Nuts & Bolts

Okay, I promise. I will never set first lines in bold text again. I'm sorry it caused confusion for some of you. Hopefully those of you who wrote and those of you who suffered in silence will prefer the new layout. I've put a lot of work into it, and this has caused a delay in sending out the mailing. I hope you will think it was worth it. Now that I have completed the design, I will hopefully be able to recover lost time next issue and get back on schedule...

I'm still working away from home (Hemel Hempstead), and this continues to impact on my time. I have become resigned to continuing to produce the magazine myself, as no-one has offered to take this over – but I'd appreciate help from proficient typists, with access to PCs with 3.5” drives. Any volunteers?

I hope you enjoy this issue, I look forward to your comments!

Catie

Contributions
Good articles are always wanted. All MSS should be typed double spaced on one side of the page. Submissions may also be accepted as ASCII text files on IBM, Atari ST or Mac 3.5” discs. Maximum preferred length is 6000 words; exceptions can and will be made. A 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.

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that book. *Star Maker* contains, in linear or circular chart form, three ‘Time Scales’, which between them engulf both the action of *Nebula Maker* and that of the seminal first book *Last and First Men* (1930) – a narrative which recounts the human story through to its termination on Neptune two billion years hence. Then following *Last and First Men*, and set in its historical frame, came *Last Men in London* (1932), in which a ‘Last Man’ on Neptune time-travels telepathically to experience twentieth century London. Thus, looking at this entire section of Stapledon’s work, we find a kind of ‘Chinese boxing’ of future history, achieved through successive and various, but chronologically consistent, narratives. Stapledon in drafting worked all this out in great detail by means of a series of huge coloured master charts, of which those in the novels are merest summaries. The originals are part of the Stapledon archive held in the Sydney Jones Library at Liverpool University. They impressively exemplify a future historian’s workshop.

I think Stephen Baxter’s working definition of a ‘future history’ might be improved by some small amendment to make it clear that the fiction is not, as he puts it, “set against a consistent background of events and characters”, but actually creates that consistent background against which the characters perform. That definition, and his article as a whole, contribute usefully to the ‘taxonomy’ of SF.

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From KV Barlow

Stephen Baxter’s interesting survey of the Future History sub-genre (Vector 179) understandably concentrates on relatively recent works, though he does mention Wells in the context of Christopher Priest’s utilising something of *The Time Machine’s* framework in *The Space Machine*. (KW Jeter, it’s worth adding, ditto in *Morlock Night*). Wells, it is true, didn’t himself again cash in on the Eloi future world, but there is a near-horizon future history scenario of his creation which he did introduce into several separate works. It is first delineated in the utopian/dystopian novella ‘A Story of the Days To Come’, collected in his 1899 volume *Tales of Space and Time*. London of the 22nd Century is roofed over, moving platforms provide transport, wind vanes supply power, luxury aircraft ply to the pleasure cities of the South. He depicts at greater length an identical static culture of uniformity, and then disrupts it by revolution and invasion, in his novel *When the Sleeper Wakes*, published that same year; and in *When the Sleeper Awakes*, the revised version published a decade later. In the interim there appeared, in *Twelve Stories and a Dream* (1903), ‘A Dream of Armageddon’: a dystopian vision where the action is centred, (within that same cultural framing) on the pleasure city of Capri. The stories share a coherent future ambience, technological and sociological, though plot-wise and character-wise each follows a separate track – which perhaps only half-qualifies them as constituting a future history, if Stephen Baxter’s definition is to be strictly observed.

A master of the history of future worlds, and at his furthest imaginative reach of that of future universes, was Olaf Stapledon. The posthumously-published, incomplete *Nebula Maker* was actually part of an early discarded draft for *Star Maker* (1937). It fills out in more detail what is covered in the pivotal thirteenth chapter (‘The Beginning and the End’) of

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From Norman Barnard

My thanks to John Madracki for reassuring me that I’m not alone and there are others who find *Red Dwarf* increasingly unfunny and SF on TV generally disappointing. I thought perhaps it was just book-obsessed old me. I wait with trepidation for the day when some idiot tries to film *Neuromancer* for the small screen.

Jessica Yates’ typically wide-ranging piece on children’s fantasy contained several gems, especially when she noted that the adult wizards in Diane Duane’s *A Wizard Abroad* never seem to get involved with real-world type disasters like Auschwitz or Aberfan. Maybe Americans would find that “political” or something?

You yourself, dear editor, show unsuspected prophetic powers, in assigning my praise of Paul Park’s *The Cult of Loving Kindness* (Reviewers Poll) to his *Coelestis* which I’ve only just read this month and also found admirable. How did you know? (Apologies! When working through adding reviewers comments to my chart of recommended books I accidentally added Norman’s comment to both
books. This in no way affected the result. Oops! Catie)

But you spotted why some of us tend to come to some books later than first publication: we prefer the paperback format. Not only is it usually cheaper, which means we can buy more with our money: it is easier to handle, slip in a pocket, read on a bus or hold curled up in bed. Hardback books are, to my great alarm, growing bulkier by the month; I find that pretentious, wasteful, burdensome and uninviting — and not just for SF titles either. Do other readers agree?

From Martyn Taylor

I was interested in John Madracki’s survey of TV SF, having hoed the same furrow myself ten odd years ago. Almost very complete (what about the adaptations of various Fay Weldon stories — ‘The Cloning of Joanna May’ is SF in anyone’s book — Alan Plater’s ‘Middlemen’ and Andrew Davies’ ‘A Peculiar Practice’ and its sequel) and exhaustive, even if I feel he did undervalue the amount of SF pumped out on the cartoon channels (X-Men, Power Rangers [yes, it’s awful, but my kids love it], etc etc) but that’s only my opinion.

Where was his thesis, though, his explanation? As for his critical standards — “antipodean awfulness and transatlantic trash” may look good in a Chris Dunkley piece but Vector is supposed to be the “Critical Journal of the BSFA”, and critical standards require more than cleverly expressed personal opinions. Evaluating any TV show without taking into account its target market is a fatuous exercise anyway (and almost by definition anyone reading this is not within any TV exec’s target market) and bad critical practice. Damn something for being a bad airplane rather than a submarine it never pretended to be.

Which still leaves the question, why is so much TV SF so awful?

My thesis was that the British producing classes are shit scared of science and only appreciate SF if it is safely funny (these people love Hitch Hiker’s... and Terry Pratchett even if they don’t understand them...) since then I’ve done some writing for TV and would add that not only are the production values of most TV SF bad, the standards of writing are even worse. Why should this be the case? Well, most TV writers are the same people as the producers (only the names have been changed to protect the guilty) and have the same attitude towards SF, while most SF writers hold TV in such contempt they can’t be bothered to learn the vocabulary of TV.

Then there is the budgetary consideration. Anything not in contemporary dress and setting automatically adds 30% to the budget, more if you have to make your own sets and costume rather than hiring them (even more if you’re doing it on film which, until recently and the invention of those lovely video image manipulation toys, was de rigueur). Now, most TV SF is poorly received and has poor audiences. Allow a croak voiced Dalek in an Armani suit to feed all these factors into his spreadsheet and his answer will be the go ahead for two more series of real life crime programmes and a rerun of The Best of it’ll be Alright on the Night.

TV by its nature is an intimate medium and our society appears incapable of understanding it unless it is realistic. I’m not taking your average SF idea here, you’ll agree. And, I suggest, there’s your explanation. TV isn’t film and it isn’t the written word (which is the best medium for SF — allow your audience to create their own special effects, if only you can write well enough...) Until SF people can be bothered to learn its vocabulary and understand its limitations (and its possibilities) I find myself agreeing with John. I’m not holding my breath for the next great TV SF programme.

One cavil, though. If memory serves, the eponymous heroine of A for Andromeda was played by Susan Hampshire rather than Julie Christie.
A Conversation with Graham Joyce
by Catie Cary

Graham Joyce gained a reputation as a writer to watch in 1991 with his first novel, Dreamsides; this reputation was enhanced by the publication of Dark Sister in 1992 and House of Lost Dreams in 1993. Dark Sister won the British Fantasy Society award for best novel in 1992, and Graham has sold the option to film it to Metrodome (the company responsible for Leon the Pig Farmer). Dreamsides has been bought by a French publisher, and a French edition will be published; it is out of print in this country. Dark Sister and House of Lost Dreams are both being translated into German.

His short stories which have been published in In Dreams, Interzone, New Worlds and Darklands 2 amongst others, have been well received. His next novel will be published early next year under the new horror and dark fantasy imprint Creed from Penguin, and he will be the Guest of Honour at Novacon this year. Things would appear to be on the up for Graham Joyce. It was shortly after the publication of House of Lost Dreams, last summer, that I went to visit him at his home in Leicester.

Graham, who was born in 1954, comes from a local mining family with whom he maintains a close relationship; as I arrive his energetic parents are just leaving. They have spent the afternoon working in the garden. He introduces me to his wife Sue; she is a charming and lively solicitor and we get on well. When Graham goes down to the end of the garden to dig vegetables for our meal, he complains that the level of our laughter means that we have been talking about him behind his back. He's right of course, Sue has been telling me how much she dislikes the flattering photograph which is printed on the jacket of his books, which she refers to as the Tom Selleck pose, and she describes with relish the occasion on which she heard two ladies at a signing complain that he is not as goodlooking in real life.

During the evening there is a lot of laughter; the Joyces are excellent hosts, Graham is an excellent mimic and Sue has a lively wit, and after our meal we sit late in the kitchen talking over a candle lit table with an excellent bottle of wine. But earlier, when Sue went to have a bath before dinner, we retired to Graham's quiet study, to talk....

When did you start writing?

I started writing when I was about sixteen, I started writing a fantasy novel, and it was a way of trying to work out what was happening to me with all
these drugs I was taking. I reckon it was drugs that motivated me...

You reckon it was drugs?

Probably it was drugs. I stopped taking drugs after a while but somehow the writing carried on.

Did you read fantasy at that time?

I read Tolkien, I read Mervyn Peake, I gobbled all these up and I found that once you'd discovered Tolkien it triggered off associations with loads of other people. I read Mervyn Peake, I read E R Edison, everything I could get my hands on of E R Edison I read... and I thought it was wonderful I thought it was the height of literature Catie, honestly. And I've read it since I read it a year or two back and I thought it was tripe. Over-written drivel, and yet when I was seventeen and reading that, I thought *this is the way to write*. And the only thing I've concluded from that is that there are books that are right for you at certain times of your life. And Edison's Mennison trilogy (do you know those?) I loved all those and now it just makes me laugh when I read it. It is so over-written!

The way the characters speak is incredible — I was about the same age when I read it and I haven't gone back since — but I can still remember the very elaborate and ornate language.

I thought it was great literature. It just shows that I hadn't developed a critical faculty actually, and I didn't know when somebody was being merely portentous, or merely lyrical. I mistook that for profundity at the time I think. Now I think it's silly. But I read it at that time and I thought it was great at that time — I thought it was marvellous. But it's unspeakably silly.

What are the books that you re-read that you still love?

I can still re-read anything by Philip K Dick, because he's on a different wavelength, he's making moral sense all the time. It's the best kind of science fiction because he is always trying to get to the moral crux of the issue; he's not interested in world-building, he's not interested in hard science — he's interested in how we live our lives. That's why you can go back again to Philip K Dick. For me he's the most salutory science fiction writer.

Anyone else?

It's very difficult with Science Fiction. I've got the same experience with a lot of people that I had with Edison. I mean Heinlein, I was reading about that time — *A Stranger in a Strange Land* and stuff like that which at the time blew me head off. But now it just seems so silly, you know? And there are all these changes I've gone through — I mean I can't take Heinlein seriously — his attitude towards women makes me laugh...

Baby-chewed nipples...

Exactly.

Somebody once told me that I was a typical Heinlein woman — and meant it as a compliment. If he hadn't been so huge I'd have decked him...

Yeah. It's preposterous to think that a writer has got such a lack of sensitivity and insight that he can write in that way. Yet, and yet, when I was seventeen I just thought — this is great stuff. Now I've changed obviously but the book hasn't changed and I can't go back.

I think his juvenilia still bears rereading — though I haven't tried recently — when he keeps away from sex and women and...

Yeah, like you say, "shut your gob up about women, Robert, and you're alright", but as soon as he starts to talk about real life and real relationships... this is where a lot of science fiction loses me because it's so bad on human relationships. It may be great on making imaginary worlds but what the fuck has it got to do with the way we live our lives? and our relationships with each other? And whether it's science fiction or whatever it is, that's what any kind of literature is really about... at bottom. The genre forms just happen to be the media that you're working in, it's the colour of the paper... really what it's about is how we live our lives, and if literature isn't touching that, then to me, it's not doing its job. And that's why I'm not interested in a lot of science fiction.

So who do you admire?

You mean contemporary, or?

Well, what you read now, read for pure pleasure... or read because it gives you something.

I always find this a really difficult question because every time I want to mention somebody, I want to qualify what I'm about to say, but I guess, it really is difficult with science fiction....

It doesn't have to be science fiction, don't limit yourself to that.

Right, I'm a great fan of Mike Harrison,

*Course of the Heart* was amazing...
Wonderful book... excellent, because Mike Harrison is writing about how we live our lives, you know? Okay, he’s using particular genre tropes and the things that signal genre in writing... I’m never happy with all these labels about mainstream and genre anyway... all the best stuff is on the edge, but I do like Mike Harrison, I do like Ian Banks, but I prefer his non-science fiction, I can’t be bothered with the science fiction novels he writes but the other stuff is wonderful. So of contemporaries, I like what they’re doing.

But for pleasure I can still pick up Dickens and that kind of stuff you see. I’ve got really eclectic reading habits... I keep re-reading Jonathan Swift, I’m a great fan of his. I love the Gulliver cycle, it’s brilliant, prototype science fiction, I reckon. You know Brian Aldiss did this thing about Mary Shelley being the first science fiction writer. I don’t really agree with that because I think that Jonathan Swift got there first... you only have to look at it... you’ve got flying islands and all the elements of science fiction and fantasy in that cycle, and there’s a line that I’ve often adopted, that Homer’s Odyssey is about being washed on Islands, and this motif is in Shakespeare and Jonathan Swift and all over the place, and the technological equivalent of it is a rocket landing on a planet, and it’s the same motif, actually, which signals to the reader — right, let’s just change the rules here, something magic has taken place and all the rules are suspended — and this is the proposition, what does this tell us about how we live our lives?

So, what I was going to say about Swift was that he does that, he uses that motif and he offers us prototype science fiction, there are these islands that defy gravity and they’ve got all these scientists working on them and they’re involved in all kinds of explorations. Do you know the flying island?

Laputa? Yes, I’ve read it, but not recently...

They’re trying to make sunbeams out of cucumbers, they’re trying to restore the nutritional value to human shit, it’s hilarious! It’s brilliant satire, but it’s prototype science fiction.

And great fun to read.

Oh yeah, though it’s quite dry masculine stuff, but...

I used to like his poetry...

Do you remember ‘Celia Shits’?

I don’t think I came across that one! (giggles)

It’s a great one, I mean this is what he was at because he lived in the Augustan age, where everybody was trying to say that man is just a little lower than the angels, that was the presiding belief at the time, and he was trying to say “No, No”, he was a very religious man, “No we were raised from the muck, actually”.

God knows how we got onto that...

That’s alright, Does anybody consciously influence your work, stylewise or otherwise?

No, not consciously. I’m sure there’s a lot of people that I’ve read over the years, that it’s coming out, but you spend a lot of time trying to get your own voice and style, and in the early days of writing you spend a lot of time imitating I think, eventually you do feel your own voice coming through and I couldn’t point my finger now at anybody who’s particularly influenced me. There’d be a lot of voices in there. You’ve got to remember I’ve done an MA in English Literature. I studied English for a degree, and then I did an MA. I’m pretty well read in the classics, the mainstream greats. And I’ve admired these and appreciated those and at some point all that stuff is dissolved in what you’re trying to say. I’m not trying to say that I’m in that mainstream, but I’m trying to say that they’re down there, they...

Form a mulch as it were?

Yes, it’s all mulch.

When did you start trying to write for publication?

I guess I made a serious stab at it when I was in my mid twenties, I used to send stories off, and they were always being rejected, but I guess I always sent them to the wrong places... I’d always start with Granta or something like that... (wild laughter) and wait for them to discover this manuscript but it never quite happened like that. Also I was a poet in those days and I won a couple of poetry awards and I got my poems published in various places, but I could never get my fiction published. Nobody was ever interested in what I was doing... I used to get letters back saying “Yes, this is very well written, but your subject matter’s too weird”. I was always told I was too weird, and this was before, remember, I was trying to write either science fiction, fantasy or horror. I didn’t see it quite that way at the time, in fact I had some-
body around at that time who’d pointed me in that direction, saying “look, you’ve got a constituency for this kind of stuff, you’re going to have to look at science fiction, horror, fantasy readers, because the literary mainstream, they thought it was all too wild”. I was constantly up against that problem.

I wrote a novel in my mid twenties, it’s still in the bottom drawer (best place for it, hope it stays there). But it had the same reaction any time that I sent it anywhere. You know, this well-written but...

So what was the nature of the weirdness?

I was always interested in exploring different levels of consciousness, whether it was dreams, drug-induced states, hypnotic states, shamanistic states; I was always interested in the idea of other realities and that people could be going through this world but having completely different realities to each other. I remember from college days getting hooked on this social construction of reality idea — that you inhabit the same world but don’t inhabit the same reality — so I was trying to write stories about different realities and the way that people had access to different realities was either through sleep, drugs, magic, belief systems, religion.

So when you came to write *Dreamside*, that’s really following on down the same path...

It was actually, it was very much. This was something I’d been writing about for several years. So when *Dreamside* came along and I did that thing of going off to Greece and writing that novel, when it sold, I was thinking, well why has this one worked where others haven’t? And I guess it just came before an editor who saw it as a genre novel. And I’d never been thinking about genre, not because I didn’t want to, but that just wasn’t where my thinking was. Perhaps it was to do with this background of studying literature, I’d never really perhaps taken genre seriously enough. But an editor picked it up and said we want to publish this — is it science fiction, fantasy or horror? And I said, what? What do you mean? And she said, well we think it might be maybe science fiction or possibly fantasy. And I said, well I don’t really care to be honest, like the idea that you’re going to publish it — it’s great, you know — do it. You decide what it is.

That’s just the label on the back...

Yeah, I don’t care, just publish it. I don’t care if you call it Mills & Boon if you want — publish it. And after a lot of dithering, it came out as a fantasy novel. Although it seemed to be really well accepted by the science fiction community, as a science fiction novel, it’s certainly doesn’t conform to my idea of fantasy. Maybe it’s around the area of dark fantasy, but it misses a long way from my definitions of fantasy. And yet it doesn’t quite seem like science fiction, and it’s certainly not a horror novel. I do have this problem with classification, it always seems to be on the edge. At least, I’m not sure if it’s a problem.

I admit I’ve always read your books as mainstream, or at least mainstream with touches of the weird... Anyway what does it matter?

Oh I don’t know, a lot of people do say that it’s mainstream. Colin Greenland said I think your stuff is mainstream, various people have come up to me and said I think your stuff is mainstream, but it’s got the weird, you know, it’s got that factor X.

So is it Slipstream?

I don’t know what that is Catie, it’s a catchall (laughs) ...the sort of stuff that SF fans would like only it isn’t SF.

Yes, I guess so, if that’s what slipstream means then maybe it is.

It puts you in there with John Fowles and...

I think that there’s a huge problem with this discussion and that’s that people have endless discussions defining science fiction, and what is published now under the title science fiction, it’s crazy to try and string those things together and yet people
want to. Clearly here's a community who enjoy the
same kind of literature, so we feel the need for some
kind of definitions, yet it's an insane task because the
whole range of those things just defies
corporatisation.

What there is in it, is factor X. Factor X, it's either
a lazy way of saying that weirdness or (terrible cliche)
sense of wonder thing that science fiction fans like,
fantasy fans like, horror fans like, appreciators of
slipstream enjoy very much. It's the element that says
the rules are slightly suspended now let's see what
happens when we change the rules.

This lust for a definition just drives me up the
wall. Why bother? Librarians can do that, because
they're paid to do it. They get
enough money to do that. Let them do that. They like
doing it. Good. I'm glad. I'm very happy we've got
librarians. They're good people. They do that for us.
It saves me from having to do it. I don't want to have to
worry about that.

But I do want to get factor X into my novels
because it's what I enjoy when I'm reading and I find
it in science fiction. I find it in some fantasy, and I find
it in some horror. But factor X goes out of each of
those genres when radical marketing takes over.
Factor X disappears. When a horror novel becomes
very visceral factor X is gone. When science fiction
becomes very rational and schematic on the basis of
Physics Chemistry or you know Hard Science, factor X
is gone from that. Fantasy... loses factor X when you
start having talking animals. I can't stand talking
animals. The thing about talking animals is that they
lose their animalness when they start talking, the
beautiful thing about animals is that they don't talk.
They behave and relate in this universe in a way which
doesn't involve language and people keep wanting to
write novels about talking animals. Factor X is gone.
You know what I'm talking about with factor X be­
because you know the sort of things that give you that
feeling, when you get there.

Yes. That altered state, the opening of the
eyes to new ideas — it's all of that.

It's the altered state thing again, which I was
saying earlier I was trying to get into my novels, that is
definitely factor X. That I think is the thing that strings
these three genres together. But I really don't give a
monkey's which genre it falls into as long as it's got
factor X.

Good.

Where does the germ of your books come
from. How do they start? Is it an idea? Charac­
ter?

It's nearly always an idea. Dreamscape came with
the idea of somebody having a repeated awakening.
Where that idea came from... I'd gone camping with
Sue to Cornwall. She'd wanted to go on a Mediterranean
holiday, but I'd held out for Cornwall, because I
was a bit sick of the Mediterranean. I'd got tired of it,
so I'd held out for a "discover Cornwall" sort of
holiday. And it pissed down with rain, every bloody
night. And so Sue was giving me hell, because I'd
chosen this, and I was lying in the tent while she was
giving me hell, and this idea came over me, and I said
shut up and listen to this, and she said, "oh that is a
good idea", so it started with that idea of somebody
waking up again and again.

Which is really powerful. Right at the begin­
ing of the book that sequence where Lee is
trapped in his dreams.

See this is my theme again, reality, of not
knowing what reality is. You couldn't distinguish
dream from waking reality, because of the fact that
the dream was banal and almost identical to waking
reality. Your dream and my dream, we might always
recognise instantly that we're dreaming because of
change and the suspension of logic. But what if you
have a dream where logic is not suspended. When
everything appears to be as it is when you're awake.
And that seemed to me a terrifying idea — dream and
waking reality might be indistinguishable. It's like that
idea from Jung. I was always impressed by that idea
of Jung's which said that when you wake up your
dream world continues but giant shutters have
blocked off what's happening in your dream. You're
still dreaming away but your consciousness is only
vaguely aware of noises from behind this great barrier.
It seemed wonderful that there was this reality going
on, still, while you were awake, and that each could
have equal weight. Your dreaming reality could have
more weight than your waking reality. A fascinating
idea and the idea of people developing powers to
come to kind of amphibious creatures so they could
live equally in both these environments. So that's what
hatched out Dreamside. It was that idea.

Okay, but then Dark Sister, where did that
start?

Dark Sister: My novels have come out differ­
ently, they all seem to have come out different. And I
hope they continue to do that. I don't think that's a
problem. I worry about it sometimes, because I look
at other people's novels and they seem to me as if
they've got a clear thing that they're trying to do,
whereas mine are always hatching out different.

Isn't that because they have their own
personality?

Yes, there is that too, but with a lot of people's
novels you know where they're at and you know what
they're doing and you know what they're exploring
and I suppose I sometimes wonder if I don't know
what I'm doing because ...

I thought House of Lost Dreams was closer
to Dark Sister than Dark Sister was to
Dreamside...

OK. That's fair enough. It seems to me ...

But I'm just a reader...

It seems to me to have come out differently.
But that's alright. In some ways that makes me feel
a bit better. But Dark Sister, what I wanted to do
there was take another idea of altered states, in this
case witchcraft, but couch it all in the reality of
relationships between people and show that the
altered state affects the ordinary state, and then the
ordinary state begins to play on the altered state
and things are cyclical and they're related to each
other. That the altered states that we have are not
hermetically sealed, but affects what we call reality.

See how we have problems with these words
because it's very difficult to talk about the alterna­
tive realities and use language which gives them the
same kind of credibility and bottom line as what we
call the waking reality. But I wanted to show that
once you start getting your head into an alternate
reality, it affects your life and your life affects it and
so on. And also to show that things like witchcraft
don't grow out of a vacuum; they grow out of
people's desires and frustrations and they have a
very real emotional basis for people and also there
is a very interesting subject matter to explore the
question of women's relationships and what men
do to them in the way that men can oppress them.
And I wasn't writing it as a politically correct novel
or anything like that, I was writing it as a novel to explore
these different reality states. Because I wanted to
show that in Dark Sister Maggie does all this witchcraft
thing, but the most dangerous thing that happens
to her is when her husband punches her.

She does all this exploration, but the real danger
is from her life. So I was relating wife battering to the
psychological dangers, but the real physical danger
was not from demons or witches or spooks or any­
things like that it was from having her husband smack
her in the gob.

Ok then what was the germ from which the
House of Lost Dreams sprang?

There are certain experiences that everybody
has which are dismissed as coincidences. We've all
done it, and we've all had the one where you think
about somebody and the phone rings, and there they
are, and it's banal, it's clichéd, everyone has this kind
of experience, so we have this dustbin word and it's
called coincidence, and I wanted to explore that.

I'm interested in the way you address
feminism in Dark Sister and also to an extent I
think in House of Lost Dreams. It's a sort of
psychological interpretation and not political at
all...

Right. I think I'm partly working out my own
ideas about feminism in that because I've spent quite
a lot of years thinking about the subject and the
issues, and I've met all kinds of feminists; I've met
inspiring feminists who’ve really turned me around, and I’ve met lunatics that called themselves feminists, who should be quietly put down. I think men have got to think about feminism now, and they shouldn’t moan about it, they shouldn’t whine about it, but they should be doing what needs to be done now. Feminists have said what they’ve got to say over the last twenty years, and there’s some brilliant stuff there for men to think about. If men go around behaving like they haven’t heard it, then they’ve missed an opportunity somewhere. I think the issue is far more complex, however, than a lot of feminists realise. As far as I’m concerned, feminism has been informed too much by the separatist feminist movement that’s been in the van of feminism. I’d like to hear a lot more from the heterosexual vanguard of feminists; we’ve heard a lot from the separatists and it’s a lot more complicated than that.

People have to live their lives...

People have to live their lives, and I remember reading magazines where men were agonising about this, you know, and what should they do... and there were these feminists arguing that the best thing they could do is not live with women. Gibberish!

What a way to live your life! What have you won if you do that?

So what I’m quite interested in is seeing men trying to work it out, in the interests of being a better person. I don’t think, on the subject of feminism, there’s a lot left to be said. I really think men have got to do the work now for themselves. And I certainly don’t think it’s about letting women have their own way... I mean they can just fuck off if they think that’s the answer... I don’t trust women any more than I trust men.

Yeah, I think you’d be extremely unwise.

Yeah. What kind of idiot would? But that doesn’t mean that I haven’t been listening hard to what’s been said over the last twenty years, although some writers seem not to have heard anything, and that seems to me appalling. And there’s some people who claim to be writers who don’t even reflect any of the talk or thinking that’s been offered over the last twenty or thirty years. They behave as if nothing’s happened, you know, where are they?

So a lot of what’s in the books is exploration, because my books, you know, they may be science fiction, they may be fantasy, or whatever they are, they’re actually much more concerned with human relationships than anything else, and it’s about men and women and how they actually live together, and how they deal with each other, and that involves questions of sexuality, so it’s an endless and fascinating subject for me.
Hearing from the Ion Engineers

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A Quarter Century of SF Poetry

by Steve Sneyd

of "the making of anniversaries there is no end", to misquote a cliché — a process ever accreting as the "Heritage Industry" begins to seem this country's only real future source of occupation.

Still, Why shouldn't SF join in? 1955's 100th anniversary of the publication of H G Wells' The Time Machine, deserves the celebration it will doubtless receive, if any genre classic does.

In, naturally much less lavish style, SF poetry also has an anniversary worthy of some sort of recognition looming.

Easter 1994, is the 25th anniversary of the first poetry reading at a convention in this country (or at least the memory of fan speaketh not to the contrary, as far as I've been able with due diligence to discover.)

During the quarter century since, appearances of poetry at cons have been, to put it mildly, sporadic; indeed, in England, they include a gap of some fourteen years, or two thirds as long as the interval between the first and second world wars.

Nevertheless, since for the last few years there has been some sort of poetry event at at least one English convention every year, and since that English gap had no parallel breach-of-continuitywise in Scotland, here is a tradition of sort to celebrate in whatever fashion proves appropriate.

In the meantime, a brief account of what happened when in this particular specialised sphere of human activity, beginning at the beginning, or even slightly before, is possibly worth putting on the record with what accuracy information available permits.

Arthur C Clarke called for a poetry of science fiction as long ago as 1938, and poetry indeed appeared intermittently in fanzines and pulps down the years.

But any kind of real visibility had to wait till Michael Moorcock took over the editorship of New Worlds and alongside his many other innovations, introduced poetry to its pages — albeit a poetry far from the conventions of genre verse, freer in form, surreallyistically experimental in many ways, and as concerned with "inner" space, the mind-blowing inward voyages of the late '60s, and the "soft sciences" that tracked their passing, as with the outer space journeys then busily moving from the realm of fiction to fact with the Moon Race between the USA and USSR.

Such a potted summary is necessary to explain what happened next — the pre-beginning of the beginning, as it were, in terms of the theme of this article.

John Brunner told the story in some detail in his 'Noise Level' column in Dick Geis' Science Fiction Review (No 5 of that column, subtitled 'Rhyme and, If You're Very Lucky, Reason', appearing in the March '71 issue, No 43).

Briefly, within the Brighton Arts Festival of 1968, a weekend conference on science fiction was organised, jointly chaired by the historian Asa Briggs and the poet and critic Edward Lucie-Smith.

As the closing item of the conference, Edward Lucie-Smith organised a science fiction poetry reading, with a 'cast list' from inside and outside what was generally seen as the SF world. Brunner notes that these included Adrian Henri and the Liverpool Scene, George MacBeth, D M Hart, D M Thomas (then connected with New Worlds, later a Booker prize-winning author), and Brunner himself.

To quote Brunner directly: "Tickets were horribly overpriced, so the audience was small, but it was a very stimulating and enjoyable occasion". (He also notes that "Not all the material read was strictly SF — it shaded over into fantasy and surrealism — but a surprising amount of it was the pyre metal", particularly praising MacBeth's 'Bedtime Story' with its poetic account of the death of the last man.)

The success of this event encouraged Brunner to organise a reading at the 1969 Eastercon at Oxford, its theme being the recently published anthology, Holding Your Right Hands, in hindsight the most influential SF poetry yet published. The anthology's editor, the same Lucie-Smith who had brought about the Brighton reading, took part in this reading, almost certainly the first ever to form part of the programme at a British SF convention. (In the Science Fiction Review article, Brunner speaks of "inviting Ted to come along"; elsewhere he has said "he was kind enough to drop in — unpaid as I recall, and preside at a reading to which I and others contributed."

Lucie-Smith read excerpts from the anthology and gave indications of the thinking behind his choices. Brunner and others also read. Brunner, in the Noise Level account, says "Considering he (Lucie-Smith) had outright refused to rehearse our duet beforehand, it went off rather well and provoked a good reaction from the audience." (adding to this account, in the 1989 letter already quoted, "I can't remember all the people who read on that occasion, but I do recall that afterwards Ken Bulmer told me that he had been doubtful about the appeal of such an event but it had gone off unexpectedly well."
This encouraging response led Brunner to organise another for next year’s Soacon in London. This reading featured Jeni Couzyn, a South African poet then living in London, who used SF themes for poems meditating on Aldiss stories, and who read her recent black comedy “extract from an Alien cookery book”, called ‘Human Pie’, which apparently had the audience in fits of laughter.

However, another aspect of the reading, a “storm in a glass”, or rather caused by a glass, which is best remembered by those who were there. (Other readers included Brunner himself, Brian Aldiss, and Edward Lucie Smith, Michael Moorcock was present and George MacBeth may also have read.) A member of the audience, “incensed at the quality of the verse, or drunk” — Brian Aldiss) threw a glass at Brunner, Couzyn and Lucie-Smith, which hit the first named on the leg.

In reaction to “the SOB responsible, now dead”, Brunner read for the first time in public his poem ‘Flying Against Mr X’ (a “flying” being a Scots term for a railing or scolding poem) and “with a real target in view”, in his own words.

After that 1970 event, nothing seems to have happened till 1974, when Lisa Conesa, a poet herself and editor of the well known fanzine Zimz, which gave considerable space to poetry, organised a poetry reading (she called it a Poetry Soiree) for the 1974 Tyncon.

As a souvenir of this, she published an anthology, The Purple Hours, which contained a selection of poetry by well known SF writers and fanzine and little magazine poets, though in the event only a few of those included in the anthology actually took part in the Soiree.

However, those who did read included a notable trio, Brian Aldiss, Couzyn again, and Robert “Hawkwind” Calvert, poet and lyricist with the SF-rock band Hawkwind.

This is probably the only occasion that Calvert, who died in 1988, read his poetry in a context other than a Hawkwind concert or on record.

Andrew Darlington says “the reading seems to have been a minor distraction [within the Convention] with confused and disappointing reactions, but the participants were well-pleased with their performance and a little self-congratulatory at leavening some culture on the event.”

Duncan Lunan recalls John Brunner reading the ‘Mustapha Sherif’ poems which appear as chapter epigraphs in his novel Web of Everywhere and notes “we got into a discussion at the interval and became so absorbed that we forgot to go back into the hall.”

There were plans for other such events, but Conesa got a disappointing response from the organisers of Seacon, and a Poetry Soiree, planned for the 1976 Mancon, aborted almost literally “at the eleventh hour”, for reasons difficult at this late date to establish, beyond the level of unprovable guesswork.

Thereafter, these disappointments, and the death of a family member discouraged Zimz’s editor from further attempts. No one else took up the idea, and poetry at English Conventions began a long period of being conspicuous by its absence, certainly as an organised item.

There were occasionally SF poetry readings, though not in a convention environment — for example at the Sunderland 2000 festival in 1973, where the “Beyond This Horizon” SF event included a genre poetry reading organised by Chris Careell, with accompanying mini-anthology from Ceolfrith Press, with an Edward Lucie-Smith introduction updating his HY8H introductory text.

In 1979, as part of the “High Frontier” space exploration exhibition at Glasgow’s Third Eye Centre, organised by Duncan Lunan, the same Chris Careell, by now Third Eye’s director, invited Edwin Morgan to read his SFnal poetry, and Third Eye produced the work read as the outstanding “slim volume” Starlgate.

In 1985, Lunan himself organised a reading at the Scottish Albacon, at which John Brunner read, as did Alasdair Gray, who also presented work by Edwin Morgan. In 1986, again with Lunan presiding, another convention reading featured Edwin Morgan himself and Diane Duane.

Subsequently, Lunan was to arrange a reading by Morgan and Brunner at the Edinburgh Science festival in 1989, and has since given readings of SF poetry to non-genre groups like the monthly Ayeshire “Poems and Pints” events.

In the meantime however, he played a major role in the poetry reading on the first night of the 1988 Lucon. As convention Guest of Honour, he took part in a discussion about the value of SF poetry, chaired by myself, during which he illustrated the genre’s value in focusing understanding of scientific development, and illuminating and inspiring discovery, with extracts from his own book Man and the Stars. Confusion over event locations meant occasional irruptions of costumed Vikings and Spacemen, but a reasonable audience then heard a reading by Darlington, extracts from a tape of Dave Calder reading from his remarkable collection Spaced, and Pete Presford reading his own work, examples of SF poetry published in his zine Barddon, and an unusual “unconscious SF” poem written by a resident at a hostel for the homeless.

Lunan’s comment on convention audiences for poetry seems relevant here “not...large, but they’ve been interested.” (Of his “Poems and Pints” experience he added “Some of them told me they were worried about what I was going to read, but to their relief they were able to understand it all”.

1989 saw an unprecedented run of SF poetry events at three English conventions.

At Eastercon in Jersey, K V Bailey organised a two-session workshop. The first included readings and discussions, using as focus a special publication, Speculum, edited by Bailey himself, which included discussions of genre poetry, suggestions for writing exercises, and instances of relevant poetry by the
winners of a Ver Poets speculative poetry competition and others. At the second session, participants produced and discussed poems themselves.

Mexicocon III, at Nottingham that year, included a midnight reading, by invitation of the organisers, by Bailey of a selection of his own poems. Of this event he says: "I was startled to find a fairish audience at that hour — it proved agreeably responsive, but I realised that a following reading by lain Banks was what had really assembled it!"

Finally, in June, two SF poetry items were included in the programme of Iconoclasm, held at Leeds' then atmospherically gloomy (it has since been refurbished) Griffin Hotel.

The Friday evening included a reading which may have owed the size of audience to its being the only "main strand" programme item at the time. However, the majority returned after the interval, stayed till the end despite the attraction of a nearby bar, and Andrew Darlington got an unprecedented request to enclose his poem "Hiroshima Mon Amour/Radical Kisses" at the end. Others who read included Andrew M Butler, Pete "Cardinal" Cox (who has since organised at least two poetry evenings for Peterborough SF Club), John P Haines, Works editor Dave W Hughes, then Dial T4 editor Terry "M'ranje" Moran, Krax editor Andy Robson (a humorous prose- poem from his Life of a Star collection, launched at Iconoclasm) and myself (I also competed). Work by a number of leading American genre poets, including past Rhysling winners read by themselves, was also played on tape.

Next day there was a workshop, which included various writing exercises, talks on editing and editors by Robson, on marketing work by Simon Clark and D F Lewis etc. Subsequently a mini-anthology of the work read on Friday and that from the workshop was produced, under the title Icons of Starcasm.

1990's sole representation seems to have been small-scale, almost "fringe", at Con2bile in Peterborough, with filk, in many ways a related genre, taking a higher profile.

In 1991, Bailey ran an evening "fringe reading", assisted by Chris Amies, work by Keith Allen Daniels, Dave Hughes, and others being read along with KVB's own.

George Hays Library Convention, Hasticon, in 1992 included a considerable representation of genre poetry, the Saturday morning reading included Bailey, Peter Garratt, and myself, while Hay read a poem of his own and a prose poem by Lord Dunnsary. Later I gave brief talks on the history of genre poetry, particularly the work of early US SF poet Lilith Lorraine, and on publications using genre poetry.

Later in the summer, Clwydcon, held at the Welsh Agricultural College at Northop near Mold, had originally been intended by organiser Presford as the first all-SF poetry convention. However the collapse of plans to hold the annual "mainstream" Poets and Small Presses Convention on the National Garden Festival site at Ebbw Vale meant that Clwydcon had to assume that role also. However, SF poetry remained a part of the programme, with a debate on traditionally free verse in genre poetry between Haines and Sneyd, along with minireading and discussion; the latter brought interesting comment and fresh viewpoints from such "mainstream" poets and editors as Anthony Cooney of TOPS and Gerald England of New Hope International. (As a link across the years, the latter had been included in the 1974 Purple Hours anthology).

1993 brought an SF poetry item, organised by Peter Garratt, within Helicon at Jersey. Billed as predominantly a workshop, it became in the event mainly a reading, those taking part including John Brunner and past Rhysling SF poetry award winner Joe Haldeman, as well as Garratt and Bailey. Mexicocon 5 at Scarborough programmed "Barsoom Ballads" for the Cornehan Suite at 11:15 pm on Saturday (details mentioned because not only did this mean competing with a band playing elsewhere, but the said suite proved to be a wormhole-type passage for co-runners and hotel staff.) Nevertheless, a smallish audience of 20 or so stayed to the end of the reading, organised by K V Bailey, which included predominantly poems, as the overall title indicates, with a Mars reference, and others which touched on diverse aspects of SF. Those who read included, as well as Bailey, Garratt and myself, and in addition work Darlington, Haines and Sue Thomason was read on their behalf. A short discussion followed, Lee Spinrad in particular posing pertinent but hard-to-answer questions. (It is hoped that a selection of the work read will appear in the 1994 Mexicocon the first decade souvenir book).

In a brief, indeed, breakneck, skim through twenty-five years, it is difficult to convey except perhaps by implication the diverse "flavour" of events which may sound similar but "in real life" were no two the same, let alone "let the dog see the rabbit" in terms of instancing the poetry read. Some of the publications referred to are still in print, and SF poetry more generally can be found, with a little diligence, in anthologies available either through libraries or, for the more recent, mainly from America (though plans for new ones here, from Anchor Books and strange Adventures Press — the first of which may indeed have already appeared) shows a welcome revival of interest in the possibilities. My hope is that the revival of interest shown at conventions will likewise continue and indeed grow. After all poetry and SF are natural partners — or, as Edwin Morgan put it, in 'A View of Things',

"What I love about poetry is its ion engine."

Acknowledgements

My thanks must go to many people, and in particular the following, for information without which the article would have been impossible.

Brian Aldiss, Kenneth V Bailey, John Brunner, Peter Cox, Andrew Darlington and Duncan Lunan. Remarks quoted from Duncan Lunan are extracted from an extensive interview with him which is scheduled to appear in Fantasy Commentator No 45, USA.
We, old as history now...

Henry Treece
by KV Bailey

Catie Cary contributed to the Compass Points feature of Vector 170 a recommendation of Treece's novel The Golden Strangers. Not all readers, it appeared, considered his work to have either fantasy or SFnal relevance. In correspondence with Catie I mentioned that I had known Henry Treece well, and agreed with what she had written of his talent to immerge his readers in both the reality and the strangeness of the past. (My title is taken from a poem in his collection The Haunted Garden.) She encouraged me to enlarge on this for Vector and in doing so to offer some personal recollection.

Henry, his wife Mary, and several lordly cats lived in a rambling mansion adjacent to the Saxon church of Barton-on-Humber, a village at the southern approach of that big bridge crossing over to Hull. We had common interests in the writing of books for children and in his plays for radio. My work in the '50s often took me from our then home near Nottingham into Lincolnshire; he was a frequent visitor to Nottingham, and so it came about that we were from time to time each others house guest. On one such occasion I recall that my wife baked a huge medieval pie for a party to round off the first night of his Edward II play, Carnival King, produced at the Nottingham playhouse (as was his later Viking play Footsteps in the Sea). Our friendship lasted through to his too early death in 1966. He was a good raconteur, a born teller of tales, ceaselessly trying out new plots and themes in conversation, avid for and meticulous as to detail, gathering and transmuting almost on the spot experiences of the day (a remote pub, an encountered eccentric) into his store of images for the past. For example, he gave us a first copy of War Dog with an inscribed dedication to our old bearded collie whose ways and character he had come to know almost as well as we did.

He was pre-eminently a historical novelist, writing for children and for adults, but he was also a poet and possessed the kind of insights which Rosemary Sutcliff discerned when she wrote in her introduction to The Golden Strangers: "He understood better than any other writer I have ever read, the appalling intricacy of life in a primitive society." It was this understanding which enabled him to portray so convincingly how the life and manners of one race, tribe or community might appear to be unbridgeably alien to another. He showed through the actions and interactions of his characters how this strangeness seems to have made inevitable the violent hostilities and cruelties of history, yet paradoxically could breed mutual tolerance and eventual peaceful fusions. In its simplest form this is seen in the early juvenile, The Eagles Have Flown in the transformation of Artos, the Celtic Bear of Britain, into Arturis "who rode in the service and not the destruction of the old Roman manners and government". It is also evidenced there (and personalised) in episodes of savagery and of healing between native Cymry and Saxon sea-foik.

As Margery Fisher wrote (with reference to The Bronze Sword) in a Bodley Head Monograph (1969): "Though Treece had been heard to say that he 'hated the Romans,' he could enter into their desire for law and order as intuitively as he could understand the doomed courage of the Celts." The opposition of the barleys-growers and the invasive cattle-men of The Golden Strangers is echoed in his last work, a remarkable novella (strikingly illustrated by Charles Keeping) - The Dream-Time (Brockhampton Press, 1967). Here, however, Treece moves into what sometimes seems a timeless pre-history, or at any rate a scene in which the practices of corn growing, or herding and hunting, of cave art and metal smelting all coexist: a scene populated by proto-humans without language and by true humans with dawning languages. The constant themes of cruelty, courage and compassion, of aggression and reconciliation are rehearsed through the multi-landscapes of an ur-world. New concepts and physical potentialities are seen shaping within the human mind. This was the direction in which Treece's imagination was moving: a direction presaged by the opening lines of a poem he had written some twenty years earlier: "There is an ocean in my head that nightly sings, / Swings, sways and crawls about the mental globe..."

Without extensive quotation it is difficult to convey the 'planetary' sense which suffuses Treece's writings - both in his children's stories and especially in the mature adult novels such as Red Queen, White Queen, Jason and Oedipus. It may be channelled into

Henry Treece 15
physical description of a clarity as sharp as Le Guin’s, as here in ‘War Dog’: “... against contrary winds, three dark longships rowed only by a dozen oars and so low in the water that every wave seemed to smother them, came out of the swirling mists, the greedy gulls squawking and wheeling above them”; or it may be mythopoetic as in the imaging of a time “long before Crete came up like a great fish from under the green sea and reared her golden palaces for the god’s approval” (Oedipus). He himself, in notes (appended to the Margery Fisher monograph mentioned above) for a lecture given at the Hull College of Art shortly before his death, wrote of a creative writer’s vision being directed to “the seasons in their progression...this ritual dance of the months”. So sensitised, he continues, “he will know, without doubt that all years are one year, all pleasures one pleasure, all disasters trivial, and all heroes expendable”. The perceptions which feed this vision, he says may then be ordered by a writer “into a cosmology, or imaginative system, so as to form an entire and self-sufficient environment for his writing”.

Henry Treece was never a writer of science fiction nor strictly of fantasy, though in a man-into-tree apparent metamorphosis in his Beowulf novel, The Green Man (his only mention, I think, in the Clute-Nicholls encyclopedia), he comes near to the Holdstockian version. Yet the self-revelatory sentences just quoted suggest the extent to which his imagination and his imaginative work may be compared with those of many writers within our genre. Catie Cary wrote accurately of his “unique vision; bleakly poetic, violent and scary, grittily realistic”. Such words might also be said of the vision of Ian McDonald in Hearts, Hands and Voices, of that informing the Times World chapters of Vernor Vinge’s A Fire Upon the Deep; and perhaps also that of Suzy McKee Charnas in Walk to the End of the World. No direct comparisons, but, with all their differings, a certain common grounding in such a vision. Reading the opening chapter of Hearts, Hands and Voices, I was particularly reminded of some of Treece’s adult fiction.

He wrote only one critical work, though a memorable one – Dylan Thomas: dog among the fairies. They were friends and, though unlike in poetic technique, not so far apart in poetic sensibility. They both had affinity with what was known as the ‘Apocalyptic’ movement. In one of Dylan Thomas’s poems there is a line which I think might well be applied to Treece’s understanding of humankind’s planetary status and destiny. It is: “A process in the weather of the world” — provided always that this is complemented by another line, one which is also the title of that poem: “A process is the weather of the heart.”
First Impression 17

Stephen Baxter
Ring
Alan Johnson

In Stephen Baxter's latest novel, he takes us back to the future history so elegantly plugged in Vector 1/9. The scale of this work is immense, taking us from the heart of the Sun to the end of our Universe in just over 400 pages, and provides the capstone of the Xeelee cycle, but how does it stand up as a story?

The year is 5963AD and the quasi-religious cult, Superet has long term plans to preserve the human race, and to these ends sponsors projects which it feels will promote this aim. This story is about two diverse projects, a project to place a human intelligence inside the Sun, and a second to send a multi-generation ship on a relativistic trip five millions years into the future, although it will only be one thousand years subjective time, with the intention of creating a wormhole back in time to their point of origin. The reason for this massive undertaking is that Superet has gleaned information from this period that traces of the human race exists at this point in time, and view the project as a way to preserve humankind. The stellar project is designed to examine the interior of the Sun, and a force grown child, Liezel, is brought up on Earth and experiences a lifetime of sensations in a few days before dying and her essence is incorporated into the probe to give a human experience to the data acquisition.

The multi-generation ship, The Great Northern, (named after Brunel's steamship, because the preserved remains are incorporated into the ship) survives the relativistic voyage intact physically, but the crew polarises into various factions. On completion of the voyage they fail in their intended mission, but achieve a measure of success of its goals.

The way that Baxter weaves the two diverse strands of the story, the cosmic elements and the experience of people in increasingly bizarre and threatening situations is a tribute to his growing powers as story-teller. He concocts the most up-to-date theories of quantum mechanics and cosmology without losing sight of the ultimate goal, that of telling a story. The return to the Sol system, and Liezel's experience of the destruction of the Earth, along with the revelation of the reason for the early death of the stars, provide some of the best hard SF I've read so far this year and is probably some of the best I've ever read. The completion of some of the science may put off some, but if you are prepared to work a little you will be well rewarded.

Reviews of Hardbacks & Paperback Originals
Edited by Catie Cary

John Barnes
Mother of Storms
Millennium 1994, 455 pages, £16.99
Steve Jeffery

This is one of those novels that, in a number of ways, more or less typifies hard SF. Three elements in particular are at work here: what Kaveney calls the 'Big Dumb Object' scenario, a threat or challenge on a vastly different scale; the old pulp SF notion of the 'superbright' - here a transcendent immortality though a viral fusion of man and self replicating AI, and large dollops of scientific research delivered in meticulous detail at points throughout the text.

Happily, Barnes seems well aware of this heritage - there is a sly nod to Heinlein in both the name and personality of the AI controller of one character's car - and evades most of the inherent pitfalls.

It won't give away too much to reveal that Mother of Storms is an environmental disaster novel, and that humanity overcomes and survives a threat of its own making, albeit by the skin of its teeth. The apocalyptic storm, an immense hurricane, is spawned by the release of huge quantities of methane into the atmosphere when the UN nuke an illegal missile site near the North Pole. The warming of the oceans provides a fertile breeding ground for a monster hurricane in the Pacific.

Against this global disaster. Barnes plays a series of more human scale plots. Randy Householder is a father tracking down the man behind his daughter's murderer for a 'snuff' XV wedge (a full sensory recording). Synthi Ventura, wired and reshaped into a grotesque cartoon femininity, is an XV startet for the Passionet porn channel. There is Jesse Callare's hormonally frustrated relationship with Naomi and her right-on, New Age psychochobabble, and their counterpart in ex-lovers Carla and Louise, both now in separate isolated retreat - Carla in her ocean going submarine boat, Louise in space as the last member of an orbiting space station.

All, of course, will come together in various ways as Hurricane Glen and its rapidly spawned daughters ravage the islands, coasts and eventually whole continents of the earth, clocking a final body-count in the billions. All will be transformed, in various ways, and some redeemed, by their ordeals.

Louie, as humanity's last hope, is transformed more than most. He absorbs himself into the Net as a vast, semi-autonomous army of self replicating Al machines on a drive into deep space to salvage an ice asteroid, the world's biggest F factor sunblock.

This desperate solution is perhaps the novel's most unsatisfactory point. If such devastation can be unleashed from the side effects of the initial UN air strike who knows what might result fromLouie's even more grandiose deployment of a billion ton ice cube in the atmosphere? There are some other problems. Barnes occasionally loses track of a couple of his multiple sub plots, which turn up later to add a sense of carnage - Japan is people in increasing byz.a rre.

All, of course, will come up against the shore, almost too large to grasp. The disaster is more deeply felt when it impinges directly on individual lives.

For all that, it's a solidly entertaining, and sometimes exhilarating read. And you get to learn more meteorology than you perhaps wanted to know. So the next time Michael Fish says "Don't worry, there isn't going to be any hurricane", just go out and check the barometer in case.
Terry Bisson

Beast from Discworld Fire
Tor, $19.95, 254pp
Kev McVeigh

Terry Bisson's first collection of short stories is one of the most welcome volumes in recent SF, one to be treasured in the future. Not only does the reprinting of these stories in one place save all the difficulties of locating them through magazines as divers as Asimov's, Interzone, F&SF, Omni, Science Fiction Age and even Playboy (though for stories as good as these it would certainly be worth the effort), but it allows a reader to look at some of the things Bisson does which are so special by the magnifying effect of their close company.

Taking all of these stories together reveals that there isn't one particular aspect of Bisson's writing which gives this collection a degree of cohesion which was uncommon in such volumes: in pure dialogue stories such as 'Next' and 'Press ANN', his mastery of voices brings characters to life, the award-winning title story is remarkable for its sense of place, the odd man out is Bisson's own entry in 'The Two Janets' where voice and tone begin a whole midway trek to full view; and then in complete contrast 'England, Underway' has a timeless quality enhanced by an odd artificial depiction of a Brighton that never quite existed, and mysteriously archetypal characters: the one common factor in almost all of these stories is a warmth and charm revealing a genuine love on the part of the author for these characters. Sometimes this is manifested in straight humor. As with the slickracket 'Two Guys from the Future' would make a great comedy sketch, and often a gentle romanticism, ('Two Guys from the Future', 'Press ANN', 'The Two Janets' all invoke a wry wistfulness), but very few of these stories are thematically linked. Humorous writing is generally joke driven, immediate and transient, shallow knee. These archetypes you will remember, suddenly in a few years time with such rich completeness that you will search out this volume and reimmerse yourself in its depths. They will become old friends to you, and deserve to become classics just as of not only beyond the genre.

The least of these stories is the alien view of Earth 'They're made out of Meat' which is a oddly funny squib until an ironic last line upsets it all. The best? The riches here are many, but the title story, 'The Two Janets' and the 'Two Guys from the Future', 'Press ANN', 'The Toxic Donut' and 'England Underway' are all worth the entrance money on their own. And then there is 'Over Flat Mountain' about a truck driver and a hitchhiker driving over a huge mountain raised up above the atmosphere in Kentucky. (You get to know Kentucky pretty well, reading Bisson). Here Bisson wins me over with such true observations as the young hitchhiker stilly checking the ten-dollar bill in his pocket to make sure that it hadn't turned over.

Terry Bisson has emerged from nowhere as one of the best short story writers currently active, up there with sterling, McDonald, Connie Willis on her good days, and very few others. Humorous writing is generally joke driven, immediate and transient. Shallower knee. These archetypes you will remember, suddenly in a few years time with such rich completeness that you will search out this volume and reimmerse yourself in its depths. They will become old friends to you, and deserve to become classics just as of not only beyond the genre.

The Forest House
Marion Zimmer Bradley
Michael Joseph, 417 pp, 1994
Tanya Brown

The Forest House is based on the plot of Bellini's sprawling opera Norma, which may account for some of the grand gestures and dramatic analogies to which its characters are prone. Ellen, daughter of Drudis, falls immediately and irrevocably in love with the young Roman Gaus after meeting him in a boar-pit. To her father and foster-brother, however, Gaus's heritage makes him a symbol of the hated Roman empire, a threat to the British way of life and to Druidic traditions that have been passed down unchanged from their Atlantean ancestors, short, may not marry Gaus. Heartbroken, she accepts an invitation to enter the Forest House, a sanctuary for Druid priestesses. Embroiled in the internal politics to which even a female Druid is sometimes prey — and empowered by her experience of the Goddess — Ellen finds no more joy in this moment to mourn the loss of her lover. She can't believe that she will never meet again — and neither, it must be said, can the reader. Bradley's historical research seems impeccable; her Roman setting may lack fantastical elements, but it is rooted in fact — although there's a tendency to be either pedantically precise or mystically vague. For example, although no date is given for the events of the now funny squib until an ironic last line upsets it all. The best? The riches here are many, but the title story, 'The Two Janets' and the 'Two Guys from the Future', 'Press ANN', 'The Toxic Donut' and 'England Underway' are all worth the entrance money on their own. And then there is 'Over Flat Mountain' about a truck driver and a hitchhiker driving over a huge mountain raised up above the atmosphere in Kentucky. (You get to know Kentucky pretty well, reading Bisson). Here Bisson wins me over with such true observations as the young hitchhiker stilly checking the ten-dollar bill in his pocket to make sure that it hadn't turned over.

Terry Bisson has emerged from nowhere as one of the best short story writers currently active, up there with sterling, McDonald, Connie Willis on her good days, and very few others. Humorous writing is generally joke driven, immediate and transient. Shallower knee. These archetypes you will remember, suddenly in a few years time with such rich completeness that you will search out this volume and reimmerse yourself in its depths. They will become old friends to you, and deserve to become classics just as of not only beyond the genre.

The Fossil House
Michael Joseph, 417 pp, 1994
Tanya Brown

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The Forest House
Marion Zimmer Bradley
Michael Joseph, 417 pp, 1994
Tanya Brown

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Storm Constantine

Calenture

Norman Beswick

The arrival of her ninth book (not to mention umpteenth stories in Interzone and elsewhere) projects her as a new Constantine an established SF/F writer.

To the start of the story, she managed to avoid other people’s formula. For better or for worse, her stories have always had a life of their own. First (beginning in 1987) came the three Wraeththu books, with the last, adrenally mysterious titles, slow-paced and sprawling plots, enigmatic and androgynous characters. Constantine has cast herself in, imaginatively teasing out and disturbing our concepts of genre writing (despite their untidy self-indulgence and a dismissive review in Foundation) they represent a considerable achievement.

The Monstrous Regiment and its sequel, a triumph on a planet where feminist rule has gone disastrously wrong, had good things but were perhaps less successful. More obviously ‘thought up’ (she herself was dissatisfied with the Regiments because she is ‘happy with themes that avoid either/or’). But Hermetech with its powerful travellers, starting anatomical rearrangements and climaxes of erotic magic showed her back on conceptual course; critical reception was understandably somewhat mixed, but Constantine was at least using her imagination uncluttered by other people’s argument. (The Encyclopedia of SF refers to her “gothic sensibility” which for all I know may be true far too.)

...gathering practical every time going to grow up easily, but settled whales, especially. Hetha has been taken hostage and takes up the mantle of the gods, for Sparhawk’s side, was an exemplary fantasy writer, worth reading for the novel’s scenes alone.

...and Eddings’ simplistic style of writing and ‘rabbit out the hat’ use of magic is often criticized as representative of all that is wrong in modern fantasy. But ask any Eddings fan, nobody does it like him or as well as him, and The Hidden City will keep Eddings at the top with the very best.

Andrew Harman

The Frogs of War

Legend, 1994, 250pp, £3.99
Ian Sales

Although the outcome of this epic story is never in doubt, the plots continue to wander and wiggle around like Medusa’s hair after a particularly bad perm. His machinations in not only keeping track of all these plots, in bringing them all together for the predictable climactic ending, often borders on farcical. When Medusa appears in Sepherina’s bedroom and stabs her through the heart, because she loves her and can’t stand another man being the light of her life, she is ‘magicked’ back to full health because she is still needed to help the heroes. Although this is the final nail in Zalasta’s coffin as far as we are concerned, one can’t help feeling a little sorry for him, his misguided and possessive love for Sepherina. Let’s face it, that’s the main reason for his downfall. It’s all good clean fun, and the inclusion of the simple-minded trolls, usually the bad guys, on Sparhawk’s side, was a masterstroke, that entertains. The plot is simple. At the secret thalamoscal laboratory of Losa Llamas, a mad thalamoscal physicist has created the eponymous frogs, the Frogs of War. In five years later, Snyderew (nee, hee) uncovers this secret, and heads for the aforementioned frogs in order to effect holo planned dastardly deeds. Meanwhile, Firkin (ha, ha), Hogshead (stop it, you’re killing me), Dawn (as ‘Dawn rose slowly’ – p50) and friends are looking for King Klynth’s father. Firkin et al become entangled in Snyderew’s plot and, well, fail it.

Along the way, we have lots of dreadful puns, silly jokes, and a style of writing that insists on building up to ever more, different and incidentally unmentionable by ponderous wizards and terminal cosmic battles. The story is often too rooted in the forces of ritualised evil.

In other words, another Constantine goodie and well worth reading. I think she has the SF fan I’ve delighted to see her unravel a technical tangle into a fantasy that almost (but happily not entirely) ‘makes sense’. It has to be said, of course, that nothing she has written since the Wraeththu books has quite given the frisson, the little shiver of the unconscious, that those stories so deeply and irregularly occasioned. She was wise to turn to other areas, before she got stale and the statistics began to work against her, and the rumors of another Wraeththu book being on the stocks is just that. Nevertheless, she has turned the image another way to come at it with fresh aural eyes.

I have to confess I’m waiting for the biggie: the novel that’s not only technically brilliant but also has the reader taking emotional risks, that says something new and startling – something that could be a new variant of the romance. It’s a lot to ask of a thirty-eight year old writer who has after all has to keep the titles piling up and the rewards coming in, and maybe she’s mistaken and she’ll never achieve it. But I’d love her to try. Some metaphysical tracts are theoretically or forced to it by her talent.
What is it we are doing in science-fiction? To Gernsback it was didactic, a dramatised lesson in the value of technology. As SF exploded beyond the Gernsbackian continuum it became a vast, intergalactic, romantic and adventurous. By the New Wave it had become a mode of literary experimentation. If anything, it is a part of the postmodern feedback loop. In other words, SF is what we make it to be. But if one thing holds true throughout every metamorphosis of the literature, then it is a concern with change. SF celebrates, announces, decries, records but can never quite ignore the terrible destruction reality and potential, hinging about that eternally spinning moment when the present becomes the future.

And if we accept that premise, there is no doubt at all that The Waterworks is science fiction. It's setting is New York in the 1800s, a city grown prosperous on the back of slodgy goods to the Union Army during the Civil War. Now, that prosperity is impelling the city into the future. Throughout the novel, Doctorow describes the city as a vast machine, spinning the threads of its industrialism, the thriving power of the new industry embodied. But in the approach of the modern world, there are new moralities to be forged, moral questions that have never had to be faced before. Boss Tweed has left the most corrupt city and state government ever known. Men who have turned rich and old cheating their government are now the powerful arbiters of social, cultural, and economic life. And this corruption is spawning new horrors.

Science fiction upon society led to Mary Shelley's Frankenstein at one end of the 19th Century, fear of the darkness still lurking in the corners of the bright modern world gave rise to Bram Stoker's Dracula at the other end. It is no coincidence that Doctorow's novel, dealing with the same moment of transition, echoes of both.

A young freelance writer for one of the New York newspapers, Martin Pimentel, (dangling of course), and the onomatopoeia (which is as daffy as it sounds). Sentences tend to follow one another in a way that sounds like a tape recording of an obscure religious mantra being played backwards, the words jumbled, the whole affair speeded up, while a beat was being cheerfully thotttled, with a mind-numbing regularity. Highly amusing, indeed. Unfortunately, Harman seems to have no sense of the ridiculous, nor of the absurd. A clever-clever prose style, dreadful puns (although admittedly none as moronic as Piers Anthony's and a stock fantasy/D&D scenario do not make Harman a serious "jew" to Terry Pratchett). Although he is fair, Harman does what he does well.

I do have one question: on the back of the book is a quote from Critical Wave: "If you like Pratchett, Gardner, or indeed Piers Anthony, you're sure to find this... entertaining". What is the ellipses covering for? "Margarini"? "Not in the slightest bit?" There's too much missing to make this book genuinely funny. Mean, does Harman seriously think you've supposed to go all the way through a "humorous" fantasy book?

Harry Harrison
Galactic Dreams
Legend, 1984, 188pp, £9.99

In his introduction Harry Harrison says that these stories were written to show young people, and year that reap their with types, corrected and more moral phrases amended. There is also a new story, "Bill, The Galactic hero's Happy Birthday," in which the hero can be believe the stories more closely but there is no biography, and I don't recognise any of them -- they don't include well-known stories such as Streets of Ashkelon. These are action stories of an early writer, not the more thinking Harry Harrison of Make Room, Make Room. An example of these different Harrisons can be seen in "Down to Earth," which retards return to frivolity of the future and the moral crises his adventure only prefigured.

From The Book of Daniel through Ragtime, Loon Lake, World's Fair and Billy Bathgate, E.L. Doctorow has blended the real and the fictional into a vision of America, repetitive, of progress as a seductive belief. He paints the past with attention to detail that gives his fictions the documentary texture and vivacity of a Ken Burns film, yet he mythologises it and especially the city, so that the struggles of his characters trapped in the processes of history and progress become heroism almost by definition. It is a magic he repeats to telling effect in his splendid novel, a powerful new venture into the mythic landscape of the recent past.

"Mute Milton" is probably the most interesting story, even though the SF does not fit well into it, and I guess may have been added to get it published as SF. In the Deep South in the early sixties two men meet at a bus station, one teaches at a small black college, the other is a civil rights worker fearful that the Klansman sheriff won't let him leave town alive. The lecturer has a radio powered in a TV studio, and Manchester will never be known. The sheriff shoots both, the radio is broken, too. This loss can be directly linked to the evils of institutionalised racism.

On the other hand, a story like The Pad -- A Story of the Day After the Day After Tomorrow, is very much a groovy parable from the top shelf of the sixties, in which a girl is talked into bed by a man who knows she is a rogue, and it, which follows, and besides, is the obvious reason, is one of those intelligent aliens cross the universe to Earth and then get 80's pamphlets. An alien who mistakes them for cockroaches" stories which looses its humour the second or third time you find yet another author has written it. In a way, this volume left the impression that Harman's anthologies are uninteresting. There is no single voice. The only thing that stands out is that in common is a sense of age.

Paul Kincaid
The Mushroom Jungle: A History of Post-War Pulp
Paperback Publishing
Zeon Books 1980, 1980 pp, £14.95 pb

Zeon Books is an imprint of Zardoz Books, who publish paperback, pulp and comic collections. If you've ever read that magazine and revelled in the tacky interest of 40's and 50's pulp programming, you'll want to read The Mushroom Jungle. If you want to know about the language of popular fiction in the War, and how cheap it was, this is the book for you.

Publishing, like every other aspect of society, is controlled by shortages and rationing and in that era many small publishers put up to issue original paperbacks in the genres - SF, pseudo-Tarzan adventures, Westerns, hard-boiled thrillers, the like - free of charge. Sometimes it was just to keep the lights on. From what we know, writing, publishing and selling the books were pretty much synonymous. The books were cheap and printed on pretty poor paper, had gotty painted (and usually misleading) covers and sold in tens of thousands, yet about one no one made any money out of them, authors lost all of, some authors got a living by writing every day and producing one or two books a week: others only produced one book a fortnight in their evenings after coming home from the day job. In some cases the day job was running talks and the printing companies doing the books. This was the case with Stephen Francis, whose company published all the Jonason novels he wrote. However, he turned to Hank after an SF novel by John Russell Feamle bonded.
Oddly enough, although everyone knows how dreadful Vangelis Stiassni's sound-track Grigdan were (don't they?), of all the hacks who wrote this trash, only the SF is remarked upon by the other SF authors: like Kenneth Bulmer and E.C. Tubb went on to recognition, while any other SF author of the time (even Arthur C. Clarke) was bound to touch the edges. Even Neveready managed to rise through the pulp publishers hands. And somehow the Americans managed to avoid this dead hand: French neveready managed to make his name as both a thriller and an SF author. He has contributed to the conservative clampdown on law and order of the early and mid-fifties which resulted in the pulps and horror comics being so fully eradicated, and Holland has a half-marketed luminaries as, the executions of the Hank Janson books. People who want to burn books are keen on killing people, demonstration that Goddard the judge who denied the Janson appeal was the judge to have served a long time that he can no longer remember where it is (but then, she is over two hundred and thirty years old).

Nowhere does Gaiman state that Didi really is Death, one of the seven Endless who are older than the gods. Sexton's suspicions could be perfectly valid. But Didi swears through double edge, yoking in the life of the city, as though she owns the place; people give her things, let her into gigs for free, look after her. But her looks aren't all roses. There are people out there who know her for what she is, and want her power for themselves. This day of Me is a hunted day - but still, it's Me, and Didi finds himself appreciating it again.

Didi gives Sexton the last of her cash - two pennies - and in the next few minutes she is dead. In her last words a plaintive, "No. Please... I... Later, she says "I wish it were truetrue..."

And Death, her alter ego, says "It always ends. That's what gives it value."

The artwork, particularly in the meeting between Didi and Death, is surreal, and uses strong but subtle symbolism to get inside the reader's head.

This volume also contains Axioms: a piece of history of the world, and how its events can be explained by logical, mathematical means.

When young Thomas Kemp accompanies his mother on an expedition, he finds the strange, artificial gulls at the summit lake of Balka, and sees a man dancing, who turns out to be the bridge that spans the twin peaks of the City, his father decides certain observances. It is in several ways, a fabulous city, whose only river is a ribbon of blood, and whose only river is a ribbon of gore. The only person to emerge with any integrity is Triad-member Joey the Deadhead, (whom, the reader is allowed to watch him go insane from the pain), but this time Doyle merely shot Chang twice in the face. Interestingly, it is only when the “hero” kills his amoral character, ones very like Doyle himself, that the slaughter is described so baldly, without the usual horror genre spice. For example, when having sex with an IRA terrorist who has turned to violent crime, the way he has, Doyle merely breaks her neck as she comes — no Thrill. It is one thing to like your character, but why describe their deaths, when they are really no less awful than the ones that peripheral characters suffer, in so much less of a voyeuristic manner?

Deadhead raises, and fails to answer, the question “Why?”? It is splatter for splatter’s sake. White Ghost raises the same question in the mind of the reader, but this time Hutson at least begins to engage with it, however unsuccessfully.
There are no prizes, then, for guessing that this is a comedy of errors, verging between satire and broad farce. James Wander, a socially managed neo-Oriental future everyone’s status and Achievement Points are determined by their foreheads as a barcode. James Wander, naturally, is happy in his A+ status. He has a beautiful wife and children, a good job and a rising career. He can afford to be benevolent and generous to those with lower Codings.

A freak accident at a supermarket check out takes him of his prestige, status and even his humanity, and recodes him as a can of Vigor sodium-free pea soup.

At first everyone around him is supportive and sympathetic. But as he takes his case through the courts, he learns that the social stability of the Hofsten Codings rest on one simple principle: you can never change your Code. Branded as a can of soup, James Wander must learn to be the best can of soup he can possibly be.

Fortunately, he is lured into an illegal operation to change his code back and is arrested on the operating table. From there he continues in prison, then as a mental hospital and finally as a tramp clown in a run-down travelling circus.

For years that large elements of the plot don’t quite add up is as beside the point as worrying over what K. is actually accused of in Kafka’s The Trial. Wander is on a one way ticket through the fringes of his society; a colourfull collection of misfits, madmen and ex-cons.

The Fission of the title is an abusive young woman from the future, whose favourite words are “tonk” and “forking”. This distinguishes her from the other young woman, Gloria, who specialises in very slow, measured speech that causes an android, a dragon (guarding the Golden Fleas), the Cretin Bull, thimbled Cretans and snake-haired Medusa, among other marvels.

The novel’s style is heavy handed with the referential gags that at first are moderately funny. Increasingly, though, the action and clog up the text, plot and characters being filthy, the author fraudulently piles on the verbal faux pas, which I’m trying to be fair. Only Reviewer’s Duty got me through to the end. But I’m afraid that some people may like it.

Meadowlark 
by Becky Le Roux

The Black Gryphon
Millennium, 1994, £15.99, 250pp,
Tanya Brown

The Black Gryphon is set in the same world as Lackey’s bestselling Valdemar series, but no previous experience is necessary to enjoy this novel. This takes place fifteen hundred years before the events described in The Heralds of Valdemar. Urtho the Good, and those who espouse his cause, are locked in combat with the mage Ma’ar (implicidy the Bad) and his dark armies. The war, “like a creature with a huge appetite”, has dragged on for years, and slowly but surely Ma’ar seems to be winning.

This isn’t that sort of book, though.

The novel centres on four characters, Skandron, the gryphon, the only black gryphon, is an aerial warrior with immense fighting skills and an aeg to match. His friend Amberrdrake is a kestra’cher, a kind of shifter who uses sensory massage, sexual heat and magical abilities to balance the emotions and healing skills to soothe and heal the mental and physical wounds inflicted by the war. Both Skandron and Amberrdrake have their female counterparts. Zaneel is a female shifter who appears to be a mutant, an unwanted by product of Urtho’s magical goings on. Meanwhile, Winterheart is an emotionally repressed healer who remains in a dysfunctional relationship with the mage Conne Levax, unable to accept that she is capable of more. Both must come to terms with who they are and accept their roles in the conflict.

On one level this novel is a simple good versus evil fantasy, where the forces of good fight for what they believe in, and pledge their loyalty to Urtho, while the Maltese Falco and other creatures of Ma’ar are motivated by fear and loathing, and demonstrate their moral repugnance by stooping to torture and foul play. On another level, Lackey and Dixon (her husband) deal with moral and ethical issues such as therapy, emotional dysfunction, betrayal, genetic engineering and child abuse. A light fantasy novel is not the best place for this, while the authors never trivialise these subjects, depth
Ian McDonald's work to date has often been characterised by his use of up-to-the-minute scientific speculation culled from the pages of popular science press and turned into a heady stew of myth. Literary allusion and a seemingly limitless fascination with popular culture in all its many forms. It’s a mix that, when successful, combines to produce distinctive and powerful prose but has the tendency to degenerate into imitating self-referentiality, undermining the effect it is designed to achieve. One of McDonald's most fertile sources of inspiration has, of course, been the SF genre itself, leading at least this reader of his work to pose the question: clever post-modern pastiche or redundant imitation? It’s surely no coincidence that McDonald’s second published collection of short stories is, rather cheekily, called Speaking In Tongues, but readers who in the past might have found themselves crying in despair: Will the real Ian McDonald please stand up? will be relieved to discover that his latest novel Necroville, shows the author making big advances in the quest to find a voice of his own. Certain sections of the novel aren’t immune to the pernicious glossolalia which has infected his earlier work, but what is good about the novel more than compensates.

The scientific advance that powers the plot of Necroville is nanotechnology which, early in the next century, has enabled the dead to be resurrected. In a Los Angeles of twenty-two million inhabitants the reanimated dead are housed in ghettos, or necroville, providing a source of cheap labour for the living to whom they are in thrall. Only beyond earth orbit, where the Freedefsd have fought a war of liberation against the all-powerful corporations who rule earth and control the technology of resurrection, are the dead masters of their own fate. As the novel opens five characters are drawn by a vow of friendship to the cosmopolitan decadence of the Saint John necroville on the Mexican Day of the Dead. Santiago Columbar: a world-weary dabbler in designer drugs, haunted by the death of a lover: Yo-Yo Mok: an ambitious and successful lawyer whose career is improbably ruined by the cybernetic ghost of a Carmen Miranda impersonator; Trinidad Malcomupolo: a rich dilettante, searching for something in the wake of a failed love affair. Toussaint Tesler: the estranged rebel son of the Tesler-Thanos corporanda, and Camaguey Quintana: marine biologist, turned nanotechnist artist, doomed to die by his betrayal of the woman he loved. Each, in their own way, has nothing left to lose and in the course of that one night they all become involved, directly or indirectly, in the momentous events of a complex plot to liberate the enslaved dead and kick-start the emergence of a transhuman future.

No-one could accuse McDonald of lacking ambition. The ideology and conceptualisation of the novel are first-rate (if you’re prepared to indulge the author’s preparedness of the assessment of the possible effects of the widespread nanotechnology on society), but he grounds the science-fictional elements of the story firmly in an emotional reality. As their individual histories are revealed so we realise the paradox of the characters’ position: that it is the dead who must teach the living the value of their lives and how to live them. Ruined in the world of the living beyond the gates of the necroville the five undergo, during the festival of the dead, a symbolic resurrection in the city of the dead. McDonald’s power as a writer has never been in doubt, but in the past the layering of almost too much detail and that sometimes wearying self-reflexivity has tended to obscure his strengths. Necroville has moments of real power and beauty. McDonald’s forte may still largely lie in his handling of individual scenes and set pieces, but theの中でarqueanou touch he lends to the description of the alien, not but recognisable, transformed L.A. of the quick and the dead linger in the mind long after any accumulations of slavish imitation have faded. In some respects his struggle to find a true (rather than distinctive) voice in the clamour of late twentieth century SF may still not be over, but Necroville shines powerfully enough to the reader to demand significant attention.


This volume produced by two of the production staff (the Okuda’s) in conjunction with a first time researcher aims to provide the definitive source guide to the Star Trek universe up to and including Star Trek: The Next Generation (series 6) and Deep Space Nine (series 1). It is always difficult to review a reference text like this, but as a habitual viewer of the continual reruns on Sky One, I was asked to trawl through the text and find its focus to be as accurate as would be expected. The format is the conventional alphabetical cross-reference, but it is also liberally sprinkled with illustrations and images grabbed from the video footage. These screen grabs are of variable quality and let down the overall look of the volume which is of a high quality. The text lists all characters to appear in the 263 hours plus of Star Trek myths to date. However, the main use of such a volume surely is as a source of trivia, and I would like to give as an example a short quiz based on material gleaned from this volume.

1) What is Geordi LaForge’s favourite food?
2) What is Data’s ID code?
3) What ancient Earth artifact was destroyed by the Klingons in Tongus: Northern Front?
4) What do Dr. Miranda Jones, Dr Ann Mulhail and Dr. Katherine Pulaski have in common?
5) What was Sulu’s first name?

All in all, The Star Trek Encyclopedia comes across as exactly what it claims to be, is probably for dedicated Trekkers only, (a guaranteed best seller.)
Lance Olsen
Tonguing the Zeitgeist
Pomegranate Press, 1994, 192pp, $11.95
Paul Kincaid

Dennis O'Neil
Batman: Knightfall
Bantam Books, 258/84, $3.95
Andy Mills

Robert Silverberg
Thebes of the Hundred Gates
hb, £3.99pb
Kev McVeigh

Paula Volsky
The Wolf of Winter
Bantam, 1994, 439pp, £4.99
Martin Birje

Vanni, at least six — perhaps eight — ago, in the time of the emperors and the Caesars, in the city of Rome, in the distant past of our time, in the year 1990, so that Rhazes, murder most of those who stand in his way, Crom and Cervantes, to his touch and to his escape, very their flight imply involving in the assassination, at that time two of the two, in an army, a new, and have been gone and forgotten then, that can be branded upon the imperial, manipulated by a foreign aggressor.

If reminiscent of the style of Macbeth, that is not surprising, as the author is the Shakespearean scholar. Further pleasurable interest may be obtained by looking for other parallels and influences within the novel.

For example, in the northern kingdom (or Uralte) of Rhazes, a picture of Tsarist Russia, icebound in winter, murderous in spring, and always by sinister enemies within, be they bandits, assassins, or sadists. It is of the Brzoii Mountains, their name from the Abruzzo region in Italy, where lingering smallpox and other faces forever watching the mortals below? Is the location and description of Ousikbey-Hudendref from Castle Hohenzollern, ancestral home of the German Kaiser...

If reminiscent of the style of Macbeth, that is not a mere pastiche of scenes and themes. It is a work of literature which, if set in a world phantastical, but in — say — a transatlantic business or political organisation of the 1990s, would be hailed as a modern novel of social observation and criticism... of the world and the morti... Oh, other mortal soldiers or ghostly warriors, the underlings are regarded by their "superiors" as... and in... and in... and in... and in...

The author tackles the use — and misuse — of drugs for enhancing control over the invisible world. She enhances our sympathy for Vanni at the outset, a sympathy replaced by abhorrence as his character develops, and then sympathy returned at the end — an ending which leaves a telling amount of the plot.

Yet is it the end? Will Shalinda repeat the cycle of depression, domination, drug dependence, defeat...? Not that this possibility implies a sequel. It is rather that Paula Volsky has combined the traditions of British and American fiction in her work, the principal characters all live — if not happily ever after — at least contently. In American novels — there is always another day to come, the characters gone on into the future.
Men At Arms has an underlying theme of tolerance and acceptance, whatever it's been called or denied. It's never more than a theme, though, it never gets in the way of the earnest and "womankind" lettered on it... Meanwhile, Captain Vimes is preparing to hang up his sword and retire, or at least go on leave, and prepare to leave a life of wedded bliss with Lady Sybil Ramkin, dragon- buster, and woman out for all she can give. Life is seldom that easy, however, and things will go worse before they get better.

Angua is introduced to the Dog Guild, in charge of scavenging, and her subscribers, who have a rather violent reaction to her being a woman. The Dog Guild is a monarchy of sorts, with a queen and a dog. The queen is not impressed with Angua, and even her presence is noticed by the other dogs. However, she is able to make a good impression, and her ability to walk on her hind legs is a hit with the other dogs.

And somewhere in the city there is the Gonne. An immortal with the appearance of a woman, she can never die, and her body is in a state of decay. She is known for her beauty and her ability to change her appearance at will. The Gonne is a mysterious figure, and her presence is felt throughout the city.

Meanwhile, Bunt (formerly known as Imp) has become a slave to the rhythm, a channel for something that has been around for a very long time. (What was the sound before the birth of the Universe, for instance, or four...) In nothing in Susan's sensible, practical upbringing has prepared her for anything least she has help; The Death of Rats is accompanying her on her tours of Duty, preferring to stick to a steady back beat. It's alive again.

Robert Charles Wilson
A Bridge of Years
New English Library, 1994
333pp. £3.99
Andy Mills
I know, I say what you're thinking. You're not going to bother with this one. You picked it up whilst browsing in the books section of the supermarket and the cover - depicting an armoured humanoid figure firing away, buildings ablaze behind it - put you off. Forget the cover, for though a golden armoured future warrior plays a key role in all of this, and there is a fair amount of mayhem and murder. Eventually. Instead, it's thoughtful, exciting, classic stuff.

The novel opens in dramatic fashion. Ben Collier is out in his garden when a sudden member of the aforementioned warrior, one Billy Garullo, brutally kills him and disappears as quickly as he came. Later, a rather dirty but empty house is bought by Tom Winter, on the run from a failed marriage. Tom hears odd sounds in the house and is amazed to find that whilst he sleeps it is mysteriously cleaned. Eventually he finds out that the cleaners are metallic "insects", the house the entrance to a time tunnel which leads back to 1982. For Tom it means a chance to start again with the added bonus of living in a less screwed up world, in which he knows won't collapse around him. But Billy knows someone has come through the hole, and he's not pleased, whilst in the meantime weird things are happening to the body of Ben Collier.

I admit that I'm particularly fond of time travel stories, so I might be expected to be well-disposed anyway to A Bridge of Years, but it wouldn't win many friends if it didn't have great fun spotting echoes of past sfal works: for instance, the house and its custodian are reminiscent of Simak's Way Station, the time ghost which stalks the time tunnel to the near-future of neutrons of Shaw's A Wreath of Stars, and there's a hint of The Terminator in the
enough. Wilson’s characters are his own, however, rounded, real — and with one exception — sympathetically drawn. The exception is the impotent Tuan, as much a victim as the people he kills, it’s Tom’s pushy, materialistic brother, for another the remaining characters are lonely, vulnerable individuals, all of whom have lost something and are looking for something, though they’re not often sure of what. It infuses the story with a hint of melancholy, as when Tom realises that he cannot treat living in the 1920s as though it were a rehearsed drama, and that whenever one people saved the possibilities which existed.

“Everywhere the same, Tom thought. 1962 or 1982 or 2062. Every one of the world’s cities is a bilingual, no? I hope so.” It’s perhaps not surprising, then, that whilst the story is highly coherent, its end one, the end of the novel brings no endings for its players but new beginnings, and a universe of possibilities even for the unhappy Billy. Ignore the cover. This is a good ‘un.’

David Wingrove
Beneath The Tree of Heaven
NEL, 1984, £16.99
K. V. Bailey

Part 1 is yet another (and an interesting description) ‘Mars book’. In The Stone Within we left Jelka Toloran just before ending her quest on Titan. Now on Mars, in transit earthwards, she is kidnapped, later to be released by a reformed Hans Ebert. She completes her journey, but Ebert’s continued sojourn on Mars leaves her feeling of future significance. Parts 2 and 3 are located in Cities North America, Europe and Africa. They are concerned with the future destiny of the Earth-ruling T’ang Seven and with the fall of cities.

There is in this, as throughout Chung Kuo, a micro and a macro scenario. The micro-scenario is that of endless plottings and manoeuvres among hierarchies, bureaucracies and revolutionaries. Characters — such multitudes — tend to be two-dimensional. Of cardinal figures, Knut and Jelka Toloran and leading protagonist Major Kau Chen are well-rounded. Others are personalities of malice (De Vore), vice (the monstrous Tang of Africa), perennial wisdom (Master Tuan Ts’Fo). The micro-scenario within such a profusion of people’s and functions performances partakes of the opposite status and change. The Cities and the ruling Seven are in crises of decline. The symbolic title of 1971 is “The Twilight” and that of its pivotal chapter 18 ‘Cities in The Plain’. There is an engineered spreading of the plague from Africa into Europe, chaos in Alexandria, and periodic and curfews in City Europe.

Elsewhere, City North America has been destroyed by an errant orbiting asteroid and the imperial heart of City Europe is about to be blasted. The false historical facade of the Middle Kingdom is being undermined by the release of the ‘Anastole File’, disclosing the suppressed secret past of the Seven and the domed Kang Kua City, monument to interplanetary transfusion of Chung Kuo ethos and technology, which has been blasted open in the course of interstellar strife. At the same time a new element is active on Mars. The black men, the Ous, early hopeful colonists ousted from the cities, now live in the wild under Mother Sky. ‘The Girl in the Night’ is a hologram, appearing in the Martian desert, tells Hans Ebert that it is in the company of the Ous that he will come to understand the Tao. Wingrove seems to be indicating that they represent the Yin element, a dark side rising to counter/complement Chung Kuo’s Yang dominance. This is the ‘operatic’ confrontation, good and evil forces and low-level dwellers alike, are such to make the reader feel involved. The action and story is not only well written and convincingly constructed, intriguingly and strongly, it is the revelation of deeper structures enfolding; an unexpected, the ‘Tai-Chi Tu’, the ‘in counterplan’ which registers most enduringly.
Barbed Wire Kisses makes a welcome return to Vector after a gap of two issues.

In the following pages, Mark Plummer examines the newly risen shade of Galaxy Magazine, and Maureen Speller explores the choices available in the small and alternative presses. But first, Paul Kincaid weighs up the glossy A4 magazines – and he's determined to be unfair.

Barbed Wire Kisses

Magazine

Reviews

Edited by

Maureen Kincaid Speller

Comparisons are odious.

Okay, let's be odious. Let's see how magazines treat their contributors. (As to how the contributors treat us... I'll be getting round to the fiction later.)

These thoughts were prompted by Lawrence Dyer's 'Slugs and Snails and Puppy-Dogs' Tails' in Interzone #66 (or 'Slugs and Snails... as the contents list would have it, don't you just hate that habit in Interzone?'). Now this is a reasonable story which would have been a lot better at about half the length. When you have only one isolated character and one premise (in this case, an old dog discovers the ability to regenerate parts of his body) it isn't easy to keep the ending a surprise. It would have been better if Dyer had gone at the thing full tilt in a much tighter, tauter story, rather than taking longer and longer over things the closer he gets to the end. Once I had worked out the ending (not exactly the most mind-bogglingly difficult of tasks) I got more and more irritated at the way Dyer delayed getting there. But at least he was trying to sustain a measure of suspense. So why did the editors include an illustration which gave away the ending two pages before the story actually finished? This is not just annoying for the reader, it is not simple carelessness on the part of the editors, it is actually insulting to the author.

This degree of stupidity is unusual. But it is symptomatic of the way too many magazines ignore the way the stories are presented. Too often, Interzone looks as if it doesn't care about the stories. Which makes it very hard for the reader to care about them. The look does not vary (which may be the biggest sin of all), the same typeface (readable but a little heavy), the same column width and leading (the space between the lines, in this case rather too close), always justified; the result is that the pages always look cramped, unappealing, hard to get into. It doesn't help that the artwork (when there is any: only two of the six stories in Interzone #67 have any illustration) always fits exactly the same pattern, one full column when it is within a story, the top half of a two-page spread when it heads a story. There is no variation in this regime. There is a tendency also to use a rather coarse illustrative style, heavy lines, flat and lacking subtlety of shade or shape. It gives the pages an unvarying, amateurish look: as if a rigid format has been devised so that no-one involved in the magazine actually has to think about how it looks.

I am being a little harsh on Interzone, it is by no means the worst of the bunch. That honour belongs to Tomorrow, which is printed on poor quality paper with a reproductive technique that makes Interzone look slick. Tomorrow #7, actually dated February 1994, looks like it belongs to the pulp era even down to the arch headings for each pulp-era story. I was going to point to the exception of Keith Brooke's 'Jurassic and the Great Tree', but I realised it was reprinted from Interzone, even down to the accompanying illustrations.

Pulphouse #16 looks like a stable-mate for Interzone. It isn't printed on slick paper, but it has the same, uniform two-column grid, a similar (but not identical) typeface, the same paucity of internal illustration (other than the story headings). But if the feel is the same, Interzone comes out the winner in terms of the stories. None of the stories in this Pulphouse stand out. Mike Resnick's 'The Mummy' (one of his ongoing Lucifer Jones adventures) was an amusingly lightweight Indiana Jones rip-off; Lawrence Watt-Evans's 'Monster Kidnaps Girl at Mad Scientist's Command' was as silly and inconsequential as the title; Carin Richerson's 'Parasites' was a neat but unexceptional play on vampirism, menstruation and lesbianism. The rest wouldn't even warrant that much attention, except for two
things worth noticing. Two of the stories, "New Relations" by Billie Sue Mosiman and "Close to the Bone" by Lucy Taylor are gritty, which is a celebrated thing for women, and the stories deal seriously with subjects like menstruation, motherhood and lesbianism. In comparison, easier to read and inconsequential "Human Subject/Action, seven written by women among the 16 in the last three issues; and only Gary Kremen's story, inconsequential "Human Waste" even touches on any subject which doesn't conform to Interzone's usual "boys for the boys" scenario.

Science Fiction Age looks to be the exception. It is printed on glossy paper with full colour illustrations (most of them very good), and though it keeps a typographical framework with three columns, the type size is actually slightly smaller than Interzone's, which gives the impression that there is more space so making it easier to read. Odd lines are picked out in blue ink, which break across the columns help, because the pages no longer look as if they are unrelated blocks of text. Unfortunately, apart from a good story by Barry N. Malzberg, "Understanding Entropy" (pity about the plot) and a reasonable joke by Geoffrey A. Landis ("What We Really Do at NASA") this fiction doesn't begin to stand up to what's going on around it.

Then there is Back Brain Recluse #22, which pays its writers the respect of thinking about each story and presenting them in this individual and attractive way. The typography is smaller than that used by Interzone, and the type size is greater, so there is more white space on the page which makes the text look attractive. The layout doesn't follow the same format for any two stories (forming one, two or three columns, ragged or justified text, forming around illustrations which never conform to a standard shape). The variety in BBR, it carried to excess, could easily swamp the stories, like so many style magazines where tricks of typography and visual nonsense of what is included there. But here, the typography is at the service of the story. As an example, consider "Flagellant's Search for the Ego" by Lizbeth Rymland, one of those very short and poetic pieces which try to capture the incoherence of the world, reproduced in a medieval script in a pale grey which occupies the entire page space. The script face emphasises the oral-tradition, mythical feel of the story, and the format, which sets it apart from everything else in the magazine, clearly shows the work of someone who has thought sympathetically about what the author had set out to do. It is a good but not great story, but the format really makes it work.

If we are making comparisons, and we are, the general run of story in BBR is better than the average Interzone story (Interzone, of course, has to fill more pages more often), but the best stories in Interzone tend to top the best in BBR. It is just that BBR, so much better, is presented in a much more attractive and readable style, and appears to take the reader and the writer more seriously than Interzone does.

As for the stories (yes, I did say I would get round to this) let's start with BBR. Among the ten fictions included in this issue ('Body of Life' by David Keukes and 'Marshall' by Dan Rick Chamberlin, while structurally interesting, hardly count as stories) there are two good tales from reliable sources and two, actually quite clever pieces by less well-known writers. The good one is 'Don Webb with The Way Out', a science-fiction biography of dream which is eventually disappointing only because of the routine within it, and "Paul di Filippo with 'Mud Puppy Goes Upstairs'" Di Filippo has cleverly broken down into the recurring dream of Sheldrake's morphic fields' and here presents a world where movement up hill takes one through a morphological evolution.

The excellent are 'Tolkien's Root' by Tim Nickles, another in that odd SF sub-genre which attempts to express the incomprehensibility of the workings of the mind, and yet "Paul di Filippo with 'Mud Puppy Goes Upstairs'". di Filippo can match Smith's mad conversations, but he has caught the headlong, lunatic plot perfectly, and this story of a mad scientist who has let himself be murdered by his wife so he can test his theories by reviving himself in the body of his dog, makes far better use of Sheldrake's ideas than the contribution to BBR.

The best story from any of this crop of recent magazines, however, has to be Stuart Falconer's "Fugue and Variations" in Interzone #85; a finely judged examination of how Mozart, as an old man, influenced Wagner in the writing of his opera. Frankenstein. The modern-day librarian hero researching this story among his grandfather's papers, also finds that the path which leads him to the discovery also leads him through secret paths in the nearby park to a place of childhood memories. It is a gentle piece which stands out all the more because it is at odds with the student tone that so many Interzone contributors feel the need to adopt.

Paul Kincaid

Magazines reviewed: Back Brain Recluse #22
Interzone: #65 (July 1994), #66 (August 1994) & #67 (September 1994)
Pulpshure #16
Science Fiction Age Vol 2 No 5
February 1994
closer and maybe even some of the stories look familiar; the Point is a reprint from 1955 and the Silverberg comes from F&SF circa 1963. Sheekley contributes a serialized novel. The City of the Dead, its pages in no way enhanced by some rather basic Photolustrations of a model town provided by E. J. Gold. The serial was a staple of the original Galaxy, and indeed of other magazines of the era, because for many writers it was the only way to get novel-length work into print. Many classic reissues have their first publication in its pages, but the need has now passed—indeed, serials have been all but abandoned by the other major magazines—and their continued use here again illustrates the Augean aspect of the relaunch. There are stories by new writers, at least new in the sense that they are not listed in the Encyclopedia, but all the stories in this first issue are unremarkable which may be in part because they are so short—several come in at less than two pages.

They do not. By the second issue, adorned with a Freas cover (an artist generally associated with Aloy's outings but at least he's got his roots in the right era), Sheekley, Silverberg and Gold assemble some such turkeys as Evelyn E. Smith ("The Club Party" c. 1956), Chad Oliver ("Anachronism" c. 1953) and L. Sprague de Camp ("None but the Lunatic", which makes these serials running simultaneously).

Another one for the nostalgia buffs: we have a science column entitled "For your information", the title used for most of Whitley's columns in the original Galaxy, but even E. J. Gold baulks at reprinting old science articles so they do have a new writer.

Aside from the editorial and science article, the contents page lists 14 items in the magazine, including several writers from the first issue: Chuck Rothman, Jean Marie Stine (who is listed as a contributing editor) and Lawrence Schimel. The tendency remains towards short, inconsequential pieces—Rothman's contributions in this and the first issue amount to less than one page of text in total. Big Trimble tells us far more than all but the most ardent fanatic would ever want to know about this pilot episode of Star Trek.

We even get Harry Nilsson—yes, it is that Harry Nilsson—who always wanted to write for Galaxy as a kid and has now been able to achieve that goal. It's not because he happened to know Gold; it certainly isn't about the strength of the writing. It's debatable which is worse—writing a line like "He would always invariably say no" or, as an editing assistant, saying\n"Strange enough, lurking amongst all this very minor stuff, that's a very good story by Dan Webb, but perhaps this was a mistake. Still, it's early days for a new magazine which will surely find its feet by issue 3.

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the wood shiftily reader is concerned.

Albedo 1 comes from Eire, a magazine distinguished by the venue and energy of its editors, and their enthusiasm is not always matched by expertise in the content or formatting for the fiction, the range of ideas is not always matched by corresponding expertise in their development and sometimes, I have to say, I wonder why the editors made the choices they did. This is of course easy to say, not having seen their slush pile but do we, I wonder, want or even need yet another Arthurian mood piece? Robert Nelson's "The Quest for the Perfect Knight" (AT #3, while compelling, offers an inane explanation for Galahad's quest for the Holy Grail and does not fit with the rest of the Matter of Britain. Speculative, yes, but hardly earth shattering. John Leake's "September Thirtieth" (AT #4) promised so much in concept and yet delivered a story in chancet. A man whose familial special effect and personal obsession is "emulated" by a journalist with an eye to a certain anniversary - oh, I see you're ahead of me, and indeed you are ahead of the author, who took the long road round to the point of his story and totally sacrificed building any tension en route. Disappointing, as the central premise of the story promised a good story, and the editorial control might have given us a more satisfying read.

Other stories are more successful. Adam White's "Residuum" (AT #2) lifts those tacky little New Wave adverts about using your memory to its fullest extent into a whole new realm of fantasy by introducing us to a character whose memories all those boring memories which take up space and exploring the problem which occur when the computer doesn't function properly. Having got to the stage where I feel my own memory is utterly overloaded, this story touched a chord with me, and probably with many other readers. Another brief, but telling squib was John Kenny's "Detritus" (AT #2), the ultimate threat to all children with unbearably untidy rooms. What actually happens is never entirely explained but the story is a sad warning to parents, for the reader if not for the protagonist.

Other themes are more traditional, the suspended animation of a man eaten by a terrible fungus; the evil scientist, cloning supermen to take over the world, though this is given an interesting new spin with the involvement of the Pope. Actually, consider the ethical and spiritual ramifications of cloning for the Catholic church I was disappointed that the writer finally settled for conversion of the protagonist in the usual way. In some ways, the most disappointing story of those I read was Brian Stabejdef's "The Masque, beautifuly written yet no more than a stylish rehash of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death. It was a story which struck me as pointless considering the original is still available. Nevertheless, it does show that interest in the Gothic tradition of SF and fantasy is alive and well and also living in the portman-teau.

Andrew Cox, introducing the first issue of his magazine, The Third Alternative, bemoans the lack of imagination of his local SF press who refused funding for his magazine, apparently on the grounds that they didn't like some of the man-McClure. Cox decided that he wasn't prepared to sacrifice editorial integrity and thus has gone it alone, which probably comes as no surprise to any small press magazine editor who has ever trodden this well worn path.

His magazine's brief is "the short, long and by and by the editorial is already becoming worryingly defensive about content which is often "simple" stream", "stream of consciousness" and "plotlessness", the latter being definitely not true, according to Cox. As an editor, while you may be clear about what you personally like, the perceptions of fellow readers may be very different. Many people associate "stream of consciousness" with some kind of post-cyberpunk, mechanical, down these-mean-streets, aggressively American style fiction, in which case, boy are you going to be disappointed with The Third Alternative.

Instead, we seem to be going for a reprise of that old 1950s discussion about British SF and its very distinctive feel. But neither is TTA the New Wave reconstituted. The writing though is very literary, sometimes self-consciously so, a style I associate with certain sorts of creative writing classes, and not all of it is likely to appeal to SF readers with traditional tastes. Some of the stories seem, much like those in Albedo 1, to head off without any real reference to where they're going. Joel Lane, a writer whose work I greatly admire for his low key and haunting style, goes slightly off the rails with "Take Me When You Go" (TTA #1), little more than a half-hearted meander of a friend of the protagonist who doesn't quite get his life together - not up to Lane's usual standards at all. And there are other stories which seem to be more exercises in arranging words on the page than actually saying something.

Of course, I'm old fashioned enough to like a vaguely linear approach so Neil Williamson's "Softly under Glass" (TTA #2), which deliberately ambivalent in its conclusion, at least gives me the impression that this story does flow chronologically even if my understanding of what's happening is suddenly called into question in the last few paragraphs. Williamson's sketch of Hugo, the too-perfect art gallery owner turned - but in whose gallery? - is masterly. At a time when preserved lamas, black and white, are being regarded as works of art, Williamson's exploration of what exactly does constitute a masterpiece plays fascinating tricks with the mind.

An old favourite, issue 12 of Auralise let me down rather, its contents being very unsatisfying in a "been there, done that, got the tshirt" sort of way. Another Vietman story from Brian Stabejdef is again a cause of rejoicing, more for its straightforwardness than the very distinctive feel with which it was introduced. "An Old Male" by Jeff Wheeler is a strange tale of families which are on a slide.

Dirk Strasser's "The Tale of Valkyria and Verdenir" did not significantly promote the cause of fantasy writing with the tired revelation that the eponymous characters are twins on either side of a battle. Misha Kamoshako's "Ascension" owed a lot to that American prejudice with a future cataclysm which leaves us pouting around in the ruins of our language distorted beyond belief, and seeking a desperate refuge in the sort of things which stifle all initiaves. The only difference is that while the Brits head for the hills, the Australians head for the desert in a Mad Max kind of thing, I was left thinking irresponsibly of why the current deserts of Foster's Lager ads.

Maureen KCoidapper Albedo 1, #2, #3, #4 (available from the New SF Alliance, PO Box 625, Sheffield, S1 3GY) Auralise #12 (available from the New SF Alliance, PO Box 625, Sheffield, S1 3GY) The Third Alternative #1 #2, #3 (available from S Martens Lane, Witton, Ely, Cambs, CB6 2LB Four issue sub. £9.00) Yazzky (available from Blackfriars 6, Zokov, Praha 3, Czech Republic)

Barbed Wire Kisses 31
**Signposts**

**Philip K. Dick**

_The World Jones Made_

...a challenging and highly entertaining work, which deserves to be a better-known part of the PKD oeuvre than it currently is.

Andy Mills

**Parke Godwin**

_Fireworld_ is a page-turner, though not, possibly, a book for Arthurian purists. It is based entirely on how life in Britain might have been around the time, and for me ranks highly... I would recommend it, particularly to historical fantasy buffs.

Vikki Lee

**Simon R. Green**

_Down Among The Deadmen_

"Here's a ranty amuse. and for me ranks highly... I would recommend it, particularly to historical fantasy buffs."

**Daifyd Ab Hugh**

_Arthur War Lord_

"Daifyd deserves full credit for not writing - say - a COMIC-CUT PROVO IN KING ARTHUR'S COURTYARD. The fifth-century scenes are so vivid that I resented being brought back to the Time-Tunnel-type efforts at intertemporal rescue / damage limitation."

Graham Andrews

**Gwyneth Jones**

_Flowerdust_

"The ethical and philosophical questions which underlie both personal relationships and political ideologies deepen. Flowerdust far beyond the average fantasy adventure, but the book never degenerates into a lecture - it is always easily and delightfully readable. I enjoyed it immensely."

Sue Thompson

**Philip G. Williamson**

_Heart of Shards_

"Williamson's writing is, as ever, more than competent and he paces the novels with impressive skill to create a real sense of tension. Heart of Shadows is its predecessor Moonblood, may not be vastly ambitious, but as a rattlingly-good read may be (if you'll excuse the pun) heartily recommended."

Andrew Seaman

**CUT PROVO IN KING**

That than the Time-Tunnel-type efforts at intertemporal rescue / damage limitation.
in the final chapter, and the book provides a useful bibliography of all King and King-related works, marred by the fact that the book is out of print and has not been updated. On the plus side there are some excellent illustrations from King artist Ken Liu. That said, Stephen King Story is in my opinion a curate’s egg: not the ideal book to pick up to learn about King, although it does refer you to those that might be.

Ben Bova with Bill Pogue The Trikon Deception NEL., 77/94, 470pp. £5.99 Steve Palmer

This is a near future thriller set in a space station. Essentially, the novel relates events during 1998 on an orbiting scientific station; a station that is supposed to be researching a means of using microbes to eat pollution, but is actually used for international scientific research.

Witten with the orbital experience of SkyLab man Bill Pogue, in this novel, simultaneously introducing a couple of interesting ideas yet remaining far too swamped with real-life detail to have any pace. By page 109 practically the only thing that’s happened is that Jimmy’s computer disc has been stolen.

It’s mediocre. Pace is in places dreadfully slow, and the middle third of the book is a mess. The main difficulty I had was with the characters. All seem extreme, and it appears that the author has used these extremes to fashion a plot; there is the macho commander who doesn’t realise he loves the pretty doctor; the terminally ill scientist who hates scientific programmes; the lazy, save by science; a lust-driven luckless character; and other hunks of cardboard. From these the author once again produces a flimsy mess of jealousy, grief, betrayal and murder. There’s a believable scene in which Jimmy and the sections set on Earth, but more often it descends into Neighbours-like hysteria.

On the other hand, there are extraordinary (and accidental, I’m sure) moments of deja vu: the sexually bizarre death of a top Conservative politician, and a European community vote where British voters defeat all eleven other members. As for the realism of the extrapolation, I think 1998 is a fraction optimistic for the setting, even granting that Ben Bova wrote the book in 1992. A final thought: it is too easy to see that great cliché, environmental disaster personified by dead whales. The blurb and the text both try to persuade the reader that the Earth is in danger of imminent ecological collapse, but you can’t say it’s convincing.

Disappointing, but not without some spark.

Terry Brooks The Tangle Box Legend, 19/594, 334pp. £15.99 Max Sexton

The Tangle Box is an easy way to approach the characters. The characters are uncomplicated and single-dimensional; they are either all good or all bad, and the book ends with a predictably Manichean climax. However, there are human interest sequences, and if we make it a cut above pulp fiction. The Tangle Box is preoccupied with love between humans and non-human, the responsibilities of kingship in a kingdom of diverse races and subjects; and the medical relationship between woman, nature and magic. The novel is too slight to explore these themes adequately superfically. Indeed, what Terry Brooks achieves with a high degree of certainty and definiteness is to make a cut above pulp fiction.

Penelope, the Secret of Skytab man Bill Barray, is a book that I found difficult to cope with the attraction between himself and Druo, Cordelia’s bodyguard. Anil’s father Piot makes no secret of his contempt for his daughter-in-law’s newfound galactic ambitions. And Barray is having bad dreams, a result of the heavy-handed therapy typical of Barrayan military medicine. Meanwhile, Anil has not become Regent and is acquiring personal and political enemies on every side. It’s only a matter of time before this begins to change Cordelia’s life.

Boyd’s competent, chatty style is not altogether in keeping with a plot as action-packed as this; she has a tendency to skip from front to back character development so urgently described that the reader has to fly back to catch the really happened. There are many unexplored allusions to events in the previous novel, which can be discouraging for a novice time reader; perhaps some of the apparent non sequiturs in the plot are more sense if a little more of the background was explained.

Despite this, Barrayar is an entertaining read. Boyd’s characters are deftly-drawn and sympathetic, and her space-age feudal culture rings true. A fast-paced, action-packed adventure novel suffused with wit and tinged with romance, great holiday reading.

James Buxton Strangers Warner, 14/794, 332pp. £4.99 Martyn Taylor

Irritators are dying on Long Barrow prison and it isn’t suicide, or other prisoners, or even the screws. So who is it?

Well, Long Barrow is haunted by the spirit of a militant Vietnamese warrior hanged for a murder he didn’t commit. Jim Carroll, also inside for a killing he didn’t do, eventually discovers the truth, although not before the inmates have done a Strangeways on the nick. At the same time his best friend’s daughter has just managed to escape from a murder which is very much a carbon copy of the weaver’s answer (the victim of which is haunting the girl). Confused? You won’t be.

The essence of good horror is not just the relentless haunting of the protagonist, it is more subtle. One finds out about the weaver I knew exactly what was coming. Similarly, once the story began to be told from the viewpoint of the present murder victim, I knew everything was going to end and happiness. Spooky, powerful stuff. So why should James Buxton? Everything was too neat, tidy and predictable. The moral, black fairy story in which everyone gets their just desserts.

But... there were a few passages here which made my guts heave, descriptions I finished out of duty rather than desire. This man can turn a ghastly phrase with the very best. Strange is by no means a great novella of horror, but it is more and better to come from James Buxton. Watch out for him, especially in a dark street.

Joe Dever The Skull of Agarash Red Fox, 1994, £4.99 Steve Palmer

This is the first graphic treat of the Lone Wolf saga and, although it’s standard hack-and-slay fare, it’s not awful – it has its moments of stuff and a plot that can be summarised in one sentence. (Lone Wolf, with no axe after all, is a curtain of an archetypal fiddle baddie Khadbro, does some detective work in taverns, leads an expedition to an island and then through a jungle, does a bit of telepathy to get the lay of the land, then does the baddies and destroys the Skull of Agarash which was the source of the evil.)

It is standard of the artwork is good, perhaps a little too perfect – it could have done with some flaw and adds much to what little plot there is. All the baddies are non-human, and all the goodies are tall chaps with long swords and names without the letters ‘g’ or ‘r’ in them. You get to see a bit of telepathy, but it is essentially a bit of stuff and a girl with a sword. Aimed fair and square at the young adolescent male market, it’s not entirely to my liking, but it is go ing to win any awards. I think five pounds is a bit steep these days, even if you slowly slide down to admire the pen and ink work, takes no more than a lunch break to read.

Joe Dever & John Grant The Secret of King Dunstorm Red Fox, 1994, 288pp. £3.99 Julie Alkin

The stinker on the front proudly proclaims this to be “Lone Wolf 10th Anniversary.” 10 Best-selling Years at the Top.” At the “Top” of what, one wonders. This one is volume eleven of Joe Dever’s Legends of Lone Wolf based on a series of role-playing game books.

For this volume, Dever is joined by John Grant, who is a self-professed supporter of Albion and The World. The result is an average quest fantasy. Lone Wolf, the hero, is travelling the lands of Albion. He has a few big adventures and tomes. In this episode, his search is for the Lorestone of Herods (not incidentally the
Lodore of Vareta as told in the blur on the back cover). The town of Herdons is in the Magistery ofデsk, thus supplying plenty of scope for the scurvy side of the equator.

"Dramat personae..."

Karl Elliot's debut novel abhors its theme, less for its social commentary, though, than for the way the man who lead a rebellion against the inscrutable alien occupiers, is portrayed. The Chapali, in a tale of far-future political intrigue. The Chapali, with their quasi-Japanese style hardware, unification and volumetric societies, provide a clear hint as to the structure of the novel which imposes stock SF trappings on a feudal-societal framework straight out of genre fantasy. In its early days, Elliot becomes explicit as Tass flee earth for the planet Rhul, part of her exiled brothers family, dominated by the Jaran. Slavic-style horse nomads. As a stranger, Elliot senses danger, she must come to terms with being part of Jaran society, while simultaneously becoming involved in complex machinations of the aliens, her brother and the rival factions of her adopted people. The plot and literary scanary may not be terribly original, but the novel is well-written and Elliot's detailed description of Jaran society telling. Through the adventures of its resourceful and likeable heroine Jaran presents a complex and believable portrait of societies, both human and alien, in the throes of far-future change. (For what is on offer here, Elliot may come to a name to watch out for in the future.

Christopher Fowler
Darkest Day
Warner PBks, 1/4/84, 570pp, £5.99
Graham Andrews

Darkest Day is one of those novels that make a book reviewer feel that he hasn't been to look for a self before for any of the 1990 Ballantine edition of of Christopher Fowler's Rockworld, assigning it a proviso- mional guide price of £6.45 (a short 2003). My mistake - rectified at the earliest opportunity.

Newsday once called Christopher Fowler a "major new chiller writer" who "takes a chair about midway between J. G. Ballard and Stephen King" - which the reviewer probably meant to be complimentary. Well, I think it's too awfully equal - at least of King, while Ballard is really sui generis. I've always thought that when they mean one of a kind.

There's no future in my plot-outlining Darkest Day. The evening, if not the day, is too short and Vector cannot take it, Cap- tain. But I will say that Darkest Day is a BIG NOVEL that reaches its natural length and then stops - unlike some as usual. More's the pity. "The covers of this book are too close together" (misquoting Ambrose Bierce).

The only beginning when Ms Jerry Jones, a vocational receptionist, finds a corpse in the lobby of the Slavery Hotel (London's West End, European Union). "They did an autopsy on (Max Jacob) last night and found he's in a state of complete liquefaction" (p. 93). And "begin" is the operative word. Matchless detectives Arthur Bryant and John Mayhoe, the shop, has a hand / see it through / close the case. Indeed, even after the Depart- ment of Quee Complainants (Carter Dickson, not Mary Whitehouse) had been written by Gerald (Night and The City) H. Ker, "much of London still bears the stamp of a vanished empire, its grandeur, and Elliot's intention - and, sometimes, its violence" (p. 22).

London should be listed in the Dramat Personae - but there isn't. Fowler exploits his readership to an ongoing attention span than their Niven / Pourelle counterparts. Ides thought; I wonder if he's related to Harry Fowler, the actor who played Sam Weller in the 1954 film version of Pickwick Papers.

Maggie Furey
Auran
Legend, 2/6/84, 611pp, £4.99
Benedit C S. Cullum

Press releases containing the words "Eric Fantasy &" / or "Book One of..." invariably an- nounce the commencement of a long haul journey and a decision is required as to whether you wish even to climb aboard. Encouragingly, Furey cites amongst her influences C. S. Lewis, Tolkien and Bradbury, but the blur writer who wades the waters by appealing to fans of David Eddings and Terry Brooks. Auran is the heroine and, although it is related from various points of view, the book concerns her quest after, all. When I bought the three remaining Artefacts of Power, relics from a time of war and dark sorcery. The Ca- dren of Rebrith has already been appropriated by the cor- rupt Archmage, Miathan, for- merly Auran's confidante and tutor.

For this occasional reader of fantasy there were a disturbing number of weaknesses in the story. Ostensibly for rea- sons of sexual jealousy, Miathan at one point accuses Auran and her companions from certain death, whereas oh this all efforts are in- volved trying to thwart it. Elsewhere we follow the fol- lowing: "Breathing underwater... the legends were true... you couldn't drown a Mage..." How would knowledge of this vital capability be lost? Likewise Auran soon destroys a hitherto invincible age old magic-inhabiting bracelet. And surely the infodump of this bark are a combination of reasons: the book would have been more suitable as a prologons begin. This said, certain of the characters are engagingly drawn (if somewhat stereo- typed) and the interaction of mortal, mage, half-breed and various other races is not with- out interest.

When one considers that even Robert Jordan's. superhero and all the more sophisticated Wheel of Times...this shows signs of flagging at vol- ume five, and with at least more books in this series. I believe that Furey has her work out to sustain the pace.

Parke Gymkin
Firelord
Avonova, 5/9/84, 400pp, $5.50
Vikki Lee

Firelord is yet another retelling of the legend of King Arthur. I approached it with trepidation after reading the au- thor's acknowledgements. At the end of those he states: "That they didn't all live at the same time is beside the point. Very likely several of them did". It is true that characters such as Vorligen, Ambrosius and Arthur couldn't have all lived to meet each other. While reading this book, this actually is beside the point.

Set presumably somewhere around 500 - 600AD, this is the story of Artorious Ulther Pendragon, a young Centurion who works his way up through the ranks and becomes the war- ning-king who tried to unite Brit- ain in the two visions of occupation. Although most of the Legend's characters are there, Guenevere, Lanceolot and Merlin, the flowerier parts of the legend are not. No Excalibur, no Round Table, no Round Table in shining armour, and Camelot is more of a fort than a castle. Merlin appears seemingly only in Arthur's dreams as a sort of druidic guide through what, for Arthur and Britain, must be the task of becoming a king within himself as well as to those who would support and serve him.

Gold is the gift of the tells readers who weaves the Arthurian and Faery legends with the beauty of a Celtic knot. Keeping just enough of the original tales, he deftly throws from time to time, giving the reader a feeling of familiarity rather than pene- ducity.

Firelord is a page-turner, though I'm afraid the work for Arthurian purists. It is based entirely on how life in Britain might have been in that time, and for me ranks highly with similar types of historical fantasy. I would recommend it, particularly to historical fantasy buffs.

Simon R. Green
Down Among The Deadmen
Gollancz, 23/6/84, 221pp, £1.99
Mal Coward

Ten years after the demon wars of Blue Moon Rising, Sergeant Duncan Michaelis takes his team of rangers - two fighters and a young witch - to investigate a border fort in the Darkwood on the edge of the Forest Kingdom. After taking delivery of a huge consignment of gold, the fort's owner, the authorities unable to make contact with it by natural or magical means. The Rangers find the remote place deserted, with evi- dence that something terrible has happened there, while an ad hoc band of outlaws is after the gold; but
neither cops nor robbers will survive unless they can first identify and defeat the monster that is awakening beneath the fort's foundations.

Here's a rarity: a sword and sorcery novel written in casual, modern language. Instead of the usual fey, adjectives-laden passages of woe, Green's writing is light and breezy, the plot carried by dialogue more than description.

Indeed, dialogue is often closer to an American action film than a traditional fantasy story—"Go ahead. Give me a hint. You know you might get lucky"—and there is an air of everyday reality about the small, well-defined locations, characters, which sets off the rest of the book very well.

All the action takes place in and around the fort, and there's plenty of it; although the endgame is a bit skimpy, it does get a bit repetitive. But it's readable; a superior blend of fantasy and horror.

Barbara Hambly
Sorcerer's Ward
Susan Badham

In this book, which is set in the same world as The Silent Tower and The Silicon Mage, but does not use the same characters, Hambly explores the impact of magic on a coherent late-medieval world and the restrictions it imposes on society. Refreshingly, magic is not all powerful nor are the unconvincingly incorporated in society. Instead their possible influence, given their powers, is carefully worked out and the checks and balances which have evolved against them are detailed. This is particularly important for the reader, which shows a mage venturing back to the family which has rejected her in order to prevent a tragedy.

Barbara Hambly's usual skill in characterization and description makes this book a richly rewarding read, leading us skilfully into the heart of the family and craft politics that form the background of the story, as well as to the reasons why the main character wanted to leave. Let's hope we see how it formed her. Gradual revelations lead us deeper into the plot as we realise how the past is influencing the present and how the danger can come from areas we have always taken for granted.

This is a book about individual self-realisation and about the place of the individual within family life. On these levels it is a good read. However it suffers from the weakness/barbarity of Hambly's books, that the plot is not very strong. If you aren't content to be led by the narrative and not the characters and ambiences you may not enjoy this book. Although the story of a desperate search, it is lacking in excitement and there is little about the heroine which will triumph in the end.

Harry Harrison
Stainless Steel Visions
Graham Andrews

Stainless Steel Visions (first published by Tor in 1993) is one of those retrospective collections that help Big Name Authors—herein referred to as BNAs—sort out their reclining years. Random examples: Dinosaur Tales (Bradbury), More Than One Universe (Clarke), Robot Dreams / Visions (Asimov), The Grand Adventure (Farmer). Old-timers tend to deprecate such jackawakening volumes, even if they do contain original / uncollected stories as a sweetener. After all, why can't people read / reread Machineries of Joy / Reach For Tomorrow / Earth is Room Enough / Down In The Black Gang? Obvious answer: many people didn't buy these first publications; Green perhaps because they were too busy getting born (excuses, excuses...). Even collections by BNAs can take an early bath thanks to 'new' compilations. And not everybody likes polishing about in second-hand book shops, strange as that might seem.

Moreover, the books mentioned above— and others, far past listing— feature stories that represent their authors at a particular point, often with material selected only because nothing better was then available. Retrotomes (to coin a word) give fresh generations the chance to read / recent best work by BNAs. Stinger veterans can always scan the new (usually short) bits without buying the book.

Stainless Steel Visions is full of rare stories of interest to retro-tomes. In order of appearance: 'The Streets of Ashkelon' (New Worlds, September 1962); 'Not Me, Not Amos Gabby' (New Worlds, January 1965); 'Rescue Operation' (Analyse, December 1964); 'Portrait of the Artist' (F&SF, November 1963). I envy anyone yet to read these stories—he has many store.

Also runs (in my opinion): 'The Mothballed Spaceship' (John W. Campbell Memorial Anthology, 1973), a Deathworld hooley; 'The Repairman' (Galax, February 1958), 'Roommates' (The Rovers of Earth, 1971).

The golden years of The Stainless Steel Rat* are — as they say—they are— and only recently have been published. Slippery Winkly Jim d'Graiz ends up in Terminal Penitentiary ("I'm off to THE GATE PASS THE ANTICIPATED CRIMINAL CROOKS OF THE GALAXY") at the mercy of Warnek. Sukks. But Things Are Not What They Seem—they also say. 'Writing shot stories is good training for the novelist. Among other things, it teaches economy of language. Every word must count in the short story, must be important and essential. Or it must be thrown out. Writers who practice this dictum are Brian Aldiss, Thomas M. Disch, and Robert Shockey' (Introduction, p. 11). Harrison should have thrown gentlemanly forbearance to the wind and put himself on that select list. His own stories "... move and sing and captivate" (ibid.).

Stainless Steel Visions is almost, but not quite, of Harry Harrison (the sadly out-of-print 1966 Pocket Book justified its title). I'd like to see 'Captain Horatio Happravely' (F&SF, March 1963) in some future Harrison retrospective. N.B. Galactic Dreams was published by Tor in April 1994.

Harry Harrison & David Bill
The Galactic Hero: The Final Incoherent Adventure
Joseph Nicholas

There are two immediate responses to this book, inspired by two of the words in the title: yes it is, and by God I hope so.

The original Bill, The Galactic Hero was published in 1965, and quickly became recognized as a classic satire of the tales of interstellar derision do pushed out during the fifties by such writers as Poul Anderson and (particularly) Robert Heinlein. In retrospect, it has also become transformed into an easily pre-emptive critique of the un-questioning military adventurism that was shortly to meet its apothecis in Vietnam.

There matters rested for twenty-four years, until sequels struck. The oxenstricken sequence of these sequels— including this one, there are six — is to fill the gap between the main story and the codas of Bill, The Galactic Hero, but the drawback is trying to find a serious on a book written so long ago is the wholly different in which will be read. We no longer believe in the possibility of galactic empires; we know that military intervention cannot resolve deeper-seated political questions; hence we no longer believe in the subject being satirised.

Perhaps the authors recognise as much, for what they offer instead of satire is knockabout slapstick. This book features characters— named Capitaine Kadafei and General Weissmer, and an en- vey called the Eyelrackins (whom true identique) in THIS GATE PASS THE ANTICIPATED CRIMINAL CROOKS OF THE GALAXY at the mercy of Warnek. Sukks. But Things Are Not What They Seem — as they also say. 'Writing shot stories is good training for the novelist. Among other things, it teaches economy of language. Every word must count in the short story, must be important and essential. Or it must be thrown out. Writers who practice this dictum are Brian Aldiss, Thomas M. Disch, and Robert Shockey' (Introduction, p. 11).

Harrison should have thrown gentlemanly forbearance to the wind and put himself on that select list. His own stories "... move and sing and captivate" (ibid.).

For anyone still puzzling which the words in the title inspired my opening two remarks—"galactic" and "incoherent"—you can work out the order for yourselves.

Tom Holt
Grailblazers
Orbit, 26/4/94, 256pp, £4.99
Martin H. Brice

Hilarious! I laughed out loud! Reviewers cliches I know, but true.

All the Arthurian ingredients are there, from Arthur to the preternatural castles on mountain peaks; sleeping princesses; knights in shining armour; courtly drawaresses; time-faced magicians; damsel in distress; talking unicorns; an Excalibur and the Quest for the Holy Grail. But the way these ingredients are stirred together makes, not an epic but a pie... pre- pared by the Knights of the Round Table, who are now doing a motor-cycle delivery service.

Reconvened in the 1990s by the reawakened Sir Boarmund, the Knights again set out for Great Britain. They start at the Citizens Advice Bureau and follow the trail through motorway service stations, Atlantis, the Australian outback, and the North Magnetic Pole. En route, they encounter a forlorn Raster, the Red-Nosed Reindeer and a phantom William Shakespeare, now literally ghost-writing for Coronation Street. "Exit Ken Barlow pursued by a bear."

Yet there are also some serious moments, made even more poignant by the humour of the rest of the book.

Dafydd Ab Hugh
Arthur War Lord
AvoNova, 3/4, 300pp, £4.99
Graham Andrews

The use of historical mythol- ogy / mythical history in fantasy literature goes back to Twa'm A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (and beyond — but that isn't my immediate concern). L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt well-nigh perfected the form with The Complete Enchanter (+ sequels) / The Land Of Unreason. De Camp's own work certainly stands alone in the science fiction, not fantasy; despite what he says.

Arthur War Lord, by Dafydd Ab Hugh, is not in the T. H. White / Mary Stewart / Rosemary Sutcliff / Henry Treece league. But that isn't far comparison to Martin zum Aufstand; if it were nearer the mark.

A mind-altering blend of Arthurian legend and modern-day spy suspense, "Robert Anton Wilson (blurb). The 'Masonic' bit re- minds me of James Mason, playing Sir Brack in Prince Val-
Gwyneth Jones
Flowerdust
Headline, 47/94, 312pp, £4.99
Sue Thomason

Flowerdust is set on the Peninsula, in the same south-east Asian future as Jones' earlier novel Divine Endurance (although I don't feel an acquisitiveness with Divine Endurance is necessary to enjoy Flowerdust). The eponymous flowerdust is a drug with strange and powerful effects, and the quest to find it is the book's action. The leader Derwent learns that someone is distributing it, and sets off to destroy the drug cache she knows must exist. Derwent is a 'felled woman', a childless (therefore presumably sterile) exile from the potent women's magic of the d'apu matriarchy. Her companions in the quest are the King, Prince Aton, the idealistic and inexperienced Cycler Jhorni, Endurance's leader, a character who, most unusually, has not been castrated to live his life as a 'boy', and the two constructed beings Cymher and the Beautiful and Divine Endurance. The complex society of the Peninsula is well-realised and very livid. Much of the book's richness lies in its detailed descriptions of the characters' surroundings, and in their relationships with each other. There are philosophical questions which underlie both personal relationships and political ideologies. Flowerdust far beyond the average fantasy adventure, but the book never degenerates into a lecture - it is always easily and delightfully readable. I enjoyed it immensely (unlike Divine Endurance, which I was unable to finish).

Paul Kearney
A Different Kingdom
Gollancz, 9/6/94, 310pp, £4.99
John D Owen

The best way to describe Paul Kearney's A Different Kingdom, would be as an Irish Charles De Lint, with harder edges. It has the same modus operandi as a De Lint novel - in your relationships and into another place of spirit. This is engrossing. In Kearney's case, the 'different kingdom' comes to the appropriately named Michael Fay as a young boy, and haunts him for years until he finally stops crossing the through the point of passage and sets out to discover the place he was sent to. In the case of the mysterious Horseman, and rescue the soul of his Aunt Rose, who he believes is the Horseman. In the other kingdom, the land is covered in forest, and inhabited by all manner of fey and dangerous creatures, but, unlike the stories of the Sidhe, the time he spends in this other place does not cost him even more time in his home reality: quite the contrary, he can return almost to the very instant he left, so he can have a lifetime of adventure and yet return, as a boy, back to his home and live his life over again. Around this premise, Kearney has woven a strong, tale, full of both wonder and horror, with two excellent central characters in Michael and his love, Cat, a changeling in that other world. A Different Kingdom is a good, exciting, cunningly told tale.

Katherine Kerr
A Time of War
Norman Beswick

Suppose (if you can) that you are a typical non-BSFA reader, you like your SF back to the encyclopaedic knowledge so typical of fandom. You pick up this in a non-specialist mode, attracted by the splendid picture of a dragon on the cover. At bottom left are the words 'Days of Blood and Among the mysteriously these are repeated nowhere else. The blurb at the back describes a simple story about a ratchet's son who must journey on a quest with an eyeless bard. If you look very carefully, you may find on the preliminary page a list of Katherine Kerr's books, including two whose titles are missing from the blurb. I outline 'A Time of...'. In capitals on the back cover we do find the words 'The fantasy saga of the decade'. But nothing actually warns that this is the middle volume in a longer sequence, that some knowledge of earlier volumes helps explain what happens, that we move on from the ratchets some halfway through, and that the volume ends with a cliffhanger. Hmm.

You, of course, are knowable. You know that Katherine Kerr's Devory books are well-written, well-planned and plotted, and that this is the latest volume following immediately after... well, I don't need to tell you. If you like long, multivolume fantasies in which every character's adventure helps explain what happens, that we move on from the ratchets some halfway through, and that the volume ends with a cliffhanger. Hmm.

Christopher Kubaski
Earthdawn - Poisoned Memories
ROC, 28/4/94, 313pp, £3.99
Jon Wallace

This, although it doesn't actually say anywhere that I can see, is the second book of the Earthdawn Trilogy. The Earthdawn trilogy is a fantasy, and a strange one at that. Poisoned Memories starts with two hideously scarred brothers, Samael and Torran, debating whether to kill their father Jole (who scared them as children). Samael decides to look for a way to find him and what he finds surprises, discovers that Jole has a story to tell. Jole's adventure takes him on a bleak island in the middle of Death's Sea, into death itself, and back. Along the way he discovers that he is not the monster he always thought he was, and he makes the first tentative steps towards reconciling with Samael.

Kubaski's style is meticulous, the things which happen to Jole and the people that he meets are carefully documented, almost to the point of dwelling on them a bit too much. But in the end, Jole himself doesn't ring true as a character, and the rest of the cast are just there for him to play with, hence the book's drop is all there is. This is fantasia reminiscent of Moorcock in the mid-1960s, period, but without Moorcock's sheer exuberance to carry it off, A miss.

Phillip Mann
A Land Fit For Heroes
Alan Fraser

I've always loved alternative history, and have had a fan of Phillip Mann's ever since reading The Eye of the Queen, so I opened this book with great anticipation. Set in Mann's native Yorkshire, this is a 1991 in which the Roman Empire never left Britain, and now rules almost the whole world. This is, however, a world with a vastly smaller population than our own, where the human settlements are islands in a thickly forested countryside, while the Roman legions lead a totally separate way of life in the 'wild wood'. Although technology has advanced in some ways even further than in our world, the Empire has changed socially not at all in two thousand years, particularly the Games, which are as bloodthirsty and barbaric as ever, and play a very important role in this story. I'm not convinced that, even in a society as autocratic as depicted here, the Games would have been so absolute, as I think the development of the industrial infrastructure required to support this level of technology would have caused considerable social change. However, my misgivings are considerably bridged by the power of Mann's narrative, as he takes his three young protagonists, one an 'Asian', one an alien assassin, and two British Roman Citizens, and sends them out of their fixed Roman world on a journey into the forest and the parallel 'barbarian' society, which turns out to be much more sophisticated.
socially, politically and technologically than we or the Romans had thought. It's a book to vector readers, and I am eager to get my hands on Volume 2, Stand Alone Stan (the name of both a standing stone and of a town of dissenters to which our heroes are headed).

Stephen Marle y Shadow Sisters Legend, 16/94, 432 pp

Chetin Baldry

A few pages into this book, I found myself crossing the description of the ritual slaughter and violence of a small child, I wondered how far Stein Marley would go. I found out; he demonstrates an obsession with crucifixion and with the degradation and death of women and young girls.

In the seventh century AD, Chasing, the "Fledgling" to become Pope, returns to her native China. Accompanied by a group of women whose role model she has become, she battles against the mad monk Cruel and the degenerate emperor Chao, a demon being, facing to degradation and death.

Moorecock states that the novel is based on paper left to him by Pyat. There is an elaborate introduction telling how Moorecock became acquainted with Pyat, a Russian immigrant down in London. He impresses on the reader the difficulties he had in translating Pyat's writings. He even includes a copy of one of Pyat's manuscripts to authenticate his claim.

The novel takes place in the second half of the first-century Russian Revolution. It is set in the midst of a transitional period, when the Tsarist regime is on the way out, and the first attempts at a republic are being made.

The novel is divided into three parts: the first part, "Pyat's Story", covers the period from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century, and deals with the rise of the revolutionary movement. The second part, "Pyat's Letters", takes place in the years leading up to the First World War, and focuses on the events leading up to the Russian Revolution. The third part, "Pyat's Death", covers the period from the Revolution to the present day, and deals with the aftermath of the war.

Moorecock portrays a bleak picture of the revolution, with the traditional and the modern clashing, and the old values and the new worldviews. The revolution is seen as a struggle for power and control, and the characters are often drawn as one-dimensional stereotypes.

The novel is a historical romance, and the historical events are used as a backdrop for the characters' personal lives. The novel is written in a style that is both realistic and poetic, and the language is rich and evocative.

Overall, "Pyat's Story" is a fascinating and thought-provoking novel that offers insight into the Russian Revolution and the events leading up to it. It is recommended for readers interested in historical fiction and Russian history.
from James Bond films, his im-agination flowing, he leaves in blooers like the CD-ROM jukebox in the town's bar, while using solid state record- ing devices elsewhere, the Smith & Wesson handgun the ranger uses. If this piece of trivia fails to satisfy you, add to an empty sky, then read it for a laugh, but don't encourage the author by paying money for it - he might write some more!

Michael Scott Rohan
The Gates of Noon
Steve Jeffrey

This is high adventure fan- tasy at its most stirring. Scott Rohan takes us back to the twin interpreting worlds of the Core and Spiral that were introduced in Chase the Morning. The Core is our own day to day world, the hardnosed, more colourful world of dreamers and archetypes: a realm of heroes and adventurers, gods and demons, our own real, our own Core, or the magi-cal, intense world of the Spiral, an open sesame.

The Gates of Noon, though, stands complete as a story in itself, largely due the effective device of its hero's bur­ied and repressed memories of his previous encounter with the Spiral.

Stephen Fisher is an agent for a shipping company. Rich, successful, he has pursued his career single-mindedly, and a little ruthlessly. When he takes on a seemingly altruistic job for an irrigation project destined for the island of Bali, he finds rather more than government bu-reaucracy ranged against him. Following an attack by mys-te-rious creatures in a strange part of Bangkok, memories slowly begin to resurface, a world of dangers, places and people far outside his normal life.

Slowly and inexorably he is pulled back into the Spiral, as the forces for and against him, and the success of the project, intervene.

Added by the strange sorcerer, Ape, who has a destiny of his own waiting him in Bali, he re­solves to break the blockade by bringing the shipment in by a series of improbable routes and vessels.

The battle over the Project is fought on a number of levels, within both Spiral and Core. At its heart is a clash between East and West and old and new, between the mixed blessings of modern technology and the priestly, subdek traditions for the control over the water supply that is the life of the Earth.

On that level, perhaps, the answer it proposes is a little too pat for a satisfactory resolution of the dilemma. But it's high adventure all the way, and a damn good yarn, told with verve and style. Exhilarating stuff.

Nyx Smith
Shadowrun: Fijide to Black Roc, 30/6/94, 318pp, £3.99
Martyn Taylor

Every reviewer gets books which leave them asking, "why did they bother?" In this case it is obvious. The perpetrators of the Shadowrun RPK made Nyx Smith an offer she / couldn't refuse. The author has turned in a solid piece of hackwork, well written (up to a point) bowling along merrily in its milieu of Escape from New York meets Dragonslayer with added magic.

Which is exactly why it doesn't work. The settings second hand. The conning megacorporations are third hand at least. The orcs and elves and trolls are exactly like human beings. The protagon­ist - Risco & Piper & Bandit - are just another collection of stereotypes (and failings) carved from best quality cardboard. They don't ever come alive. So the game made (most often) 'em all live more or less happily ever after. Who cared? I certainly didn't. Neither did Nyx Smith.

Only when it came to weapons did the writing come alive, and we are talking loving detail which would make Jerry Pournelle blanche. You want pornography of violence? This ghostly people have it. Nasty, unpleasant, insidious, that it is one of a series about Shadowrun explains much; about Nyx Smith's rather dis­tant stake in America, and it isn't good. Burn before reading.

Roger Stern
The Death and Life of Superman
Bantam, 16/5/94, 476pp, £4.99
Graham Andrews

Roger Stern's The Death and Life of Superman was adapted as five comic books: Superman: The Man of Steel #17-26 (1992-93); Superman #73-82 (1992-93); Adventures of Superman #536-555 (1992-93); Supergirl and Team Luthor #1 (1993).

Additional material: Man of Steel #16 (limited series, 1992); Justice League America #69 (1992); Action Comics #650 (1993); Star-Spangled Comics #7 (1942).

Writers: Dan Jurgens; Karl Kesel; Jerry Siegel; Louise Simonson; John Byrne; Stern himself. Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster get an obligatory nod as co-creators. Acknowl­edgment is made to the varied contributions of Julius Schwartz, Dan Parent, Frank F. Fox, Mike Sekowsky, Edmond Hamilton - among others.

All of which should have gone to make up an obviously patchwork novel, but Stern wields the whole mad melange into seamless unity.

Plot? Blurbman to the rescue: "... the story behind the making of the cataclysmic battle with Doomsday...; of the mysterious Superman story on the skies above Metropolis, and of the fate of Clark Kent, Lois Lane, Ma and Pa Kent (etc., etc.), the four superhumans who simultaneously appeared to usher in the reign of Superman.

Death / Life is probably the best self-narrated novel of Supie yet written. (However, I haven't read George Ploch's Superman, published by Armed Services Editions during the Hitlerian war).

Whitley Streiber
The Forbidden Zone
NEL, 2/5/94, 350pp, £9.99
Julie Alkin

Whitley Streiber's latest horror novel has its feet firmly in the tradition of scientific ex-periments that misfire and open a "door that should not have been opened". It is reminiscent of Stephen King's novel, The Mist, with the same premise of a group of people in an isolated area being attacked by an increasing number of creatures from another dimension.

Streiber's participants are the inhabitants of an insignifi­cant American town, and the narrative focuses on a small group of them, Brian Kelly, a former physicist, gave up the life after the death of his wife and daughter. His second wife, Loi Kelly, is a French-Vietnamese refugee, a soldier and 'runnel rat' during the Vietnam war. Now heavily pregnant, she tries to control the underline of the frightening fratic that exists between herself and her husband, Bob, a Vietnam veteran who is the town sheriff. The other main character is a New York reporter who has bought the struggling local paper.

The novel begins with Brian and Loi hearing screams from beneath the Earth, and their dog, Killing itself in its dig­ging efforts to reach their source. The screaming is fol­lowed by strange vibrations, which particularly effect Loi Kelly's pregnancy, and soon the characters encounter a mysterious purple light and strangely aggressive flies.

As the weird happenings grow more horrific, so the inhabitants of the town dwindle, until we are following the fortunes of a small group. As they battle to stay alive, they attempt to escape the area, the young eventually realize that to stop the horrors they must enter the forbidden zone of the title.

I enjoyed this - although Streiber doesn't have Richard Layman's gift of manner, and immediately sympathise with his characters, I was still interested to see who would make it to the last page. An exciting, but un­demanding, page-turner, which is at times genuinely scary.

Margaret Weis & Tracy Hickman
Into The Labyrinth
(Bantam, 26/5/94, 440pp, £9.99)
Alan Fraser

While reading The Shining I was suddenly thought, "Why AM I reading this crap?" I concluded that I must read great maps. Well, Weis and Hickman have great maps in their books, and they also have something else that keeps you reading, though they're never likely to win any literary prizes. The punter certainly like their stuff, in the English-speaking world and beyond. In Switzer­land, I was surprised to find a paperback German translation of Into The Labyrinth, a month before the book was in the UK. The number of W&H fans there must justify the effort of getting a new book to them in the first place.

Unfortunately, if you're new to W&H or the Death Gate se­ries, here's not the place to start. The first four books of this seven book series which started with Dragon Wing, about a universe where the Earth has been destroyed. All the enclosed worlds linked by the Death Gate, were to some extent self-contained, so you could read them out of order.

However, Book 5, The Hand Of Chaos, was very much a direct sequel to Book 4, The Serpent Mage, and Book 6 is again a sequel to Book 5, itself ending on a cliff-hanger and sucking you into the sequel. Consequently, Book 6 won't make much sense if you haven't read the previous ones in the series.

Into The Labyrinth continues the adventures of the Pitryan Labyrinth, the world of Pie­r's adventure, and Book 6 is again accompanied by his dog (effectively a familiar), the Santer Mage Alfred, and Hugh the Hand, the assassin from the air world of Anarion. A new character is introduced in the shape of Mari, Harpo's ex-lover and the mother of his lost daughter, who is sent by Mari to find and kill the last survivor of the Patryn race.

At the time of the sounding of the Earth, the rival Patryn sorcerers condemned their Patryn enemies to imprison­ment in a deadly maze enclos­ing the Pitryan Labyrinth, called the Labyrinth and full of vicious foes. Here the Patryn face consultation, life­less hardships and few survi­vors to old age. Harpo was rescued from the Labyrinth by Mari, Lord of the Neux, and his book is the party cast back there by their path and the dragon-slayer, now working together. The bad
already explored in earlier novels like Dribig of Khimmur and Moonblood. In the southern desert of Firstworld's continent of Lur, a party of merchants led by Master Franu Atturo stumble by accident on a mysterious gem of great antiquity and eponymous Heart of Shadows. Joy at the discovery soon turns to terror as the gem's magical powers become apparent.

Two of Franu's employees are brutally murdered and the merchant himself is threatened by Skeletain, a monstrous stranger with an overriding interest in the stone.

However, by now the stone is in the possession of Franu's son, Sidemund, who has been dispatched to the city of Dursoul to discover the provenance of their find. He is, in turn, pursued against his father's wishes by his fiercely independent sister, Meglan. The arrival of the Heart of Shadows in Dursoul sets in motion a complex chain of events seemingly connected with the present-day politics of Firstworld, but in reality rooted in events that took place soon after the creation of the universe. Guided by the evil Skeletain, Sidemund and Meglan must face many adventures and perils, though they are aided by the timely arrival of Ronbas Dribig, the Zan-Chassian sorceror familiar from Williamson's previous Firstworld novels.

Once again, Williamson demonstrates his ability to create something fresh and interesting out of well-drawn and sympathetic characters and a convincing description of everyday life. The religion and myth so integral to the novel is, by large, unobtrusively integrated into the storyline, leaving to flesh out what details we already know about the universe of Firstworld.

Williamson's writing is, as ever, more than competent and he paces the novels with impressive skill to create a real sense of tension. Heart of Shadows, like its predecessor Moonblood, may not be vastly ambitious, but as a rattlingly-good read, may be (if you'll excuse the pun) heartily recommended.

Dave Wolterton
Star Wars: The Courtship of Princess Leia
Bantam, 320pp. £9.99

Andy Mills
You'll be pleased to learn that stereotyping doesn't permeate the entire cast; after all, Princess Leia is a republican and a pacifist (watch the body count...). Anyway, back to the story. Leia has to choose between Isolder (and hence an allegiance with the New Republic) and Han Solo. Solo spirits Leia off to the planet Damhorm, which happens to have won in a card game, to which Luke Skywalker also has to go to find the lost Jedi records, and where the evil Nightstalker and Warlord Zorin are plotting to rule the galaxy. What a coincidence!

Will Leia choose Isolder instead of Han? Will the baddies win? Will a stormtrooper actually hit anyone? No prizes for guessing...

What puzzles me about this book is who its target audience is. I'd have said your younger teenager, but Star Wars movie is seventeen years old, and even though it was then, I can't imagine the video version having the same impact on today's youth. So I suppose it's aimed — like Star Trek spin-offs — at loyal, and adult, fans from the past.

Suffice to say that, although one of those Star Wars devotees, you might enjoy this inconsequential tiff. If not, you're hardly likely to buy it anyway, are you?

Roger Zelazny
A Night in The Lonesome October
Orbit, 200pp, £4.99

Andrew Seanan
S
ult, the canine familiar of Jack the Ripper, narrates this essentially light-hearted tale of occult murder, mayhem and magic in a sketchily-realized Victorian London. In the month leading up to the night of the full moon on Halloween, sundry historical and literary characters and their animal familiars compete to assemble the requisite objects needed to take part in a night of wits which will determine whether the Lovecraftian Elder Gods will return to this world.

Though slight, the story makes pleasurable reading. Zelazny's authorial presence as he chronicles the attendant skullduggery is as witty and engaging as ever, and the novel bottles along at a pace guaranteed to keep you turning the pages until the final confrontation between the rival groups of “openers” and “closers”. All in all, a pleasurable book, grazed by some idiosyncratic illustrations from the twisted mind of cartoonist Gahan Wilson.

David Zindell
The Broken God
HarperCollins, 200pp, £7.99

L. J. Hurst
November was a book on its own. David Zindell has now begun a trilogy set in the city that appeared on that first book. It threatens to be one of the longest trilogies for some time.

Essentially, it is a rites of passage novel, describing the life of Danilo the Wild, from his childhood in a tribe of Neanderthals who live like inhum, through his journey to the city when the tribe all die (their brains running out of their ears) — though not before his grandfather has had time to scarily his body, being received by one of the benevolent giants who reside in the city, education and entry into the long apprenticeship of the Guild of Priests, and discovery that his father has sailed off into the distant stars become a god.

Like most rites of passage novels, this is no ordinary passage. In its way, you know much of what is going to happen — though not before his grandfather has had time to scarily his body, being received by one of the benevolent giants who reside in the city, education and entry into the long apprenticeship of the Guild of Priests, and discovery that his father has sailed off into the distant stars become a god.

This is very much a composite novel — I would say its biggest debt is to Herren Hess's The Glass Bead Game, and another big influence is the stories of Jorge Luis Borges (who is quoted unacknowledged). In other words, this is a popularisation of literary fantasy. If you like Hess, Zindell is not so different. If you like Zindell, you ought to try Borges and Hesse.
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