided by a race of... well, *unusual* humanoid beings of a somewhat mixed nature. Like all utopian societies, however benignly imagined, there is always a price to pay for ones protection from all manner of persecutors, and that is self-determination, or, more accurately put, personal freedom! Yes, you guessed correctly, once down-and-out on the planet **Sanctuary**, you can never leave...

As evidenced all too plainly through out human history across the vast continents of our fragile Earth, racial differences, be they superficial in nature, such as skin tone, or more marked differences, such as diametrically opposed religious-dominated cultures, more often than not lead to what can only be described as a severe psychological disease: War! Such is the basic premise through out John Vornholt's second reviewed novel, **War Drums**. A Next Generation Star Trek novel, involving, of course, captain Jean-Luc Picard and his Enterprise and sturdy crew, who unwittingly become involved in the racial and often murderous impulses shown between two groups of struggling and desensitised sentient beings, both Human and Klingon, who are both trying to eke out an existence on the somewhat grim and primordial planet Selva. Everywhere else in the galaxy, there is peace and tranquillity between the federation and the Klingon Empire, everywhere, that is, except Selva. **War Drums** is also more than just simply trying to survive on a relatively young Earth-like planet, it tries to set a moral example to us all, in the here and now, but not only showing us, via the printed word, how ugly rape, pillage, and wanton murder can be, but also shows us how to try to overcome certain basic racial differences, in order to survive collectively as a single colony.

John Vornholt is unquestionably a talented novelist who writes very good *ST/TNG* stories, and has a bright writing future ahead of him, but I'll leave you to judge that for yourself. As for the dedicated trekker, I can highly recommend both **Sanctuary** and **War Drums** as collectable reading material.

David Wingrove Chung Kuo Book Three: The White Mountain

NEL, 1992, 667pp, £5.99

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

Chung Kuo will be a series of eight novels, of which **The White Mountain** is the third. David Wingrove postulates a future Earth under Chinese rule, a hierarchical, male-dominated society where corruption flourishes and change is unthinkable. Within this rigid structure arises a movement of rebellion, fueled by the submerged European culture; by the end of the sequence a more balanced society will emerge.

It would be wrong to imply, however, that the issues are as simplistic as this summary suggests. Wingrove does not equate Chinese culture with evil or welcome the European rebellion without question. There is good and bad on both sides, as there are individuals disgusted with the actions to which their ethos leads them.

The portrayal of corruption in this series so far has laid Wingrove open to charges of pornography. This term is perhaps inaccurate. There is, certainly, nastiness: violence in association with sexual perversion. However, it is hard to imagine any readers being aroused by descriptions in **The White Mountain**, and impossible to imagine that they would be encouraged to imitate the activities described. Wingrove has rightly said that to portray a corrupt society it is necessary to depict corruption; the point at which a writer should stop will always be a matter of opinion.

The ultimate problem with **The White Mountain** is not one of ideas. Wingrove's concept has breadth and variety. Unfortunately, the effectiveness of the writing does not measure up to the imaginative quality of the ideas. **The White Mountain** has no structure, merely a sequence of events. It may be argued that a structure will emerge in the series as a whole, but the reader of one individual novel is entitled to expect a sense of pattern, a building to some sort of climax, and this is absent. Wingrove writes in short bursts, a few pages dealing with one set of characters, then a switch to someone else; there is no coherent direction.

This failure is reflected in the sentence structure and the choice of vocabulary. Wingrove is over fond of rhetorical questions and the short, verbless sentence; the repetition becomes monotonous. The vocabulary is restricted and uninteresting. This is seen particularly in the fact that no character has an individual speaking voice; they all sound the same, down to the use of the same dreary expletives.

The lack of a significant voice of their own may be the reason for the characters' two dimensional quality. Once again, this is a problem of style. For all his effective ideas on characterisation, Wingrove has not made them live and breathe, and for that reason they have no power to move the reader.

I grieve over **The White Mountain**. I grieve over the eight good Science Fiction novels whose place on the publisher's list **Chung Kuo** is occupying, and I grieve over the concept as a whole; it might have been truly exciting.

Bridget Wood The Lost Prince

Headline, 1992, 566pp, £5.99

Reviewed by Chris Hart

This hefty fantasy novel is Wood's follow up to her well received **Wolfking**, where she first revealed her talent for evoking a rich tale with a dark, gothic fantasy back-drop. The reader cannot help but be immersed in the Celtic milieu she lovingly creates; but will have difficulty fishing out the story that is drowning in it.

Ireland is under threat. The sacred bloodline is about to expire - as we are constantly reminded- and Medoc's Dark Ireland is rising to implement a chain of events that will eventually lead to the Apocalypse. Grainne, Fergus and a posse of endearing archetypes set out to avert Apocalypse, save Tara and prevent Medoc's rise to power. They need to "unmake history" by various ingenious methods, including the summoning of the Fael-Inis chariot which will propel them into the future to prevent the catastrophe of Apocalypse, manifested in the form of a highly contagious virus. The inhabitants of the Far Future live within Draconian moral codes to prevent the spread of the disease. The contemporary reference is obvious and cleverly done. Our age has become a distant memory to the Far Future and Wood uses the time travelling theme to lace the novel with playful references to Shakespeare and contemporary expressions that are juxtaposed against the Celtic background.

There are some spectacular set-pieces, most notable is the summoning of the time-travel chariot and the description of the horrific Lad of Skins, but the love scene between Fergus and a she-wolf is the real high-point; will she describe the seduction or cut away to the post-coital cigarette? - I'll let you find out for yourself.

Despite the many qualities of this novel, I sense a lack of confidence from this author; any action is hampered by densely written historical rationale and Wood seems to over-compensate for the shallow characters with endless pages filled with reflections on

history, legends and blood-lines. Nevertheless the pseudo-Christian quest for the Lost Prince is compelling and not without moments of brilliance.

Reissues

Samuel R. Delany - Dhalgren

Grafton, 1992, 879pp, £6.99

Reviewed by Terry Broome

An unknown catastrophe has struck the city of Bellona. Relationships between points on the compass are in a constant state of flux, the compass itself is unreliable, and inhabitants are terrified by a visions of two moons and a grossly swollen sun. A young degenerate with no name enters the city, bent on discovering himself. A sporadic amnesiac, he meets a variety of individuals, all reduced to a chaotic, insane subsistence existence in the ruins. Some are park-dwelling utopians, some pretend that nothing untoward has happened and others live in large groups destroying what remains and terrorising anyone who annoys them. The hero has a number of graphic sexual encounters, is involved in several fights, writes a book of poetry and has long conversations with other artists on what it means to be a poet, a critic, a celebrity.

Delany obsessively pushes the point that his hero is a bisexual of mixed white/Amerindian stock, but devalues what currency this might have had by maintaining an awkward ambivalence, especially apparent when all the racial encounters are deliberately underscored. Perhaps this was the point, but it is a belaboured one for such a simple statement. Delany, himself a black bisexual American, went through the 1960's in his twenties and might have written this novel as a reaction to the growing conservatism of the 1970's. The 1990's have dated it badly. Microwave ovens, so rare in **Dhalgren** that the hero has to describe what they do, are now common place. The shadow of AIDS looms over the book. After the 70's, the emergence of designer drugs and the shifting nature of street gangs ultimately changed the pattern of American criminality. In one of the discussions in the novel, a character argues that the hero's poetry would cease to have meaning outside of the city. The poetry is a product of Bellona as **Dhalgren** is a product of the 1970's. The final 150 pages, in particular, betray it's origins, a strange experiment in New Wave typographical and narrative quirks which do not illuminate, but obscure, a story which began to go stale 350 pages earlier. It was at this point, almost half-way through the

book, that it lost it's fascination for me when I first tried reading it ten years ago. The style, once thrilling, became prosaic and meandering. Instead of gripping more tightly, it became increasingly pedestrian. It is like a sleek steam train giving way to negative velocity on an interminable journey. At the end, it loops around to the start and finishes in mid-sentence, having gone nowhere.

He did it all so much better in **Triton**.

Brian Lumley The Clock Of Dreams

Grafton, 1992, 207pp, £4.99

Reviewed by Colin Bird

As H. P. Lovecraft pastiches go, this one is highly enjoyable with plenty of verve and style without the lethargic prose of the man himself. Elder Gods abound, all with the required unpronounceable names, and not a lot else happens in terms of plot. This is a slim volume following on from **The Transition Of Titus Crow** and forms one small part of Brian Lumley's seemingly endless series of Lovecraftian stories. First published in 1978, the Titus Crow books may provide material for fans of his successful **Necroscope** series to seek out and devour.

The story concerns the journey of De Marigny, friend of Titus Crow, into Earth's dreamland, which has been invaded by Cthulu (yes, he's back and he's pissed off!). The key to victory is the eponymous Time Clock, which can be controlled by Crow and used to defeat the bad guys. Yog-Sothoth makes a guest appearance later in the book, when the adjectives **Roget's Thesaurus**, cross referenced under 'monstrous', take a real beating. A nice romp, a tad lacking in humour - characteristic of Lovecraft - and this book is probably best enjoyed by fans of old H. P. himself.

Shorts

Arthur C. Clarke The Other Side Of The Sky

Gollancz, 1992, 245pp, £3.99

Martin H. Greenberg (ed.) New Stories From The Twilight Zone

Warner, 1992, 295pp, £8.99

Reviewed by L. J. Hurst

The Other Side Of The Sky was first published in 1957, collecting short stories written in the ten years before that, including 'The Star', 'The Nine Billion Names of God' and 'The Songs of Distant Earth'. One or two stories are fantasies about little men having

their everyday lives invaded, but mostly these are hard SF, modified by Clarke's stress on character, which some people find sickly. The two most important things in this book are the two series of connected stories - 'Venture To The Moon', and 'The Other Side Of The Sky', which originally appeared in the *Evening Standard* in 1957 just as Sputnik 1 went up.

Ironically, perhaps, what was once prediction has turned into alternate history. Very little of what Clarke described actually happened - radio relay stations are not vast space cities, space stations are nissen huts in space and not Taj Mahals, the only permanent residents have been unhappy Soviets stuck there by the collapse of the rouble economy. In Clarke's view the space race would unite Britain, the USA and USSR in friendly rivalry; of course, it simply helped to extend the Cold War. On the other hand, he saw the invasion of the media landscape - one of the stories revolves around a soft drink company invading a signal exercise from the Moon to the Earth, say in the way that they would annex the Olympic Games in our time-stream.

Clarke values humanity, and part of his optimism must be due to his stressing the role of people and even animals. 'Feathered Friends', part of 'Other Side', involves a pet canary revealing a failed air-conditioning plant, the role birds filled in mines for hundreds of years, except that *The Guardian* this summer has had a front page photograph of one of the last mine canaries; machinery is replacing them. The air-conditioning unit stopped when it froze up, something that I suppose has become common in many computer rooms, though computers are something that Clarke uses in 'Nine Billion Names' really as a vehicle for a joke.

So the result is that sideways view, the alternative universe, where these things almost happened. They are implicit in the technology, but not obvious. The opposite is fantasy like 'All The Time In The World', where higher beings try to use a petty criminal to warn the earth, to no result, that it is going to be destroyed.

The magical penetration of the world is what **The Twilight Zone** emphasises. This collection is called "New Stories From", but it is actually stories, some of them classics, including 'The Star', used in the CBS TV series **The New Twilight Zone** in the late 1980s.

The twenty-one stories include Henry Slesar's 'Examination Day', Theodore Sturgeon's 'A Saucer of Loneliness' and 'Yesterday Was Monday', and Robert Silverberg's 'To See The Invisible Man'. The earliest of these classics dates from 1941.

the latest from 1963. The series used newer stories from Parke Godwin, Roger Zelazny, Harlan Ellison and Joe Haldeman. Three stories from Ellison appear here.

There may be fans of the TV series who want this collection of stories that inspired the programs, but it would perhaps be of equal use for anyone interested to know how a TV series is put together, and how scripts develop. Alan Brenner's introduction, 'Two Year In The Twilight Zone', describes his involvement in the original suggestion for the series, before going on to work on everything from the script writing to the dubbing and the music soundtracks. Reading Kevin Brownlow's history of the silent movies, **The Parade's Gone By**, I was struck by the similarities in working methods between periods seventy years apart. Brenner may be over-emphasising his own role, but it sounds accurate.

Brenner's account ends with CBS considering the Nielson Ratings (viewing figures) and cancelling the show. It is no comfort to any would-be writer to know that their work will end in the hands of such men. Yet, I would guess that the same type of men ran NASA too, and that one reason why space was not explored as Arthur C. Clarke envisaged was that every piece of rocket was sub-contracted, and every retro-booster was the product of a lowest tender.

The cover blurb of **Other Side** mentions the Clarke's power to raise "a sense of wonder" - what most of the astronauts had to wonder was if a cheapjack tender would get them home.

Byron Preiss (ed)
The Ultimate Werewolf
Headline, 1992, 374pp, £4.99
Reviewed by Graham Andrews

The Ultimate Werewolf is a companion volume to **The Ultimate Dracula** and **The Ultimate Frankenstein**, all of which were first published in the U.S.A. by Dell (1991). Byron Preiss acted as general editor for this 'monster trilogy', with David Kellar, Megan Kellar and John Betancourt helping him out on **The Ultimate Werewolf**.

"... I'll not retell the litany of the werewolf theme in classical literature: Dumas-père's **The Wolf Leader** in 1857 (etc.," writes Harlan Ellison in his typically feral introduction, 'Crying Wolf!' "Nor will I dwell on images of the werewolf in phenomenological anecdote ... though it wouldn't hurt you to look up Freud's Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis (1909) in which (he) treats the ... 'Wolf Man'" (pp. 4-5).

Ellison does dwell on Lon Chaney, Jr (1906-73), who - in 1941 - "created the

image of the Wolf Man ... for all those who came after him" (p. 6). The Selected Filmography, by Leonard Wolf (yes -- Wolf), also deals with Chaney's Wolf Man film, plus seven other notable lycanthro-pics.

Guessimation ... Out of the twenty stories, five are A's, three are B's, and the remaining twelve belong in the alphabetical nether regions.

Far-and-away the best story is H. Ellison's 'Adrift Just Off the Isles of Langerhans: Latitude 38° 54' N Longitude 77° 13' W', featuring the anguished Lon Chaney-Larry Talbot and a medical adventurer named Victor ... something-or-other. There's a Wolf in My Time Machine' by L. Niven, runs it a distant second: Svetz, the Time Retrieval Expert, finds a wolf in his time machine (plot summaries have always been my strong point). These stories are, of course, minor classics.

The other stories were (presumably) specially written for this book. 'Wolf, Iron and Moth' is the best original story, by guess-who: "Another writer, under the obviously false byline of Lon Chaney III, gave the results of his survey-by-mail of werewolf sex habits. The sampling showed that 38.3 percent of male and female lycanthropes were unconsciously influenced by their lupine phases. When in their human phase, they preferred that the female be on all fours and that the male use the rear approach" (pp. 57-8).

Pat Murphy's anthropological 'South of Oregon City' and 'Special Makeup', an effective shaggy-man story by Kevin J. Anderson, fill out the A list. The three B-listed stories are 'Ancient Evil' (Bill Pronzini), 'Angels' Moon' (Kathe Koja), and 'Close Shave' (Brad Linaweaver: ho hum story, brilliant last line). As for the also and never-rans, 'The Werewolf Gambit' is the most disappointing - Robert Silverberg writing in Stephen King's sleep.

I know from nothing about **The Ultimate Dracula** and **The Ultimate Frankenstein** volumes, but **The Ultimate Werewolf** falls a long way short of ultimacy. There should have been an extract from Jack Williamson's **Darker Than You Think** (Unknown, December 1940: Fantasy Press, 1948), the greatest novel yet written about lycanthropy - bar none. And these shorter works must have howled to be included: 'There Shall Be No Darkness' (James Blish); 'The Complete Werewolf' (Anthony Boucher); 'Wolves Don't Cry' (Bruce Elliott).

N.B. You'd be much better off reading Douglas Hill's anthology, **Way Of The Werewolf** (Panther, 1966). Good hunting ...

Graphics

Neil Gaiman The Sandman IV: Season of Mists (Titan, 1992, £8.99)

Al Davison The Minotaur's Tale (Gollancz, 1992, £9.99)

Ian McDonald & David Littleton Kling Klang Klatch (Gollancz, 1992, £9.99)

Alan Grant & Dean Ormston John Dredd: Rapture (Mandarin, 1992, £5.99)

Pat Mills, Tony Skinner & Kevin Walker ABC Warriors: Kroniches of Khaos (Mandarin, 1992, £6.99)

John Smith & Chris Weston Killing Time (Mandarin, 1992, £5.99)

John Wagner & Jeff Anderson, Garth Ennis & John Burns John Dredd: Democracy Now! (Mandarin, 1992, £4.99)

John Wagner & Peter Doherty Young Death: Boyhood of A Superfiend (Mandarin, 1992, £6.99)

John Wagner, Alan Grant & Simon Bisley Judgement on Gotham (Mandarin, 1992, £5.99)

Terry Murray & Jeff Anderson The Shadow's Edge (Iion, 1992, 48pp, £3.99)

Michael-Jan Friedman, Peter David & Pablo Marcos Star Trek: The Modala Imperative (Titan, 1992, £8.99)

Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

Recently I started looking at graphic novels for the Library Association Youth Libraries Group. Some said that the boom was possibly over. Well, maybe. Taking original material rather than reprint, there's certainly a slackening (and most of the best new material I've seen this year has been other than SF, though that's probably a hopeful sign). However, despite the failure of some of 1991's experiments to take off, there's still good stuff coming from mainstream publishers in 1992, with the promise of more in 1993.

Season's highlight is part four of the collected edition of - well, "the best comic ever" sounds like understatement. For new readers, the Sandman, aka Morpheus, aka Dream is one of the Endless: not gods, but personifications of metaphysical qualities. Much has gone before, but it's quite possible to start here and catch up another time. After a prologue which gives all necessary information, Dream sets out to rescue a human lover he condemned to Hell, and is handed the keys of the kingdom. It is to be his decision which of several claimants rule it next. Meanwhile, the released dead, with nowhere else to go, return to earth. Even once the decision is made (or made for him), Dream has to come to terms with his maltreatment of Nada. Perhaps a seed for another story line is sown.

Sandman is on a level so far above other comics that critical discourse turns into burbled enthusiasm (such as Harlan Ellison's introduction). But there's so much good here: the conversation between the Endless just before the story proper starts; the depiction of Thor as a musclebound oaf

and a Chaos-Lord as a balloon toting child at "Mr Dreamy's party"; Gaiman's excursion into the territory of the school story or the way he incorporates (at a less comic level) the Mitonic parodies of his collaboration with Terry Pratchett. During this sequence Gaiman has tackled every kind of horror and fantasy so well you can't think of a serious rival. One sign of this book's quality is that although seven artists are involved you still *it* it as an entity. Another is knowing that there is far more to tell.

The Minotaur's Tale and Kling Klang Klatch are the two latest novels from Gollancz: one as sciencefictional as you'll hope to meet, the other with just a touch of fantasy to qualify it. Davison magnificently fictionalizes his own experience of spina bifida (see **The Spiral Cage**, drawing also on the myth of the minotaur, seen as the story of a deformed child hidden away on the King's orders. Banshee, an ugly derelict, is given a copy of the Minotaur's diary when recovering in hospital from a vicious beating. Through it, he learns about the true nature of beauty and ugliness, in his own life and in the life of others, and finds union with a doctor who herself has had her life marred by physical deformity. There are scenes of sexual tenderness and, earlier on, painful brutality: Davison's art overcomes the latter as it celebrates the former.

As for **Kling Klang Klatch**: well, there's this *teddy-bear*... Could this be an ironic rejoinder to the supposition "graphic novels" are really kids' comics writ large and shiny? **Kling Klang Klatch** is an ominous weird satirical fusion of modes: Enid Blyton collaborating with Raymond Chandler and Philip K. Dick. Inspector McBear, whose beat covers Pandatown, investigates the murder of a dance-hall panda and uncovers corruption and racism in toyland. McDonald's bizarre imagination brings us Marxist robot-cars and a lovely line in hard-boiled soft-toy dialogue. Lyttleton's jagged art takes cute care-bear sensibilities and eviscerates them, though if you want a real science-fiction explanation you get it. True, the manipulation of levels of reality gets too self-reverential and really, guys, you're not the only ones who know the lyrics of Tom Waits' songs, but on balance, a lot of fun. Recommended for it's unashamed oddness, especially to people who remember the originals (and I'm not talking about Chandler and Dick).

The Mandarin books have their roots in **2000AD**. I recently received a review copy of it's 800th edition: not bad for a comic! I once put down in an early **Matrix** for it's distasteful "aggrofacism" (though I later became a fan!) Apart from the return of 'Flesh' - never a strip I liked - I enjoyed this issue, with it's new Judge Dredd serial, favourites 'Zenith' and 'Robo-Hunter', and intriguing new installment of the boyhood of an apprentice sorcerer, 'Journal of Luke Kirby'. Even 'Flesh', with it's typical comic-book-dumb rip-off of the Tarzan myth (this

time, human child raised by dinosaurs!) might work this time. It's all much glossier and in colour, though the often murky artwork isn't always an improvement on black and white. Still, though **2000AD** may not be *quite* as it has been, I wouldn't be surprised to be wondering whether the comic should change it's name come the Millennium.

Mandarin have marketed the **2000AD** novels with massive publicity and well-chosen titles, aimed at the Judge Dredd generation. First, the ultimate clash - Dredd versus Batman: implacable law versus vigilante Justice. All right, so this is a marketing ploy, but it's a marketing ploy with attitude. Judge Death is pursued through the dimensions to Gotham city, and while Dredd and Batman bicker it's left to Judge Anderson to act decisively. This is Gothic slapstick with a vein of macabre humour supporting the set-piece combats: Mean Machine with his control settings: "surlly, mean, vicious and brutal", the scene where we discover "what unholy abominations (it takes) to frighten *Death* himself, and the final confrontation during a Heavy Metal concert with Death taking the lead in a send-up of the Stones' 'Sympathy For The Devil'. Over the top? Absolutely, but enjoyable!

There are popular crazes and popular crazes. **Raptur** is a **Predator** rip-off (**Predator** of course being "influenced" by an entire library). This monster stalks the streets of Mega-City One, slaughtering it's inhabitants and eating their brains. Although weakened by it's hypnotic powers, Dredd defeats it in the sub-city sewers. It's another "monster" which you'd like or not, as much as you like monster stories, though the usual glimpses of Mega-City One life as seen by a roving reporter help to move the story along and provide some continuity between the scenes of confrontation.

More ambitious are **Democracy Now!** and **Young Death**, which explore the values behind the Dredd series. The former is a two-parter giving the climax of the 'Democracy' story line in which the judges grant a referendum on their continued existence. In 'The Devil You Know' Wagner and Anderson show Dredd uncovering a plot among dissident Judges to sabotage the referendum. Dredd is the subject of an assassination attempt because he's the main supporter of the referendum among the Judges, not because of his love for democracy, but because he believes the citizens will prefer the security of the Judge system. The final decision is made in a classic Ennis/Burns story, where the ironic title - 'Twilight's Last Gleaming' tells us all we need to know. Voters abstain, the defeated democrats retreat into quietude, Dredd broods lovingly over "his" city. Depressing. But could the strip have taken the defeat of the judges and survived?

Young Death is the origin of Dredd's greatest enemy who was once a boy called Sydney who enjoyed torturing small animals. It's also a murder-mystery: why has death

murdered the reporter to whom he confided his story? The answer allows for some ironic sympathy on behalf of victims of the gutter press. Having said that, the joke isn't *that* funny and young Sydney's childhood amusements and apprenticeship to his equally loony father (a dentist: just think...!) go too near the borderline between macabre humour and sadism for my tender heart. Throwaway jokes such as the "indestructible superfiend" scrounging for the rent, though, are fun and fans who are disturbed by Death's violence might - as I'm sure they're meant to - wonder how far his philosophy of "Crime is only committed by the living, therefore life is a crime", is really opposed to that of the "goodies".

There are more thinky bits in **Chronicles of Kaos**. The ABC Warriors are mercenary robots brought to the planet Hekate by their leader Deadlock to learn the ways of Kaos. Basically an excuse for some well-painted scenes of mayhem, like all Pat Mills's work it's imaginative and ironic, with some nice scenes such as when the Governor condemns illegal "Moon Raves", encourages errant youngsters to confess to their parents ("I'd understand") but disowns his son when he takes his advice; or the personality change which causes one of the robots to camp it up in furs (readier objection "could say more about your problem than Joe's") or the dumb sadist Mek-Quake, "still plugging (his) head full of **Friday the Thirteenth Part 50**". Behind the scrapping is the underplayed comic double-act relationship between the two robots from **Ro-Busters**, Ro-Jaws and Hammerstein.

Killing time is something of an oddity in the mix. Written by the author of **New Statesmen**, this is an adventure featuring two transtemporal agents who appear in Victorian London at the home of a scientist who has created a time machine. Also present is Dr Culver - alias Jack the Ripper: there to complete a ritual which will set the Iscariot free upon the multiverse. It's an interesting example of how a graphic novel can fail - you need more background than the story actually gives. Some real horror could have come from longer emphasis on the fact that Winwood and Cord can only defeat their enemy *after* he has committed an atrocity, but because we can't believe in the detail no such horror arises and the final hallucinatory scenes seem to exist only because the trend of the market dictates that they should. I liked the outcome of having one of the heroes appallingly injured and in agony, but limb-lopping and blood aren't enough (unless that's all you want, in which case go shack-up with Mek-Quake). At twice the length, the story might have had twice the impact and could even have raised at greater length the attitudes which sparked Victorian fascination with the Ripper's crimes - or would that have led to *really* uncomfortable reading for an audience of adolescent males?

A DEADLY GAME OF SEX, POLITICS AND BETRAYAL

GWYNETH JONES

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