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Channel 4's 'Equinox science programme has long been a source of interesting watching, but the current season has excelled most others. One programme stood out recently.

In 'Rave New World' the experience of rave music and the synthetic drug ecstasy was explored; a fascinating programme, this, helped along by the almost doomy tones of ex-Dr Who Tom Baker. Starting off with a resume of what rave music is exactly, it immediately drew the link between this stripped down music, the drug, and the computer technology that seems to accompany every cultural movement these days. Ecstasy was in fact discovered in 1911 (I had a mental image of said Edwardians partying to the sounds of Stravinsky then chilling out with Webens, all beneath the multi-coloured canvasses of Picasso and Van Gogh... but lay unexplored as a chemical until 1985. Unusually, this drug, by allowing brain neurons to produce cascades of the neurotransmitter serotonin — linked with empathic feelings — brings people together. Yet alongside the descriptions of great happiness came more sinister phrases, and soon it became clear that a kind of shrugging off of the capacity for thought was being produced by the drug and the rave atmosphere, much as was produced by tribal shaman and war-drunk berserkers. Descriptions of losing the self, being blown away, getting lost in the pounding rhythm, letting the rhythms take over, making people lose control; all these are the metaphors of escaping the burdens of having to make choices in conscious life. It is for precisely this reason that rave music is content free: that is, with neither lyrics or melody — a unique and extraordinary development in Western pop music — there is no requirement for the listener to understand it. It exists purely as a rhythm overlaid with fragments of timbre and pitch.

This development is interesting enough, but the skulking existence of computer technology behind the techno scene makes it all the more chilling. Symptomatic of the music — rave, techno, even ambient to a certain extent — is a new anonymity that seems to me to be derived from the use of computers, for computer music composition neatly avoids the need to create melody and meaning. The new anonymity — it is uncool to be a 'character' in the new music — mirrors the facelessness of micro-technology, mirroring at the same time the lack of content, of meaning, that characterises rave music in particular. As one familiar with hi-tech music composition systems, I can vouch for the fact that, first of all, it is incredibly easy to produce a piece of music; but secondly, and more importantly, the very nature of computer systems forces the composer to think in terms of loops, blocks and fragments, for these are the main tools used. It is quite difficult to compose melodic songs on a computer because these systems force you to think non-holistically. Characteristic of rave music is its fragmented nature; small sections of rhythm and pitch that repeat simply, then vanish to be...
overtaken by another small section. These sections, as anybody who has been to a techno club or a rave will agree, can go on for hours on end, and this extension in time is another facet of the use of computers, since with gigabytes of memory available, and no need for meaning, no limit in time is required.

This content-free, repetitive nature was compared by the programme to the effects of the drug Ecstasy encourages simple repetitive behaviour; this has been proven, but oddly enough experiments have been done that, though admittedly not featuring rigorous scientific restraints, show that taking ecstasy is not required to experience the highs and the happiness of the rave atmosphere. What is most important is that the raver keep going. Occasional raving, even with the use of ecstasy, is not enough to achieve the full effects.

Having raved, it was inevitable, given the action-and-reaction nature of popular culture, that clubbers chill out, hence the appearance of ambient music. Interestingly, ambient music can be both content-free and meaningless — swathes of synthesised sound—or deeply meaningful. Again, created in a cultural atmosphere of anonymous computers, much ambient music is faceless, produced by people who hide behind hi-tech names or even numbers (recently an ambient CD appeared with tracks titled after their length in digits, another had titles consisting of colour shades; while the first two Orbital albums had no title at all). The explosion of compilation albums, both of techno and ambient music is a symptom of this repression of the human character in favour of a particular sound or other form of category, for with compilation albums there is no need for an overall feeling, or creator: these fragmented albums mirror the fragmented music.

I personally find nineties popular culture quite frightening. It seems to me that the culture of the computer—of technology—is reducing human beings and their creations by a process of mathematical computation, we are being humanly creative in an ever more computational way, and this produces certain symptoms: coldness and lack of identity; fragmentation; emotional distance or even no emotional content at all; an inability to connect.

I wonder too whether the iconography of space travel, used by so many techno and ambient creators, is symptomatic of an unconscious escape from Earth, the infinite cold starscapes epitomise computer music far better than anything produced, with sweat and dirt, by our planet. In space, you can float free forever and never meet anybody, there is no human content, no human meaning, in space since it is too large, whereas on Earth there is always the danger of having to become involved with others ...

But there are some people recoiling from this popular computer culture. In America, the old sixties spirit is being revived, but this time via technology. Attempts are being made to recognise the dangers of submerging human culture in mathematics and

perfectly sharp images and music. The new hippiess — zippies, they are called — like to do silly things such as burn neon effigies of the Wicker Man and broadcast the results live over the InterNet; but this attempt to bring together the old and human with the new and inhuman is only a start (and a rather contrived start at that). Soon, in popular culture, there will be a new liberal reaction to the challenge of the computer. What it will be — how it will manifest itself — I do not know, but it will arrive. Popular culture mutates on an action-and-reaction principle, and often its effects seep into Western culture as a whole. The question is, can the liberal symptoms of the human being overcome the reactionary symptoms epitomised, at this time in history, by the icy grip of computer technology.

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"To me the future is still black and blank — is a vast ignorance, lit at a few casual places by the memory of [the Time Traveller's] story..." HG Wells, *The Time Machine*, 1895.

I was intrigued — and flattered — by KV Bailey's response (in Front Line Dispatches, *Vector* 180) to my survey, in Vector 179, of the Future History sub-genre. KV Bailey's extensive remarks about Wells struck a particular chord, as it happens, for my own latest project has been rooted in Wellsian material; and in this essay I'd like to explore Future-Historical aspects of what I regard as Wells's greatest novel: *The Time Machine*.

**Statutory Disclaimer:** Now, I'm sure everyone will think my motive for this essay is once again to plug my next book. Would I do such a thing? Well... maybe. But I'd argue that essays like this are dispatches from my own 'front line', which is the material from within the genre and beyond I've been researching for my various current projects, and as a result the odd mention of my next book (to be called *The Time Ships*, incidentally, available in hardback from HarperCollins in April 1995, ISBN 0 00 224026 2, a snip at £15.99) may inevitably slip in...

*The Time Machine* remains a wholly remarkable book.

It was Wells's first novel, serialised during 1894 and appearing in book form in 1895 — 100 years ago — and it was immediately hailed as a work of genius. The book contains a prescient scientific premise, the disturbing and complex myth of Eloi and Morlock, and a startling vision of mankind's far-future decay — and all of this carried by a central human plot that is elemental and compelling.

At the end of the book the Time Traveller makes a second journey into time. But he never returns! — And Wells was never to tell us what became of him, or show us any more of the Eloi-Morlock universe.

To have such a glimpse of a possible Future History — and to have it closed off again, to remain "a vast ignorance, lit at a few casual places" — is, of course, infuriating. And, like many readers, I've always longed to know what finally became of the Time Traveller. Now, unable to stand it any longer, I've written my own sequel to Wells's novel.

This isn't the first such sequel-by-other-hands (to use David Pringle's term) — or, indeed, prequel. What is there in *The Time Machine* that has impelled so many writers to revisit its implied Future History? And — what did happen to the Time Traveller?

A search for further glimpses of the Time Machine universe in Wells's other writings is of little help.
Early Time Machine drafts, such as *The Chronic Argonauts* (1888), featured a mad inventor called Dr Moses Nebogipfel, who seems to bear little relation to the Traveller of the final novel. (Wells never names his Traveller, incidentally; he was called ‘George’ in the 1960 film, perhaps after Wells himself.) In fragments published in the serialised form but not the novel, we are given more glimpses of the Traveller’s first adventure. He visits the thirteenth millennium, for example, and makes an additional stop-over on his way to the end of the world, where he sees a rather pathetic kangaroo-like creature being preyed on by an immense centipede — there are hints that this is a further step in the devolution of Morlock and Eloi. But there is nothing of the second journey.

So there were no Wells sequels. But as KV Bailey notes, Wells did initiate what we might regard as a loose Future History in “A Story of the Days to Come” (1897) — a novella closely linked to his later dystopian novel *When the Sleeper Awakes* (1899, revised 1910). In “Days to Come” we visit a near-future London transformed into an immense crystalline arcolology. The upper levels are full of light and leisure, but the lower and underground levels are inhabited by blue-uniformed proles (prefiguring Orwell). And, as KV Bailey notes again, “A Dream of Armageddon” (1903) could be regarded as a glum vision of another corner of the same Future History.

But though there are clear thematic links between the world of “Days to Come” and *The Time Machine* — so that we could, with a little imagination, regard the London-arcolology world as set in a Time Machine Future History, depicting a near-future intermediate stage in the development of the Morlock-Eloi duality — there seems no hint that Wells had such an explicit integration in mind.

So we have to rely on the works of other hands to give us further tentative glimpses of how Wells’s Time Machine universe — even if, if I adhere strictly to my own definition of a History as being by a single hand, such works can never fully qualify as Future Histories in their own right.

As I noted in my first essay, one of the most enjoyable Wells homages was supplied by Christopher Priest. *The Space Machine* (1976) is a direct prequel to *The Time Machine*. Young commercial traveller Edward Turnbull visits the Time Traveller before the first voyage of the Machine, and rides it — together with Miss Amelia Fitzgibbons, the Traveller’s amanuensis — across Space, to the hostile Mars of *The War of the Worlds*. We encounter a young Herbert George Wells, who constructs a flying bed- steed from Time-Machine fragments and uses it to fight the Martian invaders. (Priest’s Traveller, incidentally, rejoices in the moniker of Sir William Reynolds — my pick as the most right of Traveller names.)

As far as I can tell *The Space Machine* dovetails completely with the plots of both *The War of the Worlds* and *The Time Machine*, thus spinning a consistent near-Future History which contains the material of both books, and as such it is a delight for the fan — although the tone of Priest’s prose perhaps does not quite match Wells’s remarkably modern, matter-of-fact style. The book is gently nostalgic, and Priest devotes some attention to the preoccupations and prejudices of Wells’s day — for example, parallels are drawn between the Martians’ handling of their humanoid countrymen and Victorian Britain’s colonial policy...

Yes, yes. But what happens to the Traveller?

Well, by the time Edward and Amelia return to Earth they have missed him: He went into futurity on that infernal Time Machine of his, and although he returned once he has not been seen since his second journey. (*The Space Machine*, Chapter 20.)

Aargh!

So much for prequels. What about sequels?

The first sequel-by-another-hand to *The Time Machine* seems to have been by an anonymous “Disciple” (of Wells) who, in 1900, used the Time Machine to explore *The Coming Era, or Leeds Beati- fied*. (Leeds??) And the most recent sequel (before my own effort) seems to have been *The Man Who Loved Morlocks* by David Lake (1981) in which the Time Traveller is unable to return to the era of Morlock and Eloi, and moves further into the future where he finds a different, more vigorous society. Frustratingly, I’ve not been able to find a copy of Lake’s book; according to the critics the work moves well, but his main concern is a fairly deep critique of Wells’ preoccupations and perceptions.

Rather more fun than the Lake, probably, but a lot more superficial, is *Morlock Night* by KW Jeter (1979). 1890s London disappears into a sort of fog, and it emerges that not only are the Morlocks using the captured Time Machine to invade Victorian England, but time travelling is generating a Universe-threatening causal collapse.

A promising opening — but unfortunately, by page 40, we learn that only a reincarnated King Arthur can fight the Morlocks and save England,
much of the rest of the book is occupied by a quest for clones of Excalibur created by the paradoxes of time travel. There are pleasant moments, and there are odd glimpses of the Morlock-Eloi Future History (such as the existence of highly intelligent 'Morlock Generals'), but the book is fatally let down, for me, by its essentially silly Arthurian central premise, and by its lazy handling of Wells's material and style.

Interestingly this book has become famous as a prototype steampunk novel. It's odd to think that such a slim work can have had such influence!

And what of the Traveller? He is soon dismissed. The Morlock generals... are waiting for him the next time... and [his] bones are tossed into an open grave millions of years removed from the day of his birth! So says Merlin, in Chapter 1; and so much for Morlock Night.

Perhaps the most interesting, if oddest, of all the sequels is Egon Friedell's Die Reise mit die Zeitmaschine (The Return of the Time Machine) (1946). Friedell was a Viennese litterateur and dramatist who produced sweeping philosophical and historical studies, which vaguely paralleled some of Wells's output. Die Reise was first published in 1946, under a US Army occupation license, and in English by Donald Wollheim in 1972.

The book has a narrative frame reminiscent of the original, as the 'quiet, shy man with a beard' of the Traveller's dinner party provides Friedell with an account of the second journey into time. The Traveller (named as a Mr James Morton) travels forward to 2123. He finds himself on a glassy plain; the city of London floats in the sky above. Everything is controlled, including the weather, food production and sleep patterns.

Disconcerted, the Traveller journeys on to 2123. He arrives on a muddy plain occupied by huge and colourful vegetation. He encounters two 'Egyptians', who have a sort of psychic sense of disturbances in the flow of history — caused, of course, by the paradoxical actions of the Time Machine itself — and, with much double-talk, the Egyptians explain that the Eloi-Morlock world is so remote that the Traveller could not have reached it through time travel, and so his vision must have been of a parallel reality: that is, Friedell is positing a sort of Future super-History containing many possible reality versions.

The Time Traveller now resolves to penetrate the past, but when he attempts to do so, he is suspended in a single 'Groundhog Day'... until the Time Machine is invented! At last, disillusioned, he returns to his own time and sets off on a final journey: a honeymoon, with a girl of the near future.

The book is not easy to read. There is no plot and little action; essentially the Traveller meets a series of cicerones who are conveniently able to deliver the dirt on the nature of their worlds immediately. A greater contrast to Wells's own careful unravelling of his future visions is hard to imagine. Friedell's main preoccupation is to explore Wells's scientific conceit, but he throws out his extrapolations and paradoxes as dazzling suggestions, rather than use them to construct genuine fiction.

But Die Reise remains, nevertheless, an interesting and thought-provoking read, particularly in its exploration of the Future-Historical aspects of the original.

Many enigmas surround this little work. It is not clear when Friedell wrote it: perhaps as early as the 1920s. Although the book opens with a spoof correspondence between Friedell and Wells — with Friedell demanding a sequel! — it isn't clear, sadly, whether Wells himself ever heard of the book. In 1938, after Austria was seized by the Nazis, Friedell — who had Jewish ancestry — committed suicide.

When I began to research my own sequel, my starting point was Wells's science, and the glimpses he had given us of an intriguing Future History. But as I read on, like Priest and Lake, I grew more interested in the deeper layers of Wells's story — the politics, the preoccupations of Wells's time, what the book tells us about Wells's own inner state — and how they might be reevaluated in the light of another century of human experience.

But, in the end, after I had gone through all this, I came back to the central, engaging figure of the Time Traveller himself.

Perhaps the vigour and appeal of the Traveller character is one of the more underrated aspects of Wells's novel. The Traveller is cheerful, bourgeois, immensely likeable, and often absurd. He tends to think with his fists: an irresistible Captain Kirk for the 1990s. We want a sequel so badly because we care so much about the Traveller.

And so, in the end, I was drawn to my own exploration of Wells's implied Future History by a need to answer that century-old reader's plea: whatever happened to the Time Traveller?
On the title page of this novel, Brian Aldiss defines it as "Another European Fantasia": it is the fourth in the sequence of novels which began with Life in the West.

The science fictional elements of the novel are unobtrusive; its future setting is intentionally close to the present day, both in time and social values. This does not mean that it fails to be science fiction at all, since these elements are essential to both the plot and the theme. Aldiss has invented the technique of a mnemonic vision, by which someone's memory can be removed, edited and then sold as a 'bullet', either for instruction or entertainment, or depending on the content of the bullet — as pornography.

Roy Burnell, an architectural historian, has ten years of his memory stolen. Since these ten years include his marriage, he is appalled to think of his intimacies with his wife being available for voyeurs, and he also becomes obsessed with the idea of finding a copy of the bullet so that he can recover his own memory and discover why his marriage broke up.

Burnell's work for World Antiquities and Cultural Heritage involves visiting and recording buildings — principally sacred buildings — which are at risk, and once the disorientation of his memory loss is over, he takes on two separate assignments to different areas of what was once the Soviet Union, now divided into independent states where the rule of law is unstable. His reasons for going are partly to find his bullet, partly because as he himself confesses he likes "the scruffy places". His encounters there are less important for advancing the plot than for exploring the novel's theme.

The idea of memory is central to the novel. When some memories can be excised and others implanted, reality itself is called into question. How does it affect the personality to lose a key memory, perhaps a memory of grief? What reliance can be placed on experience when the incident may not have happened, or not to the person who claims it?

Burnell's work itself, the recording of a building it may not be possible or worthwhile to preserve, may be valueless. Significantly, in one key sequence, he loses his cameras; what he records his purely dependent on his own perceptions. And those perceptions themselves are flawed, by Burnell's mild drug habit, but also by the inescapable fact that what he sees and feels is subjective, enmeshed in his own personality.

This failure to find certainty in human beings is set against the eternal truths of religion. Burnell's work in churches, which he would like to see simply as aesthetic objects, creates a tension, in the character and the book, between the reality of God (if He exists) and Burnell's professed atheism, there are times at which he may have undergone a religious experience, yet this too is called into question by being filtered through his personality.

Throughout the novel I felt a sense of decay and dissolution. Most obviously a decay in the physical surroundings, appearing equally in Burnell's journeys to Easter Europe, and in his own home when he returns to it. Besides this, there is a decay in personalities, most obviously in Burnell himself, in his fears of disintegration after the loss of ten years of his memory. As a contrast to this gradual dissolution are incidents of shocking violence, in England as well as in the war zones; nothing is secure.

The novel seemed to me to have an eighteenth century flavour in its style and structure. Burnell's journeys and strange encounters are reminiscent of the picaresque, or even of the conte philosophique. Burnell is no Candide, but the excision of his memory, leaving his childhood as the most vivid part of his past, gives him a kind of naive quality, a fresh way of looking at the world. He is certainly on a voyage of discovery, in more senses than one, and the end of his searching, as often within this convention, takes him back to the beginning.

The prose style is lucid, highly descriptive, and witty. A complex and intellectual passage will be interrupted and enlivened by a sudden colloquialism or unexpected word, the speaking voices of the characters are individual and energetic. And in case I've made the book sound too rarefied, it's necessary to say that it is also, in character, incident and style, extremely funny.

There are strands in Somewhere East of Life which reach out to other books in the sequence, yet it stands on its own terms as a separate novel, not just a part of the whole. I found it a complex, demanding, and satisfying book.
This is very recognisably a Poppy Brite novel and a sort of sequel to *Lost Souls*. It is set, again, between the exotic French Quarter of New Orleans and the small South Carolina town of Missing Mile. And, again, everything seems to be overgrown by the ubiquitous kudzu. This time, however, there are no Chaunte-sewing vampires, and it is the music of Charlie Parker rather than Banahus and *The Cure* that forms the squalid backdrop to the novel.

The novel opens in prologue through the eyes of Trevor, five year old son of a failing, alcoholic artist. Trevor idolises his father both for the sound of his jazz records and his comic strip, Birdland. As his father’s talent wastes away in alcoholic despair, Trevor finds his own artistic gift, and comes to fear his father’s frequent drunken bouts of resentment and depression.

Shortly after the family settle in Missing Mile, his father cracks, leaving Trevor as the terrified sole survivor of a bloody family slaugther.

Twenty years later, Trevor has inherited his father’s talent, a head full of nightmares, and a complete hatred of alcohol, and finds himself drawn back to Missing Mile and the ‘Murder house’.

In New Orleans, Zachary Bosch has taken his skill at hacking too far and finds a warning message on his terminal. He loads his car and flees, randomly northward. Flight into South Carolina and the nowhere town of Missing Mile.

After a patchy start (are five year olds that precocious?) and the improbability that these two will ever actually meet each other in a small one-horse town in the middle of nowhere, *Drawing Blood* picks up speed and strength. Brite is an unshamed romantic, and has an almost Pre-Raphaelite fascination with beautiful and tragic boys. Both guarded and mistrustful at first, Trevor and Zach soon become entangled in each other’s lives, and then bodies.

Both bring their own danger to the relationship. Zach has the FBI on his tail, but what stalks Trevor through the blood-soaked fabric of the house is of a different, and deadlier, order than Feds in sharp suits and mirroredshades. Zach brings things to a crisis when he scores a handful of mushrooms at the club. Trevor decides the time has come to enter his father’s nightmare realm and confront what he spent most of his life running away from. Tripping with a head full of bad dreams in haunted house might not sound like the most sensible thing to do. Trevor and Zach find themselves thrown back into the worst moments of their pasts, as the house comes alive in a murderous parody of Birdland.

While the gothic vampire chic of *Lost Souls* looked set to establish Brite as a cult author, *Drawing Blood* shows she can write with considerable power and evoke a strong sense of menace and horror. She is still hung up on romantic attachments between beautiful, androgynous boys, while her female characters are either victims or left on the sidelines in the face of true, boyish love.

Maybe her next novel will show that she can also write strong female roles. If she can bring it all together, and avoid type-casting herself as a goth horror author, then her next novel promises to be extremely good.

**Jonathan Carroll**

*From the Teeth of Angels* 1994, £14.99

Mark Plummer

You might, if you were so inclined, waste several hours trying to impose genre classification on the fictions of Jonathan Carroll. You might classify some or all of his works as fantasy (of the pure or dark variety), perhaps magic realism, science fiction even. You might, like the blurbs writer for this novel, view Carroll as “the most original, literate, compelling and sophisticated voice in contemporary horror”. You might simply choose to group his work under a new sub-genre – Jonathan Carroll Novels – in the belief that their is something unclassifiable about his books.

Ultimately, of course, it doesn’t really matter. Jonathan Carroll writes books, damn good ones generally. Somehow this latest volume fails to live up to expectations.

Jesse Chapman writes to his sister, Sophie, of a holiday encounter in Sardinia. There he met Ian McGann, who dreams of meetings with Death in the guise of an old acquaintance. Death will answer his questions, but if he fails to understand the answers he must pay a penalty. In some respects this could be shaping up to be a straight horror novel.

Arlen ford is a Hollywood actress. After a few early, successful films, her career gets into a rut. She needs to get away and, as this is a Jonathan Carroll novel, it comes as no surprise that she chooses to flee to Vienna. Indeed the city acts as a magnet for the characters in the novel. When Jesse disappears from his (Viennese) home, Sophie travels to Austria with her friend Wyatt Leonard to hunt for her missing brother.

Characters familiar from earlier novels appear here and there: the Easterlings (Stepping in Flame), Weber Gregston (*A Child Across the Sky*) and, all things considered, this seems to have all the ingredients of The Jonathan Carroll Novel.

Yet this novel seems less successful than Carroll’s other works. For some reason the characters fail to engage, lack the quirk charm and general weirdness we’ve come to expect. And maybe this is where the problem lies – in the expectation. There is much common ground with the previous, related novels, yet this is not a rerun of *Bones of the Moon* or *After the Silence*. Carroll’s previous novels have had a common feel, a feel that many believe places them in a category of their own. This book only contains occasional flashes of that familiar voice, most recognisable in the letters and tapes that pass from Arlen Ford to Rose, her friend and PA. The jacket blurb claims that this book “goes further and deeper than any of the author’s previous work” and maybe this is so. If nothing else the novel has a satisfactory conclusion, something that was often felt to be missing from earlier works. If indeed Jonathan Carroll “defies neat classification” (*Sunday Times* review of *After the Silence*), then perhaps this is the book that seeks to defy the classification of Jonathan Carroll Novel. It seems to have been less than entirely successful but maybe it needs to be approached with an open mind.

**C J Cherrvhy**


K V Bailey

Described as "a novel of first contact", its title is judiciously chosen. Avoiding the already too many ‘Alien’s, it neatly signifies that its human protagonist is the alien introduced into the ways of a planetary culture which to those born into them are the norm. Accordingly, the word ‘foreigner’ conveys the xenophobia with which such a civilisation as the Japanese experienced when European modes and technologies first impacted. Cherrvhy’s indigenes, the atei, are not modelled on ancient Japan, but there are certain near equivalences suggested by codes of duty, honorific addresses etcetera. Moreover, many traditional ways are destabilised or transformed as the atei build on more advanced technologies gradually being made available to them. The story starts in the vein of a typical Cherryh prospectorship–gravity well novel, but its explorations soon go awry, the ship unaccountably space-slipping to some galactically remote sun-system where, lost, it orbits a habitable/inhabited planet. Opinion is divided on what to do. In the event, the ship goes searching for virgin worlds leaving a station in orbit. From there this is emigration to the alien world. Time passes, war follows, ended by a treaty, the ‘foreigners’ being settled in a country-sized island off-shore the global continent, their traditions of know-how (towards developing space potential) brokered by a lone diplomat (Cherryh’s protagonist) posted at the atei capital.

Atrei civil and hierarchical stability is ordered by a complexity of feudings and contract ascription. The diplomat-interpreter, Bren, finds himself half–exiled, half protected, in a backwoods ‘gotic’ fortress where manoeuvres for possession of his person and his computer files are played out by the diabolical factions. Finally, after mayhem, torture and escape, he is instrumental in determining future accord between his own people, those of the newly returned ship, and the atei – they now on the verge of space flight.
Three hundred years ago, Jonathan Swift recognised the futility of man's desire for infinite knowledge, and thus described the Struldbrugs in Gulliver's Travels. Condemned to everlasting life, they did not remain youthful but instead dwindled away in an existence made meaningless by the loss of their faculties and the inability to communicate.

Man has never lost his fascination with that dream of immortality. Reconstructive surgery, vitamin supplements, exercise, aromatherapy, cryogenic preservation: all play a part in promoting the dream of everlasting life. As computers come to dominate our lives, it is not unreasonable to believe that in the future, the human mind might be scanned into a computer and the essence of a person, the memory and identity, would be preserved intact. Thus, the problems inherent in Swift's gloomy view would be avoided and the Cartesian mind-body dichotomy could be taken to its logical conclusion. These scanned humans might even live lives which seem identical to those of their human counterparts. They might seem to eat, drink, excrete and make love in the same way as any true human, but the viscidities of humanity would not beset them.

This is the supposition on which Greg Egan's Permutation City is founded. 'Copies', of course, are for rich people. You need to be rich to afford the computer power to carry out the complex recalculations of existence, millisecond by millisecond. At best, Copies live their lives seventeen times more slowly than humans but technology will improve and it is, surely, better than death or indifference. You have all the time in the world to study; you can do anything you want; be anywhere you want; even look the way you want; all thanks to Virtual Reality. What could go wrong?

We need food and water in order to survive, then Copies need processing capacity. As the human population increases, it puts pressure on food production worldwide, and bad weather lead to famine, starvation and death. As the population of Copies increases, it will stretch the processing capacity of the planet's computer networks to breaking point: famine, starvation and 'death'. Rich people can arrange for their own processing clusters but what happens to the increasing population of 'Copies'? Egan, with a realist's eye, has described the Struldbrugs as a problem.

The assumption that demand for computer space will outstrip the availability of processing facilities, even wealthy Copies may eventually find themselves in danger of being 'frozen'.

This in itself would provide material for a novel but Egan, bubbling over with ideas, heaps existential dilemmas on top of practical considerations. Copies are vulnerable despite being supported and protected by someone who has spilled their essence entities. They're vulnerable to something as simple as the power being turned off, and they are vulnerable because their status is unclear. Are they really human? Are they any more than a complex set of algorithms? Are they truly living, once they've been scanned? Much as Swift's Struldbrugs are denied a legal existence once they've passed their eightieth year, so the status of Copies is questionable once the original body has died. Addressing the problem of Copies' continuing safety, Paul Durham conceives the idea of a sanctuary for Copies, a self-supporting haven whether it be in space or held on Earth. Power will never be a problem and where identity can never be called into question.

Durham's own view of his existence as Copy or human is complicated. Although human, he has experienced life as a Copy and has decided that his existence is one of endless reincarnation, for where does a Copy go when the machine is switched off? Is his consciousness, each bailing-out that the Paul Durham Copy undergoes brings him into existence as a human in a parallel world. So complex is Egan's presentation of this metaphysics for the computer-centred life, one can never be sure whether there ever was a Copy of Paul Durham or just a human striving to discover what it means to be a Copy.

But having addressed the existential dilemma of the computer-created 'life', Egan seems unable to explore the characters in anything but the most superficial manner. We are told that most of the world's inhabitants cannot come to terms with life in the computer and quickly bale out. Only Durham may have come to understand what is involved in the computer-travelling life and his friend, a welcome a life apart from humans and other computer entities, at least in the beginning. Some people, such as Thomas Riemann, haunted by the accidental killing of his girlfriend, reiterate their lives, hunting for a salvation which they can never achieve. Egan offers tantalising glimpses of what might be possible but the hope is not in the psyches of the Copies but Egan himself is clearly in love with the Autoverse, a self-contained computer world with its own physics and chemistry, complete in every detail, so very different from Virtual Reality, where appearance is everything and nothing. He's so in love with it, he has one character whose sole task appears to be to provide us with chances to watch it at work. Maria Deluca, the person who created the world, plays a surprisingly passive role in the novel, as indeed do most of the characters. They walk through their parts but, perhaps with the exception of the tortured Thomas Riemann, it is difficult to see them as Egan obviously wants us to, as complete, rounded characters. Instead, it is as if each 'freezing' is a beginning, a new chance for growth. Egan seems to be attempting to regard them, humans and Copies alike, as two-dimensional constructs.

When he creates his new world, Durham takes a model of the Autoverse with him and the emphasis shifts. If one can never be sure whether there ever was a Copy of Paul Durham or just a human striving to discover what it means to be a Copy, then what will people to the experience of the Copies as erasats humans, to their role as would-be gods, watching over the creatures evolving on the newly created Planet Lambert. It's not clear whether this is a plot device, a way of hoping to achieve by shifting perspective as he does. I feel that once he leaves behind the metaphysical speculations and concerns with the implications of this novel in much greater depth.
The plot as so outlined would indicate pretty standard space opera — and much of the action is just that; but not so the inter-species, inter-cultural nuances which make the book so stimulating. Cherryh, ever expert in this line, here excels in representing the barriers to communication and rapport between two not wholly dissimilar, but differently 'wired' and culturally conditioned humanoid species. Atevi are gigantic, black-skinned and yellow-eyed, but it is they who experience shock on confrontation with the puny Caucasian. There is a delicious scene where camera-slung, graph-hunting tourists accidentally, and at first cautiously, encounter Bren in the stately fortress of his exile. It is, however, less physical differences than emotional and logical impasses that fascinate — words and concepts which don't translate, human feelings of affection or caring which could be described as 'liking' but which are to steer meaningless save so far as they might chime with 'having respect for'. It is through such semantic ambiguities that a labyrinth of relationships and their consequences has to be negotiated. Appended pages of grammar and glossary are a helpful standby, but it is practical and certainly pleasurable to work things out as you go along.

Mary Gentle
Left to His Own Devices
Orbit 1994, 282 pp. £8.99
Steve Jefferies

With Rats and Gargoyles, its sequel The Architecture of Desire, and a number of short stories set in the same world (or worlds), Mary Gentle has carved herself a unique niche in fantasy, in the same way as Rob Holdstock or John Crowley (with whom she shares a similar, but rather more playful, enthusiasm for the philosophy of Renaissance Hermeticism).

None of the novels completely overlap, but are linked through the unlikely and often fractious relationship between scholar-soldier, Valentine, and the corpulent champion of architecture genius Baltazar Casaubon.

Rather like Moorcock's movable Jenny Cornwell cast, Gentle time-slips Valentine and Casaubon yet again, this time into something resembling our own world, or a slightly more disharmonious version of it. Here Casaubon's genius at architecture takes on a new form, in the construction of hypermedia computer information structures in virtual reality. It seems an unlikely step from Vitruvius' Twelve Books on Architecture to Cobol rules for database structure. Casaubon, though, takes to the creation of his virtual Memory Gardens, across an improbable lash-up of Amstrads, PC's and Cray's, like a duck to water.

He sets up his system with Valentine's cracking of an algorithm for Direct Neural Input, everyone from the military to government and business, starts to sit up and take notice. Unfortunately, when the first test is run using press reporter Miles Godric as a subject the system develops an unpredictable identity of its own. At this point you might be forgiven for groaning "Not the old experiment again!". However, Gentle gives another playful twist to this one, as system-Mephistophiles turn out to be a highly unreliable authority.

Across all this are Gentle's tongue in cheek games in the playgrounds of virtual reality and her Child's Garden of Hermetics. A passing knowledge of either, and to the notion of the Art of Memory or the various references to Marlowe or Tamburlaine, might not be essential, but they add to the fun. It's also fun, though I'm never sure how appropriate, to try and disentangle the author from her own creation of Valentine. Maybe I'm just reading too much into things, but my interest in weasylowness, and if Mary turns up at a future convention in mirrorshade contacts I shall have to re-think one this. At just under 170 pages, the plot revolves, if not resolves, around the implications, and contest for control, of what Valentine and Casaubon have unwittingly created.

Those bigger power games are mirrored in the often impossibly tangled and flawed relationships between Valentine and her career-politician mother, and between Valentine, Casaubon and Miles. Quite how Gentle manages to make her main couple still so damnable and fathom. Somehow it works, and you end up rooting for them even while frequently wanting to bang their heads together in exasperation.

The other 100 odd pages are made up of three stories, previously published elsewhere.

'Black Motley', first published in Tales From The Forbidden Planet, is another Art of Memory story set in the strange world of Rats and Gargoyles. It is almost worth it alone for Gentle's delightfully literal interpretation of the Royal 'we', and Ishana's line 'Oh, I've met Her Majesty, they like me!'

'What God Abandoned' forges another link, this time to the shared world anthology The Weeride. Here, Miles Godric turns up in another incarnation, that of a homosexual shapechanger, fighting alongside a young Descartes and the Hermetic magus, Master Maier, in the sacking of Prague during the Hapsburg wars.

The bleakest story is 'The Road to Jerusalem', first in Interzone, and the only one here set entirely outside Gentle's loose-knit White Crow stories. Here, the Orders of the Knights Templar and the Hospitalers are brought into the present day where their rivalry erupts into bloody ambush and massacre, and place Lieutenant Hyacinthe Tadmartin in an impossible position before a resultant papal enquiry.

It's an odd trend, this patching of several short stories onto the back of a short novel or long novella (Holdstock does it with his recent Merlin's Wood). I'm not entirely convinced about it, but because Gentle's stories often share a loose allegiance of cast, settings and ideas it works reasonably well in this case. All three stories are strong enough to be among Gentle's best, up with 'Beggars in Satin' and 'The Knot Garden'.

The sleeping Queen of the Elemal Goddess, Quain, the pythia of the London Garden of the Divine has secretly been watched by Gentle. I've met He Majesty, they like me!

Elizabeth Hand
Waking the Moon
HarperCollins 1994, 389 pp., £5.99
Reviewed by Steve Jefferies

Hand treads a fine line throughout Waking the Moon. The magic of the Goddess is both powerful and seductive, even when wearing its dark face. Nor are the Benandanti entirely the patriarchy of the piece or benign protectors. But what might have become a symbolic power play, with its images of magic, ritual sacrifice and divine intervention, is a co-operative enterprise. The magic of the Goddess is shared with the Benandanti, and in the hands of the Goddess, it is a force of nature, a creative force, an all-encompassing force that is both life-giving and life-taking. The magic of the Goddess is a force that is both benevolent and malevolent, a force that is both life-giving and life-taking. The magic of the Goddess is a force that is both benevolent and malevolent, a force that is both life-giving and life-taking. The magic of the Goddess is a force that is both benevolent and malevolent, a force that is both life-giving and life-taking. The magic of the Goddess is a force that is both benevolent and malevolent, a force that is both life-giving and life-taking.
Katharine Kerr
A Time of War
Harper Collins, 488pp, £4.99
A Time of Justice
Harper Collins, 379pp, £15.99
Kikki Lee

**A Time Of War** is the start of a new, but related, series from this well-known and successful fantasy author, and features several of the characters introduced in her previous Deverry Series and Westlands Cycle.

This story opens with Jahdo, the young son of a ratcatcher, witnessing a clandestine meeting between an important councilman and a very mysterious woman. Instead of killing the young intruder a spell of forgetfulness is placed on him. Jahdo is ‘chosen’ by Meer, an eyeless bard of the non-human Gel da’Thea (Horsekin) eyes on a dangerous quest of his own.

To the east at Cengarr, Rhodry, the ‘Silver Dagger’ and half-elfen mercenary is employed by the lord of the Broch to track down raiders who are chillinglyargeting pregnant women for slaughter. Jill, Dewienne-master and former lover of Rhodry, knows the reason for these attacks, and makes plans to protect the very woman the raiders are seeking. The Broch also has to prepare for the war that will surely come as a result of this protection. Jill also finally discovers the meaning of the inscription inside the ring that Rhodry has worn through most of Kerr’s books to date. She sends Rhodry and some dwarven friends on a quest to the far north, a dangerous and seemingly impossible trip on which the whole future of the lands to west hangs.

So the plot sounds a little familiar eh? Well, maybe it does, but there’s nothing wrong with this as long as it’s well done, and Kerr is a master of her trade.

This book is a good place to start for folks who’ve not read any of Kerr’s previous works. There are just enough explanations of events gone before, when necessary, to ease the story along. None of the “as you know Bob” info-dumps that are so tedious in many books today, particularly series books. And, for those of you who read Kerr regularly, Rhodry never once says “Ah, by the black hairy ass of the Lord of Hell” throughout!

The book is also half of the story and ends rather suddenly, leaving the reader with a very strong sense of disappointment. For this reason, I would hesitate to recommend this to anyone who doesn’t intend to purchase the sequel.

**Subtitled ‘Days of Air and Darkness’, A Time Of Justice is the second part of the story started in A Time Of War and picks up very nearly where the first book ended.

Rhodry the Silver Dagger, now Rohdry the Dragonlord, returns to the Dwarvernhold of Linn Serr on the back of his ...ious she-dragon, and Azosah. En route, already deeply disturbed by the mysterious disappearance of Haen Marn, a magical city that spirits itself away when threatened, Rhodry witnesses first-hand the horrors perpetrated by the invading Gel da’Thea (Horsekin) army that is laying siege to Cengarr.

In Cengarr, Jill, now joined by fellow diewemartser Dallandra, seeks to outwit the renegade Goddess Alashandra and protect Elessario, the unbear child being carried by Carra. Jill has not only to protect the child and mother, but also find a way to hold back the besieging horde of Horsekin until aid can arrive from Dewerry. In order to do this, Jill must watch more than one front, protecting the Broch from magical attack as well as denying the besieging army which is seeking a rapid victory before Cengarr can receive reinforcements.

On another plane, Evandar continues to manipulate mortal destinies in typical Godlike fashion without directly helping either side in the conflict. He seeks to confront Alashandra, his ex-wife, and destroy her for, among other reasons, trying to prevent the rebirth of his granddaughter Elessario.

In her eighth fantasy novel, Kerr once again delivers an engrossing story of love, war and magic. It sometimes takes a little time to get your head around her jumps from one time to another, Kerr’s own way of filling in the gaps of what went before. Indeed, the start of this novel is somewhat frustrating for those who want to get on with the story, which was left disappointingly hanging at the end of A Time Of War. Kerr goes back many years to Rhodry and Jill’s early days together on the Long Road as Silver Daggers, in order to fill in important background to the events in the future. These sections read like complete stories in themselves, and never fail to entertain as character revelations are mapped out to validate their roles in future events. It’s a very neat trick, and one that Kerr is a master at.

Kerr continues to strengthen the immaturity and brutality of the invading Horsekin, and at last presents an enemy that you really want to see defeated. There were one or two scenes describing horrors perpetrated by the Horsekin that really made you skin crawl. On the lighter side however, the horror is balanced by the growing bond between Rhodry and his sulky dragonet, Azosah. Kerr’s treatment of magical Wormkind is reminiscent of all that was good in McCaffrey’s early Pern novels.

Although most of the issues in this story are finally concluded, there are enough obvious pointers at the end to leave the reader not only expecting more, but looking forward to it. Kerr, not known for shirking when a character’s demise is imminent, can be relied upon to give us further episodes of their lives in future novels. She has created a world that might very well go on forever, and this is one reader that sincerely hopes it does.

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Riding the Unicorn
Paul Kearney
Gollancz, £15.99, 254 pp
Tanya Brown

In the Iron World which constitutes our reality, John Wilby is going comprehensively mad. He hears voices and sees visions — things which have no place in the monotonous desperation of his life as a prison officer. Once a soldier, he chafes at the constriction of civilian life, yearning for the easy camaraderie and simple truths of his army days. The hallucinatory glimpses of a rough, pioneering life in a green land beyond savage mountains seduce Wilby, and he finds it increasingly difficult to maintain his untrucly tight with his wife and daughter. These visions are becoming more regular and it’s only a matter of time before his patronising psychiatrist locks him away in an asylum that will be as much a prison as the one he patrols daily.

Meanwhile, in the Green World, the unlikely bastard prince Tallamon—a ‘real Machiavelli’—is laying plans for a kingship. The mage Aimon protests this abuse of his magic even as he redoubles his efforts to bring a man from another world to do the foul deed.

Tallamon’s icy ambition, however, knows no bounds; he will sacrifice all whom he holds dear to achieve the kingship. Even Merrin, the woman he loves, is made into part of the trap that Wilby should find impossible to resist. ‘Riding the Unicorn’ describes the fulfilment, and the failure, of men’s dreams; while the women in the tale are portrayed with clarity and even sympathy, their importance is primarily as tools or symbols. Merrin is an independent woman, but her actions are still driven—wittingly or not—by the men who surround her.

This is a male world of warriors and politics, of masculine friendships and unity in the face of adversity, in which love and beauty are of secondary importance to the grim fight for survival, and
honour is a luxury few can afford.

Keauny's style is harsh yet evocative; no long poetic descriptions here (and, indeed, no unicorns). He conveys a real sense of the unpleasant realities of a medieval warrior society. There are no heroes either; acts of heroism, perhaps, but only those demanded by the situation. And there is no neat resolution; the novel ends on a curious note (perhaps indicating a sequel).

Not a nice sweet fantasy, but a powerfully-drawn conflict.


The Italians had the plague, civil war, and the Borgias for three hundred years, and what did they produce? The Renaissance. This Renaissance, however, is subtly shifted, from a point at which Lorenzo de' Medici, patron of Leonardo da Vinci, was assassinated, and Leonardo, instead of becoming predominantly a painter (though also architect and military engineer to Cesare Borgia), walled himself up in a tower in Florence and became the Great Engineer. All that science and invention was there in theory waiting for the right minds to come along and unlock it; and the three learning in 16th-century Italy made it the right place, and the right time. The rediscovery of the principle of Hero's Steam Engine drives the world into an acceleration of smoke, grime, overproduction and the massive clash of egos and cultures.

A couple of years ago we saw Sterling and Gibson's The Difference Engine, set in a nineteenth-century Britain where the information revolution happened simultaneously with the industrial revolution. Steven Baxter continued the Steampunk cycle with his Victorian fabulation Anti-Ice. Now Paul J. McAuley has done even further back up the timeline and placed the dawn of that same industrial revolution three hundred years further back. It certainly isn't paradise; factories belch stink into the atmosphere, people still die of the same old diseases and some new ones as well (how much impetus did industrialisation give to the development of medicine? Quite a lot, is my guess). And in the midst of all this the artists are still trying to behave as though nothing has really changed. Pasquale, apprentice to the painter Rosso, dreams of painting an angel such as has never been painted before. But this modest dream has to take a back seat when he is too close to the scene of a riotous incident in church followed fast by a locked-room murder.

Compiling the works of investigative journalist Niccolò Machiavelli (or Machiaviaggi, as McAuley insists; why the change? It's not as though we don't know who he is, nor is it any surprise when the man referred to throughout as The Engineer is revealed as Da Vinci), Pasquale is running for his life. Pasquale's Angel is a picaresque novel which ends as they habitually do, with the hero, just possibly and perhaps a tiny bit wiser and boarding a boat for the New World. The period that McAuley has chosen to change in his parallel universe was one of intensely complex political situations, assassination, intrigue, shifting loyalties, treachery and imagination. His Firenze is an alluring world, no better than our own but perhaps no worse, as bawdy and over the top as any swashbuckling movie, and with some good Jokes and points prodded home for ironic effect. There are drugs, shamanism, sex, monkeys, exploding carts, and exploding language. There are no references to "consensus" really beyond the more and less obvious satiric parallels, which is its difficulty. Alternative worlds don't exist by permission of our own, but by that of their creators.


Well, what it is, is, it's a wossname, a dictionary-cumencyclopaedia full of fascinating and funny alphabetical listings about Discworld people, places and events, from ABYSS, Bishop, Prophet of the Omnian Church, to ZWEILUMEN, Jack, the name of Twoflower's analogue in a dimensional-crossover world which has aircraft instead of dragons. Each listing cites the work(s) in which its subject appears, including a couple of little known short stories, there are line illustrations dotted through the text, and the endpapers reproduce part of the map of Ankh-Morpork. As well as the A-Z Listing, the book contains a couple of short introductory essays by Pratchett and Briggs, a brief history of Discworld, and an interview with Pratchett.

So who might enjoy reading The Discworld Companion? Serious Discworld fans. The kind of people who enjoy asking each other how many men Lord Monfathers led to a glorious defeat at the Battle of Quirm, or where one might expect to meet Nork the Impaler (and live). The book will also be invaluable to Mastermind and Convention Panel question-setters.

And who is going to buy The Discworld Companion? I suspect it will be bought by libraries, keenish, affluent, completist fans, and elderly relatives of archetypal 15-year-old Pratchett devotees ("I've got a really good Christmas present for young Niel this year").

Why write a Discworld Companion? Well, to get paid for indulging in one's favourite pastime (Briggs), and to tidy-mindedly use up all those spare bits of Discworld one might have lying around from doing the novel (Pratchett). And to get paid for indulging in one's favourite pastime (Pratchett).

But the really important question about The Discworld Companion is, is it going to appear in the fiction bestseller list, or the non-fiction bestseller list?

There is no entry for WOSSENNAME.


This is Robert Rankin's tenth novel. Brentford is a long way behind us now, and tired of the city life we have turned to UFOs over Ambridge. Raymond, he of the allotment, who had been kidnapped by a space pirate named Abdullah, then rescued by a travelling interstellar circus which plies the aether in a Victorian steamship. Meanwhile back on Earth Simon, he of the expensive dentistry, is suckered into fighting a shadowy cult representing an evil not so much squamous and rugeous as feathered and squawking...

And that is just the beginning. Rankin's inventiveness is in its usual manic flow, the jokes, puns and references bounce around as usual. This is a parallel world even without the Symmesian Hollow Earth stuff; the parallel world where old ideas go to die. There's a suspicion that the whole narrative is a novel being written by one Kipper Garth (I), and the residue of earlier books is what each new one is built upon. Eventually the sediments build up, push through the wavetops and you have a sweet little still with palm trees and breadfruit and dusky maidens. Of its bones is coral made. The parallelness of the world suggests that in some way the real world (so-called) cannot contain the stories he wants to tell. Even the biographical note on the endplate is a joke. Does Robert Rankin really exist? Might he himself not be, like Michael Slade, a constructed form of an indefinite number of lawyers, or in Rankin's case, publicists? But enough of all this.

The jokes are good although they range from the incomprehensible to the infantile, the bawdiness is bawdy and the aliens are fairly alien. Cosmic conspiracy fantasy along the lines of Illuminatus! is always good for a laugh, even in a world where the Hermetic Order of the New Temple has just given itself over to what Anthony Burgess described as a "gruelling dissolution", and why not? Here the conspiracy has less roots in known mythology and is more entirely of Rankin's own invention, but complies with the standard Fortesque idea of "We Are Property". In this case, property several times over; the foodstock of an interplanetary empire which owes more to 50's pulp SF than to anything more recent. One of Rankin's earlier novels was called "They Came and Ate Us: Armageddon II, the B-Movie", which title would really be more appropriate to this novel than to the one it actually adorns.

Ambridge was never like this. I don't see Clarrie Grundy being visited by masked aliens and suing people who say she wasn't. Around the back of the village, between the allotments, lies the Lake that dare not speak its name. You have been warned.
The Quorum is — as is suggested several times during the course of the novel — partly a reworking of the story of Faustus, who sold his soul for worldly power. Newman, however, adds a twist which is both his story's "heart of darkness" and its comic source. His Faust-figure is in fact a trinity — Mark, a style guru, Michael, a novelist and TV celebrity — and Mickey, a comics artist/writer-cum-heavy metal keyboardist — and their past does not involve the sacrifice of their own souls but that of their schoolfriend and fellow-member of the early talented "Forum", Neil Martin.

Their Deal with Leech gives them the success they crave at the cost of a catalogue of major and minor disasters for the hapless Neil. This results in a series of slapstick scenes with Neil as the fall-guy, including a brilliantly complicated play which brings Neil down just as his friends' year of absence from the deal has made it seem that he has at last found a successful niche. The Faustian references become clearer as the "Quorum" succeed. Marlowe's Doctor Faustus damned his soul to receive a demon as his servant and spent his time playing silly tricks on the Pope and making Helen of Troy parade in front of him. Mark, Michael and Mickey are media-trash, all you ever loathed about tabloid-tv and trends. "How did we get here from there?" wonders Mark: "... we used to hate people like us."

This insight — which comes early in the book — is only the first of many which reverse the apparent course of events and propel the book towards a sardonic ending. Are the Quorum sacrificers or sacrificed? Are they monsters, or would anyone — even Neil — have done the same? As we face these questions, we watch the Deal unravel and catch the reflections of other Deals in the circumstances and statements of some of the minor characters. Newman creates an ending which threatens to overbalance the novel's wonderfully effective fusion of satire and metaphysics (basically he over actualises one particular metaphor), but another of his devices, the black pyramid which looms over London's dockland is so evidently there in real life (figuratively rather than concretely, but there nonetheless) that we are tempted to look for some of the characters next time we vicariously enter the media world. But that way confusion lies, and the moral murkiness of the novel is sublime enough already. Take it as a map of the past few decades. Just read, and smile, and shiver.

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Respect the sources of inspiration, respect the traditions, respect the -isms. Nothing is dead, nothing is over, and nothing is real. The Quorum is dead, but everything else is over. The Quorum is dead, but...
Barbed Wire Kisses

Magneto Reviews
Edited by Maureen Kincaid Speller

are failing to imagine possible futures as writers and readers, we are satisfied with the comfortable ideas of those who formed our sf tastes instead of branching into new areas of the literature. I cringe when I hear a reader complain that an sf story explores biological and sociological change instead of "real hard sf," not realizing that many of the changes we face in our future happen to be in the areas of the "softer" sciences or even in the social sciences. Or when I hear a critic complain that stories dealt too much with changes in people, not understanding that the adventures of the future might occur within our own bodies and in our own minds.

Kristine Kathryn Rusch

The extract comes from Kristine Kathryn Rusch's editorial to the October/November double issue of Fantasy and Science Fiction. In the light of continuing discussion about definitions of SF, particularly the place of hard SF in the scheme of things, I take this as Rusch's statement of intent, and I naturally warm towards it. I'm growing concerned about the movement towards 'better science in our science fiction, and the consequent disregard for other fictional components, like dialogue and characterisation, what one editor, Patrick Nielsen Hayden, so delightfully calls 'literary vitamins.'

Rusch argues fervently for imaginative new futures, and eschewal of the fantasy and SF which got us this far, and I was up there with her, cheering like mad, until I actually sat down to read that issue of F&SF. Just how much of its contents actually matched up to her stirring vision? Give me originality for god's sake. Robert Reed is a writer who sometimes comes out with wonderful ideas but 'The Shape of Everything' wasn't one of them. One man's sacrifice-cum-venture to zoom off across the universe seemed hackneyed. How many heroes have carried out a noble deed for their own benefit? On the fantasy side, Esther M Friesner's puritan titles are becoming ever more excruciating, and "A Beltaine and Suspenders" lives down to its title, sadly. Susan Dexter's story of a wizard befriending an unwanted dog was sentimental, but there was nothing here that hadn't already been enacted in a hundred stories of backwoods America. As for Gardner Dozois's "A Cat Horror Story," well two good editors ought to have known better.

I've been criticised before for my relentless cataloguing of the bad rather than the good but, rest assured, rapidly realising, this is one story in this double issue, whose praises I fully intend to sing, from the rooftops if necessary, and all the more remarkably because alongside my other assorted prejudices in fiction, I normally hate rock'n'roll stories. If you really want to turn me off, put a dead rock star in your story, or worse still, a live but fictional folks who's played with all the greats. I guarantee you will hear the sound of retching for miles.

So, Bradley Denton, with 'We Love Lydia Love,' you have achieved the almost impossible and pleased me. The first time I read this through, I thought 'yeah, but is it SF?' The second time, I was surprised I'd doubted myself. The eponymous Lydia is a young singer-songwriter, talented, elusive but slow to produce. This we hear from Willie who, as we predictably realise, is living a dual existence in the most complete sense of the word. He has been surgically altered, and the more Garber tells us about him, the more excruciating and 'The Wonder of the World?' The second one stands out with all the more emphasis."

"Barbed Wire Kisses" is a double issue of Fantasy and Science Fiction, in the light of continuing discussion about definitions of SF, particularly the place of hard SF in the scheme of things, I take this as Rusch's statement of intent, and I naturally warm towards it. I'm growing concerned about the movement towards 'better science in our science fiction, and the consequent disregard for other fictional components, like dialogue and characterisation, what one editor, Patrick Nielsen Hayden, so delightfully calls 'literary vitamins.'

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I've been criticised before for my relentless cataloguing of the bad rather than the good but, rest assured, rapidly realising, this is one story in this double issue, whose praises I fully intend to sing, from the rooftops if necessary, and all the more remarkably because alongside my other assorted prejudices in fiction, I normally hate rock'n'roll stories. If you really want to turn me off, put a dead rock star in your story, or worse still, a live but fictional folks who's played with all the greats. I guarantee you will hear the sound of retching for miles.
motives of the people who use the invention won’t all have purely altruistic motives. Bradley Denton is giving us a glimpse of the world that might come about.

The other big story of this issue of F&SF is Mike Resnick’s ‘Settle in View of Olduvai Gorge,’ continuing his unflagging love affair with Africa. Mind you, the word ‘overkill’ won’t wash in my mind’s eye; I wonder if I’m the only one. With this story, we are at least a world away from ‘I Don’t Know’ than Kinniyaga, but once again Resnick is wearing his eco-archaeological heart on his sleeve. Less a novella, more a series of linked vignettes, we witness the history of Earth through the eyes of alien archaeologists, in particular ‘He Who Views,’ who learns the stories of things by handling art-objects. Not very helpful thinking that it’s time Resnick found another culture to work to death. There’s still a story to be told here; we all know that Earth is going to hell in a handbasket, and H.G. Wells has already done the description of the planet far more effectively.

Taking Rusch’s statement as a touchstone for this column, I looked back to the September issue of F&SF. If it was only barely fulfilled in the double issue, I am not sure it was fulfilled at all. Which is not to say there was no bad, but do they match this criterion?

One would hesitate to criticise the work of Ray Bradbury. I’ve been a fan of his work for years and a new story is always a pleasure, even if the ground is familiar. ‘From the Dust Returned’ is linked to Bradbury’s new collection, This Way Comes, which has a link, I fancy, with James Baldwin’s Law of Dreams and, curiously, with another story in this very issue. Fertile ground indeed. This story though, deals with the murder of Nef, grandmother of Neferitri, and guardian somehow to the Dark family. It’s a delight to revel in the strange delicate mystery of that world, one of those rare occasions when return does not mean disappointment.

But what of that other Bradbury, Lewis? That is the one. In this case, Billie Brady’s ‘Our Ground and Every Fragrant Tree is Shaded’ is a most curious study of the symbolic mythologies that grow between a small town and the general story which acts as a focus for life. Venetian Mask of Bradbury with its eye to the details of small town life, Cathy’s story of lost hopes and dreams would brighten any magazine.

The novella is David Gerrold’s ‘Thackery’s Land of Dreams,’ a story that is, alas, badly flawed by the author’s inability to keep himself out of his story. It is, I suppose, the problem with any first-person narrative, I have to admit that this story irritated me profoundly. It is set in the same way on people who don’t know that Gerrold himself has recently adopted a child, I can’t say. And you can’t tell me now because I’ve spilled the beans. Such is life.

At the heart of the story is the logical progression of every UFO abduction story you’ve heard lately. I was made on Mars. I was a tadpole. Then I was brought to Earth in a UFO and my parents are... I’m sorry, I didn’t know. Then I was bored. Thus the Martian child explains his existence. Given that UFO abduction is a hot topic, it’s an obvious thing to speculate on; just suppose that aliens are really visiting Earth. This, surely, is the stuff of SF. And it’s not even as though Gerrold is the first to wear his heart on his sleeve. I have read a lot of fiction, Orson Scott Card infamously did. Whatever one might think of Card’s efforts, and it got a big thumb-down round here, Gerrold’s story is ten times worse than Card. Someone, still keeping the knowledges of the author that’s so intriguing, that constant nudge of the reader to say that ‘hey, this is me, David Gerrold, and my friends, and my kid, and we’re in this great sci-fi story’! Now it will be from me to stand between a proud new dad and his much-loved kid, and do nothing, the thing that does come from this is Gerrold’s undone adulation of the real-life child, but does this make good fiction?

After I’d finished with F&SF, it was time to move on to Asimov’s Science Fiction, in search of the Russian vision of perfection. One story that stands out is David Gerrold’s ‘Thackery’s Land of Dreams’.

Mind you, if September’s issue is anything to go by, angels and elements are on the menu, along with yet another nod at Wells, Dr Moreau this time. Rather than looking back to Olduvai Gorge, we seem to be looking back. Or perhaps not looking back so much as looking sideways to a parallel story. Contemplating that ‘fantasy’ comes before science fiction in the title of the very magazine she edits. It’s perhaps surprising that Rusch overlooks this aspect of the genre, though obviously realising she is pleasuring a particular case and I’m being perverse. Nevertheless, having spoken for position then filled her magazine with material which better supports another, it’s a pity that Rusch hasn’t stopped to ask what the attraction might be of that mixt of the fantastic and the sci-fi which now we shall be called ‘science fantasy’, hearkening back to Wells and even to some of Corsoy’s Professor Challenger stories.

Brian Stableford’s ‘The Tree of Life’ hypes this handing back to our literary roots. My feeling is that for every advance, there is a backward glance. If so, which story are we coming from? Stableford does it very well though one is inevitably obliged to ask whether we do actually need what amounts to pastiche. As in answer to this, October’s ‘Asimov’s contains another story by Stableford. ‘Les Fleurs du Mal’ promises another backward glance to that wellspring of the decadent, Baudelaire. In fact, what we have is something altogether more intriguing. I think that ‘The Tree of Life’ was merely a sketch, a hint, a promise.

Admittedly, ‘Les Fleurs du Mal’ does start with a kind of guilt seizure, as we learn our main character’s name. It’s the knowledges of the author that’s so intriguing, that constant nudge of the reader to say that ‘hey, this is me, David Corsoy, and my friends, and my kid, and we’re in this great sci-fi story’. Now it will be from me to stand between a proud new dad and his much-loved kid, and do nothing, the thing that does come from this is Gerrold’s undone adulation of the real-life child, but does this make good fiction?

If, as seems as much dedicated as fantasy science fiction as the September issue. Quite apart from the aforementioned Stableford story, there is another rewrite of The Island of Dr Moreau, ‘The Blackery Dark’, though this time we have the ever-familiar ‘face of the potential menace. Mary Rosenbury, still guiding the world she created with her Wetlands stories, has moved to downtown Los Angeles, but whether she has found anything new is entirely open to discussion. A moment’s compassion is almost enough not to enough to support a story which is little more than another slasher. After all, there is no time to DO something with it.

The curiosity is a story by Tom Purdom, ‘Supercilius’, a quasi-historical re-run of that ancient classic, the knight slaying the dragon, going all the way back to the Greek myth of Andromeda. Nevertheless, Purdom manages to put a neat spin on something up against a monster which, as they acknowledge, shouldn’t exist, at least since the century Hapsgur, Purdom has astutely picked that moment in history when medieval superstition is overtly modern rationality gradually prevails. His metaphorical dragon marks the passing of an earlier time and one senses that Purdon regrets this.

Asimov’s also has a double issue in November, and the plum in this issue surely ought to be Michael Bishop’s ‘On de Ceoeur’, the lead story, reverts however a much milder traditional gut-jerker concerning decisions to be made when a generation star ship reaches its goal. The hook here is that the narrator has custody of a retarded child, and he and the much-loved kid have different views on how the rest of the people on the ships, and I still think it much of a coincidence that a meteor destroys their new home just as they arrive there.

October’s issue of Asimov’s seems as much dedicated to scientific fantasy as the September issue. Quite apart from the aforementioned Stableford story, there is another rewrite of The Island of Dr Moreau, ‘The Blackery Dark’, though this time we have the ever-familiar ‘face of the potential menace. Mary Rosenbury, still guiding the world she created with her Wetlands stories, has moved to downtown Los Angeles, but whether she has found anything new is entirely open to discussion. A moment’s compassion is almost enough not to enough to support a story which is little more than another slasher. After all, there is no time to DO something with it.

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Rudy Rucker and Bruce Sterling's latest wacky offering, 'Big Jelly', while amusing, is a few pages too long - cut the explanation guy, I want to read about the jelly fish, not set up a factory in my back yard. Kate Wilhelm fiddles with the predicament of telepaths without adding anything to the situation, which I regret as I feel she ought to be able to expand the dimension. Most disappointing of all is Eric Choi's 'Dedication'. Who Eric Choi, you ask? Eric Choi is the winner of the first Isaac Asimov Award for Undergraduate Excellence in Science Fiction and Fantasy Writing. catchy title, eh? And his story? Well, suppose you were part of a Mars landing party and something goes horribly wrong with your shuttle to land and rescue you. were part of a Mars landing party and something goes horribly wrong with your vehicle, and by dint of sheer perspicacity you manage to programme a handy passing shuttle to land and rescue you, then you'd be up there with Eric Choi.

This is typical of a subset of the genre, the 'beyond all hope' story. I've read several of a similar nature in the last couple of years - the party which potholes right through Miranda, the girl who walks round the Moon — it's been done before. To some extent, given the author in whose name this award is given, we should perhaps not be surprised by the traditional choice, but then again, given the way that Dozois et al have made Asimov's eponymous magazine into a forum of excellence, perhaps we should be very, very worried. Not just about the choice, but also about the standard of the other stories submitted.

Now, if anywhere ought to be a bastion of 'real hard SF', it must surely be Analog. Mind you, these days it's getting very difficult to actually locate the fiction in the forest of articles about science, most of which are top-heavy on equations. New Scientist it ain't. And some of the fiction is not really that much better. Bud Sparhawk's 'Hurricane' reads so like a handbook on how to parasail through hurricanes, I'm a little surprised it didn't carry a health warning - 'don't try this yourselves, kids'. Okay, so brilliant hyperbole but is it fiction? Well, I learned a lot about how to go about this hypothetical parasailing but I learned very little about my character or his motivations, and the narrative seemed to drag as long as the hurricane itself.

Curiously, there was one story which, in a way, did follow the Rusclian dictat, at least in an opposite kind of way. G. David Nordley's 'His Father's Voice' concerns a man who inherits a bunch of records - those things we had before CDs - on which his father, whom he never knew, is singing. But how to play them? The problem occupies him for years and the solution is neat, very much in keeping with that good old Ansiog 'can do' philosophy but at the same time very close to the realistic vision of future science.

Another function of science fiction is, or ought to be, to point up the absurd in our own lives. Mark Rich's 'To Hunt in Fields' (November) takes this to its logical conclusion and beyond, to a world where anything that is good for you is on prescription and otherwise unobtainable. Anything that's good for you, like walking, like chicken soup, like sex even. If it's good for you, then you need a prescription. The absurdity of it all is clear, even to the people of this world. In fact, the only real puzzle to me is how it happened in the first place, though these things have a habit of sneaking up on you.

It's clear that for all her protestations, even Rusch's own magazine doesn't entirely fulfill her belief concerning the ideal science fiction. And the other magazines certainly don't live up to it. Having said that, we have to be reasonable and accept that editing a magazine is not entirely about satisfying your own need for a particular variety of SF, but also about catering for your readers. Nevertheless, it's also clear that far too much SF and fantasy is still recycling the old familiar tropes. You may argue that there is only so much that can be done with a story, and this is also true, but in that case why not strive to do it as interestingly as possible instead of offering half-thought out stories? And shouldn't editors be doubly watchful to avoid this sort of thing, to foster the new, the innovative? As readers, don't we deserve the best?
Signposts

Tanith Lee
Black Unicorn
"...has a surface simplicity which masks a subtle handling of themes which are just as important in the everyday world as they are in the world of Tanith Lee's imagination." Cherith Baldry

Charles de Lint
The Little Country
" ...his inventiveness, the strength of plot, and ability to plot a story to a satisfying conclusion, should recommend this book to readers who wouldn't normally read horror." Lynne Bispham

Kim Newman
The Original Dr. Shade
"...his inventiveness, the strength of plot, and ability to plot a story to a satisfying conclusion, should recommend this book to readers who wouldn't normally read horror." Max Sexton

Rudy Rucker
Software
"Whatever you do, buy this book." Steve Palmer

John Whitbourn
Popes and Phantoms
"...despite dealing with some fairly sombre events he manages to be witty and humorous and even to evoke sympathy for his main character." Sue Badham

Reviews

John Allen-Price
Mutant Chronicles: Frenzy
Roc, 1994, 266pp, £3.99
Norman Beaviss

Humanity faces the onslaught of the Dark Invaders, whose military technology is backed up by magic. The invaders secretly begin to establish a base on Venus, which humans have long since transformed to resemble "what their original Earth once looked like." Not all humans believe the Dark Invaders exist, and accuse instead one or other of the competing nations of humanity. But the Dark Invaders capture a key woman and make her the Receptacle of Visions. She must be rescued. Captain Hunter and his group, in disgrace with a senior military commander, are the lead group in the assault.

This is book two of what is more than mere reading matter: there is an associated role-playing game series, together with comics, video games, posters, models, feature films and more. Given this background, you might reasonably expect that the narrative would contain entirety of military manoeuvres, switching rapidly and sometimes confusingly between the various competing groups, with heavy concentration on weaponry (some of it surprisingly familiar — would you believe machine guns and napalm?). You would also predict that the writing would be workaday and undistinguished. As your reviewer I have doggedly read practically every word, and can confirm that this is so.

Kevin J. Anderson
Star Wars: Dark Apprentice
Bantam, 1994, 354pp, £3.99
Graham Andrews

Once upon a time, in a cinema far, far away I saw a film called Star Wars. I enjoyed the special effects — while suspending my disbelief from the highest yarmarm at Starbase Prime. Ditto the influence-spotting: Starman, Dune, The Dam Busters, 653 Squadron... almost every movie and / or novel then known to George Lucas.

In my humble but strongly-held opinion, Star Wars is a good see-once movie, it falls apart incrementally with each repeated viewing. Ditto the sequels (The Empire Strikes Back and Return of the Jedi).

Ditto (useful word, that) the be in novelizations by: (a) George Lucas Alan Dean Foster; (b) Donald F. Glut; (c) James Kahn. Foster later turned out the "associational" Splinter of the Mind's Eye. After that came the slew of cash-in knock-offs that — thankfully — need not concern us here.

The book under review, Kevin J. Anderson’s Dark Apprentice, can be summed up in one sentence: "Still greedy, after all these years." I’m referring to Lucasfilm Ltd — perhaps better known as Star Wars registered trademark. DA is Vol. II of the Jedi Academy Trilogy. Anderson has also written Vol. I (Jedi Search and Vol. III (Champions of the Force).

*Breaking the Pax Republica, Admiral Daala uses her Imperial fleet to conduct guerrilla warfare on peaceful worlds (Blurb). A novel?)* He is unreadable — apart from a notice-of-availability for insta -table Wa rries. Any sane person over the age of fourteen would get more intellectual stimulation by watching Jake and the Fat Man or Beavis and Butthead. I’m not joking.

Isaac Asimov
Forward the Foundation
Bantam, 8/1994, 477pp, £4.99
John D. Owen

Isaac Asimov’s last published novel, and also the final piece in the Foundation puzzle. What a shame that the work is such a mess. I’ve never been all that impressed by the Good Doctor’s attempts to weave his Robot and Foundation stories together: it seemed so pointless, demeaning both series by a convoluted amalgamation. But funnily enough, the faults of Forward the Foundation aren’t due to a plot overly concerned with robots (though they do impinge on it in a couple of places), but rather to failings within the basic Foundation structure.

Asimov, under prompting from John Campbell, wrote the original Foundation stories as an analogue of the fall of the Roman Empire. So he used rather simplistic political machinations to make the plots work (and the Foundation series is, above all, about the way the politics of Empire behave). Because of this, Asimov has kept that same simplicity of political purpose in relation to Hari Seldon’s efforts to establish psychohistory amid the turmoil of Trantor, ruling the planet’s twenty-eight million worlds. And it doesn’t ring true: disbelief is not suspended at all willingly, because of the obvious fallacy of his reasoning. A planet such as Trantor would have a very complex political structure, one that it would be very difficult to undercut, so two thirds of Asimov’s plot goes out the window.

Add to this the obvious problems of writing a prequel (where the outcome is already known), and you come up with an annoying book, with no real plot tensions. Sad, but true.

Ian Banks
Complicity
Abacus, 8/1994, 313pp, £6.99
Norman Beaviss

Note the lack of a middle initial: this is mainstream Banks, the Banks of The Wasp Factory, Walking on Glass, and Crow Road. This is a thriller, and the technique, as ever, is chillingly superb. Cameron
Colley is a free-wheeling, hard-drinking, left-wing journalist on an Edinburgh newspaper in 1932, addicted to sex and complex drugs such as amphetamine, cocaine and marijuana on the side. He is pursuing a series of apparent garrison crimes and bizarre disappearances, following up various hints of an elusively anonymous source.

Parallel with his first person narrative, we also follow a gruesome series of current killings undertaken by a mysterious character described only as "you". The police are able to link these killings with a fiery piece Colley wrote denouncing a list of villains of post-Thatcher days, and Colley finds himself under interrogation. Is he the mystery killer—or does he, unknown to himself, have the clue to who the real killer is?

The main narrative is intercut with recollections of Colley's earlier friendships and addictions, adding convincing depth to the major characters. I have to say that the contemporary references, including not only political arguments with his friends and colleagues, are absolutely spot on and the author's superb control in manipulating every sentence to increase the tension and our sense of fascination.

No, it's not SF, but Banks also writes SF with the same technical brilliance. It's a corker of a tale that deserves careful attention by all aspiring young authors.

**Ramsey Campbell**

**Along With The Horrors**

**Headline, 15/9/94, 493pp, £5.99**

Colin Bird

Sculpted — "The Great Short Fiction of Ramsey Campbell 1961-1991", this thirty nine story anthology is as comprehensive an overview as anyone could possibly need of Britain's finest horror writer. Beginning with his precious Lovecraftian pastiche, "The Rock of the Necromancer" written at the age of fifteen, this collection covers all the authors' usual themes. There are stories in urban settings of banal domesticity, featuring alienated characters who must face the material manifestation of their fears. The stories range from atmospheric vignettes like the claustrophobic "The Gap", to blackly comic short stories such as "Heading Home". There are even some SF-like, tellingly gory tales such as 'Again'. The common thread is Campbell's perceptible eye for detail, which allows him to quickly enter a world where believable characters rub shoulders with the supernatural. The settings include churches, foyers, fairgrounds, cinemas (a common theme in his more modern horror) and alleyways. It usually doesn't take long for Campbell to maroon his characters in the dark, and even then the horror usually takes the form of psychological torment rather than physical agony.

Some of these stories, such as "Macintosh Will", and have been optioned for film. Others, like "The Voice of the Beach", are told from the point of view of a child, revealing the more self-conscious Lovecraftian tales, like 'The Silence of the Deep', are the most chilling. Campbell's style is far from dated, his stories are littered with realistic descriptions of cliffs, beaches and urban decay is another common thread through many of these stories. His writing style is precise and often contains shreds of effectively poetic imagery, even in the early stories.

As any collection of thirty nine stories there is a range in quality. Some of the more self-conscious Lovecraftian tales, like 'The Voice of the Beach', are not easily resolved, while others are more gripping. I prefer the episodic narrative style of the five page "Carr First" and the macabre humour of 'Heading Home'. The homogeneity of the stories does mean it is not wise to attempt this collection in anything other than short, focused readings.

**Along With The Horrors** also contains sixteen illustrations by J. K. Potter which perfectly complement Campbell's style. A fine collection to dip into and sample some of Ramsey Campbell's best work.

C. J. Cherryh

**Faeiry in Shadow**

**Legend, 18/9/94, 249pp, £4.99**

Tanya Brown

This is a world where the Sidhe walk; a dark, fantastical Celtic land that Janus and his partner, Carth, share with only a few others in the company of their companion Dubhaln. It is a world that holds a promise of high adventure in the legendary Faery Kingdoms. Janus is a soldier of some repute who leaves an embittered merchant to the possibilities of the mythical lands. Told in a reflective, conversational style, the book is a journey between the castle and the court, the magical world and the mundane. The author has managed to create characters which grab the reader, whose individuality and humanity is not lost in the story's depth.

The book is a fine collection to dip into and sample some of Ramsey Campbell's best work.
purification equipment into refugee camps, you have ever wondered: "how will they dispose of the excrement?" — this book will tell you.

Parke Godwin
Robin and The King
AvoNova, 794, 384pp, $5.50
Sad Buchan
I’m at a disadvantage reviewing this book because it’s a sequel to another book that I haven’t read. It’s also much more of a historical novel than a fantasy book and can only really be called fantasy because it’s main character is someone who is a legend. Otherwise, this book is written very much in the style of a historical novel, and the author has obviously tried to make his background as accurate as possible. This is the type of book that does so well and has failed to make his Robin special. This is why he became legendary.

This Robin is placed in the time of Wycliffe, the Conqueror and his son William Rufus. In this book he is pitted against the campaign of forest clearance as conducted once he had conquered England and fought off the Earl’s revolt. Robin shouldn’t be written as typical Anglo Saxon, with a stubborn respect for the law and custom of the countryside and for the schilling and the king with a strong sense of divine right. This is historically accurate. While the migration of the people of the democracies he found in England were that it made it easier to collect taxes. Overall this book fails to fail me and seems to have disappeared from the shelves, where this latest novel will soon follow. This new volume is, nothing to do with the world of romance and bondage, but a sequel in another series.

We are in a world of magic and shape changing — where pronounces and princesses are heroes and lovers. The use of the magic is a sign that this is the actual tale of two princes — one magician, the other shape changer. What makes the whole thing ghastly is the construction on two levels — firstly, the fantasy is not epic, and secondly, the writing is mundane. "Two glasses of wine appeared floating m id-air next to his right hand, and he took one and held it out to me. "For you, my lovely," he murmured, his voice deepened to match the small, sexy smile he wore.

This is the bonding of a pair of magicians and it reads more like the script from a sixties television series. Surely, magic should be raised above the mundane — it is extra-ordinary. This writing does not portray magic as extra-ordinary, and does not suggest the speciality of the characters, it is, though, typical of this novel.

The whole thing was unpleasant to read and unpleasant to think about.

Andrew Harman
The Gone Pig Legend
AvoNova, 1984, 278pp, $4.99
Benedict S. Cullum
There is something of the reality glitch underway: a book-worm is eating its way through a magic book in the "real" world whilst a phoenix has regenerated on an apocalyptic Having been introduced in the Chapter Dimensions as a fictional continuum where the rules of fairy tales prevail. The result...
not my concern if humans die in the process.” (292)

Angel is the nearest print analogue I’ve seen to a virtual-reality version of Fahrenheit 451. Its “rare worth” (Ramsay Campbell) permeates almost every page. Pity about the ludicrous winged-angel cover, by Peter Menzies. He either didn’t read the book or Had Orders From On High.

Tanith Lee
Black Unicorn
Orbit, 1974, £1.60, £4.99
Cherith Baldry

Tanquil, daughter of a pow, frustrated and out of place in her mother’s fortess. Her needs are neglected, and she finds consolation in the craft of mending things, and in the society of her pet, the idiosyncratic peev. Her design is to change when she creates from a cache of hidden bones the skeleton by day, and comes to life and draws her out into the desert.

This book must be known to many people, and the hardcover edition, but this paperback will rightly make it familiar to an even wider reading-proponent, and the theme of relationships between parents and children, mean that the book will do well. However, it is a difficult novel, but it is satisfying enough not to stop there. There is a richness to the symbolism which asks for further readings.

The language is vivid and precise, with the qualities of fable or fairy tale. Everything is visualised clearly, from the settings and characters to details of clothes and jewels and weapons. There is a delight in colour and texture. At the same time there is a sense of foreboding, a counterpart to the fantasy and the wonder, which is not just added for light relief, but is an integral part of the theme.

Black Unicorn has a surface simplicity which masks a very subtle handling of themes which are as just as important in the everyday world as they are in the world of Tanquil’s imagination. I enjoyed it very much and I recommend it.

Stephen Leigh
Ray Bradbury Presents
Dinosaur Warriors
Avon, 1974, 245pp, £4.99
Joseph Nicholas

As its title suggests, this is a shagary, part of a series loosely inspired by Ray Bradbury’s stories. “A Sound of Thunder”, of the man who accidentally treads on a butterfly while on a time safari in the African savanna and finds himself in an altered present. Like the novels in Roger Zelazny’s Amber sequence, this story is a fantasy in itself, but begins where the previous book left off, and ends in mid-air, but if you’ve missed the previous book you get a synopsis of them at the front.

Matching this book against that synopsis, they seem to differ little from each other: there’s much zipping up and down the timelines and dropping in and out of alternative universes, but nothing is explored in any depth. It might be argued that because the viewpoint character changes, there is no scope for such exploration; but I rather suspect that, faced with the premises and settings of each, the writer has developed self-awareness, and hence civilisation, the average young adult reader would want rather more than the sort of action-adventure dering-do.

The book contains some sketches of the events it relates, purportedly drawn by one of the protagonists. For a series packed by Byron Press Visual Publications, their quality is very poor.

Charles de Lint
The Little Country
Pan, 710/94, 630pp, £5.99
Lynee Bispham

Janey Little, a professional musician, was first inspired to turn young readers to fantasy by the writings of William Durthorn, a friend of her grandfather’s. In her great-grandmother’s attic she discovers The Little Country, a previously unknown book of Durthorn’s, and a letter to her grandson that the book must never be published. Janey opens the book and discovers that in this world, there is no other side of the world and evil man feels its power awaken.

Soon Janey is made aware that The Little Country is more than just a book, and that there are those who will stop at nothing, including murder, to obtain it for themselves. Janey realises that the people threatening her have not the power to influence and influence all, but she and her friends are eventually forced to admit that what they are facing can only be solved as magic.

In The Little Country, de Lint displays a highly individual voice. The background to this novel, a village in Cornwall and the folk music scene of which Janey is a part, is vividly brought to life, and the intrusion of the fantastical into this world is made credible by the reactions of the well-drawn characters who read the story and react to the horrors of the world.

This novel with its underlying themes of the meaning and importance of folklore, traditions, and beliefs is very readable. It is recommended to readers looking for something a bit different in contemporary fantasy.

Bentley Little
The Mailman
Headline, 18/8/94, 440pp, £5.99
John D. Owen

Bentley Little’s The Mailman is best described as being written to the Stephen King pattern. It is set in a small town in Arizona, New England, and features a small change in the town’s routine that dinosaurs which developed self-awareness, and hence civilisation, the average young adult reader would want rather more than the sort of action-adventure dering-do.

The whole book is fine, as an exemplar of horror a la King. The plot is nicely worked out, though there are no surprises along the way, given the starting point, almost any competent writer would have come up with a similar storyline without breaking sweat. And that’s the trouble after 440 pages, the story is resolved, the book put down and it’s gone. There is nothing memorable here. Might find favour with a Stephen King fan with nothing better to do on a rainy afternoon, but that’s about all.

Brian Lumley
Dagon’s Bell and Other Records
Jon Wallace

This is Brian Lumley’s second short story collection. It contains 12 stories published between 1971 and 1990. Anyone familiar with Lumley will be aware that a lot of his work is set in the mysterious world of the Cthulhu Mythos, and won’t be disappointed to find that four of these stories show a heavy Lovecraftian influence.

These stories tread an uneasy line between the ‘things’ feel that Lovecraft’s work has to modern eyes and a more modern style of storytelling that doesn’t quite come off.

‘And he had done well, and would do even better. His studies had been in architecture and the arts, folk music and folk songs...’

‘It is the Gnome Zone’ and ‘Big “C” is SF. Almost naive, but chilling for all that. Lumley has the magic touch which can take a concept and turn it into a web of strange, every­day tale and find the chill at its heart. Fans of horror writers like Ramsey Campbell, Grant won’t find that sort of style here. These are subtler stories, stories whose horror lies under their everyday exterior.

Anne McCaffrey
The Deeds of Fen Blandam
Bantam, 8/12/94, 300pp, £14.99
Mat Coward

In this latest instalment of the Pern Chronicles, the occupants of a capsized fishing boat are rescued by what they take to be talking fish, but which are in fact dolphins (“Dolphins speak good”), brought to the new-­born planet by early human colonists as aquatic guides, but forgotten by their descendants.

Redia, a boy saved from the fishing vessel, becomes fascinated by the strange fish and helps to “T’ Lion, a young dragon rider, to become Pern’s first dolphin, despite the opposition of his elders.

It’s a long time since I read, and loved, the Pern, and was disappointed to find this book hard going. Probably those readers who have followed the peregrinations of the Main, for the years more faithfully than I, will continue to enjoy the friendly, solidly constructed science fantasy, but to me Dolphins seemed to contain too much of the theme of the old-style fantasy. The dolphins’ detractors find so hilarious: back to front sentence structure, stock character, mas­querade of exclamation marks, pages with capital initials and a general air of bo­gue, meta stuff, all of which combines to drown out the wonderful sense of atmosphere on which this author’s reputation once rested.

Anne McCaffrey & Elizabeth James
Scarborough
Powers That be
Corng, 18/9/94, 350pp, £4.99
Jan Malique

Powers That be is a collaboration between Anne McCaffrey and Elizabeth Anne Scarborough, set on the terranes of Pern, a planet where many secrets exist within its icy heart. Major Yanaba Maddock is sent to Kiclooc to recuperate from a near fatal accident. Unfortunately her sick leave is hijacked by the intelligence service, who have been made to go undercover to find out what has happened to their missing, expatriate team (there’s gold in them there hills and the planet is coveted by megalomaniacal space pirates). The reluctant agent is drawn into the lives of the residents of Kiclooc, deviated day by day from the unpleasant task assigned her until finally the true facts of the relationship between the colo-
nists and the planet are revealed to her. It is a thought for a book, which could be equally applied to Earth and its motley group of citizens. 

There is a vast difference in the personality of the woman he once spurned. But women the dominant sex, but magazines is not. Such as describing some- thing as jointrage of the desert and after eve, even the very small things. Or villains as "White mode."

The three things that make this book stand out are the mass appeal, the unusually good characteri- zation, particularly of Creslin and Megara, and the well- worked-out system of magic, where each use of it, no matter how well meant, always has a balancing negative effect. The Towers of the Sunset is one of a very small number of fantasy books that I found extremely in- volving - in fact I haven't read one as good as this since Guy Gavriel Kay's Tigana. I recommend it heartily.

Kim Newman
The Original Dr. Shade Pocket books, 1994, 351pp, £4.99

Max Sexton

The Original Dr. Shade is a collection of short stories by Kim Newman, a professional critic turned writer. The title story won a BSFA award in 1990 so it may already be famil- iar to readers. It is an excellent introduction to the imaginative and po- etic skill of Kim Newman. Many of the stories in this collection have been published in Interzone and Fantasy Tales. What they have in com- mon is the use of sci-fi, chancy cyberpunk, and fantasy themes for their shock value, to pro- duce new types of horror. The title story brings to- gether much of the source ma- terial that Newman, in his capacity as a professional critic, has a good working knowledge of. The world of tabloid newspaper in- terwoven with the story of a resurrected character from an old now Rupert Murdoch's strip, the original Dr. Shade. The story opens as the Dr. Shade of the 'thirties strip battles the en- emies of the British Empire, car- icaturing Jewish Bolshevists, and dispatches them to comic-book perdition. His xenophobic, quasi-fascist politics are recur- red in the 'nineties by the propo- nent of a thinly disguised Sun. It is a peculiar character that will battle the so- cialist and foreign energies of the New Right, and where each use of it, no matter how well meant, always has a balancing negative effect. The story opens as the Dr. Shade of the 'thirties strip battles the en- emies of the British Empire, caricaturing Jewish Bolshevists, and dispatches them to comic-book perdition. His xenophobic, quasi-fascist politics are recur- red in the 'nineties by the propo- nent of a thinly disguised Sun. It is a peculiar character that will battle the so- cialist and foreign energies of the New Right. The story opens partially to exploring the psy- chology of the far right and the fascism innate in Superheroes, made more effective by the real- istic setting. While the horror comes from a creeping realisation that the story isn't so far off the truth.

The other stories are thinner, although, Newman's tech- 

nique and style always produce a plausible. But don't let that spoil the fun. I would also point out that Software contains the all-time classic interlo- cution, "I think you're a hopeless case. But your brain, Mr. Frostee said quickly. That's not the answer to every problem in interpersonal rela- tionships. Whatever you do, buy this book.

Carl Sargent & Marc Gascon
Shadowrun: Nosferatu

Roc, 894, 277pp, £3.99

Cherith Baldry

Readers familiar with the Shadowrun series will pre- sumably know what to expect from this book, and if they liked others, they will give it a try. It hadn't come across Shadowrun before and if the evidence of Nosferatu, I don't care if I never come across it again.

The importation of genre fantasy characters like elves and trols and into a futuristic urban society doesn't quite, for me. The plot is a mish-mash of well- worn occult themes, the charac- ters a group of stereotypes who all, no matter what their national- ity, race or social class, use the same streetwise argot. The times when the book tries to be funny are only marginally less successful than the times when it tries to be serious.

I can't imagine that adults are expected to enjoy Nosferatu, but if it is aimed at a young adult audience, then it patronises and insults its inten- tional readership. There is a minimal level of entertainment, and if you have a long bus jour- ney or really bad insomnia, then you might consider it, but if I were you I wouldn't bother.

Bob Shaw
Dimensions

Gollancz, 287/84, 217pp, £4.99

Jon Wallace

Everyone knows (or should know) Warren Peace, that hapless Space Legion trooper from Who Goes There? Now he's back 16 years for his first adventure. And he's bored. Being an Oscar is all very well, but when you have no need for wife, women or song what can you do.

This is the dilemma that faces Warren as this novel opens. When we last met him, Warren had been turned into an Oscar, a race of perfect golden humans. He was the best they had to keep the Galaxy free from evil. But Warren liked the ups and downs of being hu- man, and now he's fed up, until a chance encounter with a lump of pyrokline restores his human form. This incident makes him suitable as an agent...
Sned uses such part chrono-
logically, part thematic categori-
sations as `South Pennine', `The 80's', Making Histories', `Lost Fantasy', `Forbidden Future'. It is in the last-named sections (though not exclusively) that poems appear which identify the group and include some of the most innovative geopoe of two conti-
nedes widely published in LSA, which range as critically surreal (and horrific) as `We're Losing Sound Vision On The Live Reports', as apocryphal
tially political as `Sacred King'. Yet the magick roots of many of the poems of sf and fantasy are to be found in the Pennine milieu. These places, I am describing the second home of Othu, / lie high over the flatlands that hang / high over the valleys / in which still continue the fence ceremonies / of breeding and feasting (`It's Cold in The High Mouses').
Legendary and archetypal figures such as Ambrosius, Robin Hood and other heroes and spectres of history, are visit-
ing presences in landscape, earthwork and spirit, and behind his distinctive haiku (or senryu), `Time of the Goat tall', well-
explains Thorne's re-action to the threat of the boy. Theirs a satiric irony which is nowhere more evident than in the poems which are directly from science-fictional imaginations (but often with a South Pennine counterculture). Many are too intricately woven for easy quotation, as is, for example, his powerful `Return from the Grand Canal, Mars', but their essence is distilled and can be appreciated in just this one stanza from `On the Line of the Dales':
'there's snow in the winter comfort
of plants.
Even here where we cannot even see
the sunsystem we stem from`

Armonica is a sequel to an ear-
lier novel, Runcurren, but if you've missed that (and I have) there's an embedded metafiction in the first thirty-odd pages which will bring you painlessly up to speed. The premise is necessarily the same: this Earth is one of a number of possible Earths, the Darklings are trying to bring them together as `Sacred King'. Yet it is possible that this earlier novel was apparently Theos' enemy, but here becomes a rather more sympathetic figure.

But as if this King Lear parallel wasn't enough, Strang also has a suspiciously Ambrosius-like wound in his side, which will continue to bleed as long as the Earths are not healed. There is also an extremely parallel between the increasingly dys-
fuctional Strang family and Tho's fathers attempts to rescue the members of his own family from the different realities into which the Darklings have flung them. Then there is the war between the worlds as a metaphor for the river of life, down which at one point float the parentless heroes of myth and legend; and Armonica, in the novel the name of an alternate USA but in our world the ancient Roman province of Brit-
tany, later the source of many Arthurian legends and thus also an arena for conflict be-
tween darkness and light. Well before the halfway mark, the story is fraught with the weight of its own allegory and symbology. On several occasions, the characters discuss the work of Joseph Campbell and make explicit references to the archetypes they perceive their roles in the conflict as being. For characters in a novel to behave in such a fashion — and for the author to effectively evoke the reader with the manipulation of the plot — is a typical post-modernist narrative strate-
gy; but it inevitably tends to distance the reader from the story itself. One rare and certain, never really caught up in the events described — and finds itself inspired, perhaps, not only in articulating, the author's cleverness.

Steve Sneyd

Armocne Orbit, 18/9/94, 256pp, £4.99

Joseph Nicholas

In Coils of Earthen Hold
University of Salzburg, 1993, 125pp, £5.00

K. V. Bailey

In his structuring of this sub-
narrative of the novel, and of its autobiographical elucidatory notes, Steve
Tad Williams
To Green Angel Tower
Volume One: Siege
Legend, 7/4/94, 810pp, £5.99
Volume Two: Storm
Legend, 7/7/94, 818pp, £5.99
Carol Ann Green

T
taken together, the two volumes of this final book of Tad Williams' epic fantasy series, mounts up to 1624 pages of reading. That's almost three times the length of the average paperback novel. The question the reader has to ask himself is: do the books in question warrant the amount of time and effort required to read 1624 pages?

After having read both volumes, I'm not entirely sure of the answer. There are many satisfactory elements to this novel. The hero and heroine finish the epic in usual fantasy mode by getting married, the hero is a character easy to identify with: there are many minor characters and plot lines to keep the reader busy guessing the outcomes of their stories. And yet... Williams' writing holds no real surprises for the reader. The one transgression from formula is anticipated early on, knowing the necessity to unite hero and heroine in marriage and high honour, leaves a clue that for one character things may not turn out as presupposed.

There is no doubt in my mind, however, that Williams is a competent storyteller. His many stories are rounded in the main well crafted, they grab the reader's attention from the word go. The situation they find themselves in, is alas, almost too familiar. The forces of good are called upon to defeat the forces of evil after having been almost beaten into submission in the previous two books.

In this, the third book of the trilogy: Simon Snowlock, ex-solution turned knight, must help Prince Josua to overcome his evil brother King Elias, who through the promise of his evil priest, Pyrata, has pledged his life to the forces of evil. It is up to Prince Josua to bring peace and plenty to his land once more by defeating his brother. This sets the scene for the requisite battle scenes, which though overlong in places, do point up the futilities and drudgeries of war.

In another strand of the epic, Simon, known as Snowlock for the streak of white hair he gained in one of the earlier books, leaves Josua's camp, in the company of Princess Miriamelle the daughter of Elias. Miriamelle wishes to return to the Hayhoit, her father's stronghold, in the hope that she can dissuade him from the path he has chosen. Simon is pulled into the final struggle through his affinity with the swords of power: Memory, Sorrow and Thorn. It is the coming together of these three swords that forms the climax of the fight between good and evil.

Williams weaves the strands of his massive trilogy to a close in the final pages of the second volume. Storm. The hero receives due recognition, and the hand of the heroine in marriage, the forces of evil are, of course, destroyed and peace is restored to the people of Erkyland. Yet, the question remains with me at the end of this novel, did it really need 1624 pages to bring the trilogy to a foregone conclusion? I haven't decided yet.

Steve Zell
Wizzard
Tanya Brown

Plin Rim is small-town Arizona, and fourteen-year-old Bryce Wiliams is uprooted from upstate New York and deposited there when his father decides he wants a piece of the local action. There's something of the Old West about Plin Rim, and Bryce finds himself liking the place as he begins to make friends and enemies among his new schoolmates. His stepsister Megan, meanwhile, is indulging her passion for carving in the region's hills and mines. Life seems pretty idyllic, no?

For small-town Arizona, with its quaint Indian guides and local history society, hobbies - as far as the front of the book uninform us - "horrors from the darkest pit of hell". At first, it's just a couple of missing people, an odd echo in the old mine, a dark rumour about the forebears of the lovely Connie (one of Bryce's main reasons for liking the place so much). And isn't it odd that there are so many small graves - children's graves - grouped together in the cemetery? But perhaps Bryce is just being paranoid. He's an outsider, after all.

Then it's Hellbrado night, and everything goes horribly wrong... Wizzard is an entertaining read, with a grippingly high body count and some interesting characters (most of whom die). Zell sketches teenage life in a small American town with an expert eye, and the horror creeps in slowly, hardly disturbing the atmosphere of rural bliss at first. But the plot doesn't quite hang together; too much is left to the reader's imagination, and the final chapters unlearn so much carnage, so abruptly, that the reader can easily lose touch with the fate of individual characters - and not care too much. A very readable novel despite its flaws, Zell is a name to watch for.

Peter Green

Currently there are seven ordinary orbit groups, two novels groups and a non-fiction group. Ordinary groups can circulate anything from short stories, to extracts from novels, from fantasy to horror. Novel groups are fairly self explanatory being for novel extracts only, again from fantasy to horror. The non-fiction group, is for people interested in writing critical articles on any aspect of SF and fantasy, including reviews; it also discusses the difficulties involved in such writing.

A quarterly newsletter is also produced, named Trajectory. This usually includes market information, competition details, and letters from Orbit members.

If you are interested in joining any of these groups, please contact the Orbiter Coordinator: contact Carol Ann Green, 5 Raglan Avenue, Raglan Street, Hull, HU5 2JB.
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