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**Geoff Ryman**

**SF and Pop • Elizabeth Moon**

**Iain M. Banks and T.S.Eliot**

**VECTOR**

**203**

**The Critical  
Journal of  
the BSFA**

# Vector

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THE CRITICAL JOURNAL OF THE BSFA

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COVER: Detail of a photo of Geoff Ryman by Jerry Bauer from the inside cover of 253 (Flamingo, 1998)

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### The View from the Clapham Omnibus

Sometimes science fiction can be embarrassing, particularly when you are teaching it. Sometimes you've spent hours (well, minutes) carefully explaining Delany's contention that 'Science fiction is not about the future; science fiction is about the present' and something comes true.

I was teaching *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* to a group of mature students and we were looking at the scene in October 18— where an elderly MP, observed by a sleepy maid, asks a young man a question.

And as she so sat she became aware of an aged and beautiful gentleman with white hair drawing near along the lane; and advancing to meet him, another and very small gentleman, to whom at first she paid less attention. When they had come within speech (which was just under the maid's eyes) the older man bowed and accosted the other with a very pretty manner of politeness. It did not seem as if the subject of his addresses were of great importance; indeed, from his pointing, it sometimes appeared as if he were only inquiring his way; but the moon shone on his face as he spoke, and the girl was pleased to watch it, it seemed to breathe such an innocent and old-world kindness of disposition, yet with something high too, as of a well-founded self-content. Presently her eye wandered to the other, and she was surprised to recognize in him a certain Mr Hyde, who had once visited her master and for whom she had conceived a dislike. He had in his hand a heavy cane, with which he was trifling; but he answered never a word, and seemed to listen with an ill-contained impatience. And then all of a sudden he broke out in a great flame of anger, stamping with his foot, brandishing the cane, and carrying on (as the maid described it) like a madman. The old gentleman took a step back, with the air of one very much surprised and a trifle hurt; and at that Mr Hyde broke out of all bounds, and clubbed him to the earth. And next moment, with ape-like fury, he was trampling his victim under foot, and hailing down a storm of blows, under which the bones were audibly shattered and the body jumped upon the roadway. At the honour of these sights and sounds, the maid fainted.

How are we to interpret such a grisly event? More to the point, what is an elderly MP doing wandering about in a sleazy part of London in the middle of the night? My answer was that presumably he was looking for some sort of sexual encounter. This divided the students: some thought that that was the answer – and it makes the rôle of the young girl who is trampled by Hyde at 3 a.m. even more sinister (and what were the witnesses doing at that time of night...?). But a core of them resisted such a reading. Perhaps he was coming back from somewhere. Or was lost. Or something.

Three days further into October a cabinet minister resigned over a robbery which occurred after this white man got talking with a black man on Clapham Common. The tabloids leapt to an immediate conclusion, egged on by his vehement denials even prior to the allegations. It doesn't matter what the actual details were – these being swamped in the subsequent round of allegations and outings – but the unconvinced students were willing to agree after all that my interpretation of *Jekyll and Hyde* was accurate.

(I discussed the same political events with a group of students with an average age of twenty-one, and half of them didn't know who Chris Smith is, nor who Louis de Bernières is

for that matter. Fills you with great confidence for the future of education and the nation, doesn't it?).

And then a few days later I was teaching *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* at another institution, having given them the essay 'How to build a universe that doesn't fall apart two days later' to read. In there, Dick describes an inspiration for the climax of *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said*, an encounter with a black stranger, whom Dick drives to a garage.

In the novel Buckman meets a black man, Montgomery L. Hopkins, at a petrol station, and hands him a drawing of an arrow-pierced heart. After a brief conversation, he embraces the man. This act of taking comfort stops the tears and gives Buckman a sense of release. But, of course, such an embrace risks being read as more than an embrace. In a letter dated February 24 1974 to Philip José Farmer, Dick wrote:

When I originally told it [the title of the novel] to a girl in our field she said, 'That's a Harlan Ellison title,' and when I told her the plot she said, 'And the protagonist is a homosexual.' Then she left. I actually wrote an introduction defending the protagonist against her slanders, but later threw it away, deciding that the hell with it, which is what I said at great length in the introduction.

In this, Dick argues that 'he does not care whether General Buckman is homosexual or not; he cares only that rising out of and transcending this terrible day General Buckman shows himself able to love, and in fact able to love a stranger.' Dick goes on to suggest that the novel deals with several kinds of love; for example Taverner's encounters with seven different women, Alys's lesbianism, the apparently legal sexual encounter between Allen Mufi and a thirteen-year-old boy and the cherishing of a pot which is considered a work of art.

Still, it's oddly – I nearly wrote queerly – reminiscent of recent events: middle-aged men, one black, one white, both strangers.

I suspect that we'll never know exactly what happened on the common that night, and certainly it's up to the individual reader to decide how to interpret the climax of Dick's novel. But it's interesting what it has revealed about our thought processes – mine, my students, people I've talked to about the incident, tabloid writers and readers.

In the incident and the books, a man leaves the sort of place he might reasonably be expected to inhabit, and crosses to a different territory, where he encounters a man of a different ethnic background. This encounter is eroticised, and by most readers (viewers) seen as deviant. From the wrong place, we slide to the wrong act and the wrong person. It's not a million miles away from the attitude that suggests anyone who strays down the wrong road deserves to be mugged or raped or worse. They were asking for it.

And the corollary: a place for everyone, and everyone in their place. And if that's the viewpoint we end up endorsing, even if unconsciously, that really puts into question our trust in a genre that supposedly prides itself on different people and different places.

Late 1998, Hull, Nottingham, Loughborough,  
Northampton and places in between.

by Andrew M Butler



## LETTERS TO VECTOR

We begin with another comment on Vector 200, from Pam Baddeley:

### From Pam Baddeley, via email:

V200 was quite a good read. Although I don't usually get on with Brian Stableford's articles, this one was more interesting as it gave us a history of events and put that into context, rather than the rather heavy literary criticism pieces he usually writes. The Norman Spinrad and Mary Doria Russell interviews were interesting also, and I've put *The Sparrow* on my reading list.

I wasn't so convinced by the Wookiee book articles as the first is arguing against itself via the interjections, and the second is buried in ponderous 'serious critical pseud' – I don't know why writing about literature always has to be burdened in this way instead of clear succinct prose! There are probably some interesting ideas in there but they're lost beneath all the elaboration.

Anyway, this issue was probably more interesting than I've found Vector to be for quite a while. ☺

Many thanks for the praise: we put a lot of effort into the anniversary issue to make it special. I hope you continue to find it interesting. In retrospect Andrew could have put more effort into incorporating Gary's interjections into his discussion, or Gary could have worked them into an article. Still, the arguing seems to have generated some debate, as the letters in V202 indicated.\*

We also had another comment on the poll results published in V201:

### From Katherine Roberts, Bridstow, Ross-on-Wye:

Did anyone else find the results of the 'Best of British' poll in Vector 201 rather depressing? I count myself as a reader/fan of sf, in so far as I'm member of the BSFA, I subscribe to *Interzone*, and have even been known to dabble at writing sf myself. Yet I found it difficult to work up much enthusiasm for any of your top 10 British novels, with the notable exception of *The Lord of the Rings* – but come on, surely that one's fantasy?

Perhaps, as Andrew Butler so rightly points out, the reason lies with the very worthy nature of these novels. I'd also, at the risk of inviting an avalanche of outraged letters from your male members, dare to suggest it lies with their masculine slant on such 'worthiness'. I remember when I saw your poll announced, I enthusiastically scribbled down from memory a list of genre books I'd enjoyed, then went through that list deleting all the fantasy (which got rid of *The Lord of the Rings* and about half a dozen others), all those whose authors were not British (which got rid of Anne McCaffrey, Ursula Le Guin and Margaret Atwood), and all those published earlier than your cut-off date (not so much of problem, since I hadn't many of those on my shelves anyway). And what was I left with? NOTHING! I knew there was a reason I didn't enter your poll...

Maybe I'm alone in this, but when reading sf, I look for characters I can relate to first, an enjoyable read second, and serious theme/scientific authenticity third. The best books have all three, of course, and if you ever do decide to widen the scope of your poll, I've a feeling the results will be quite different. ☺

GSD replies: Personally I was surprised by how much I agreed with the poll, given that normally I find the best books don't even get

nominated for awards. But then, I am a male member. I think you're quite right that my esteemed co-editor shouldn't have allowed The Lord of the Rings to pass as sf. Perhaps we should have a poll for Fantasy books, or books from the last 100 years, or simply a poll of favourites regardless of genre? It's something to consider next time Vector does this sort of thing.

AMB replies: On the whole, yes, I'd think of *The Lord of the Rings* as fantasy. On the other hand, it could be an alternative history set in between a couple of ice ages. I thought long and hard about including it in the results, but in the end I took solace from the fact that Tolkien is included in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* – I might be wrong, but I don't recall him ever writing any pure-bred sf and yet he gets included. On the other hand, they write: 'No reasonable definition of sf would encompass the works of JRRT; but this concept and its embodiment in *The Lord of the Rings* have had enormous influence on both sf and Fantasy.'

It was always my intention to allow people to define 'best' for themselves, as well as science fiction. After all, what about Mythago Wood, Pavane, The Cornelius Quartet, Crash, Stormbringer, Grimus, The History of the RuneStaff, The Arabian Nightmare and Mort, each of which were nominated by at least one reader? (My comment 'Given all this, "science fiction" was left to be defined by the voters, and with the exception of the Tolkien novels, was unproblematic' seems rather suspect in retrospect. I suspect it is in the nature of genres that whatever criteria we set, someone will complain. I do think there should be a best sf and fantasy of the century poll, probably with more clearly defined criteria, which cuts across nationality, but I predict now arguments over that dark fantasy/horror novel, that crime novel and so on.

### From Jack D Stephen, via email:

Thanks for publishing my recent diatribe. I thought when I first saw it you must be hard up for letters but you had pages of the stuff!

My response is well, yes! From where I live Hull is a good five hours drive south. And as for the seems (my emphasis) that was my point! To me Menzies seems to be everywhere. And I have no reason at all to frequent King's Cross. But fair do's, point taken. Can we be friends now?

About Scottish sf. I would add to your list Alasdair Gray (the leading Scottish fantasist of our generation and unaccountably missing from the Clute fantasy encyclopedia, by simple oversight I believe) and Graham Dunstan Martin. Historically Scottish writers have been fantasists rather than "pure" sf. I just wondered what was in the late 80s and the 90s air that led to sf appearing. Or is Scottish merely temporarily "sexy" in the publishing world?

Another tut tut. The glaring omission from your Welsh sf list was BSFA award winner Chris Evans! (And doesn't Lionel Fantorpe come from Cardiff or Swansea? but perhaps we shouldn't mention it.) ☺

AMB: Yes, Gray is an immensely important writer. In fact just the other day I was teaching (the works of) Iain Banks as the stepping stone between literary writers like Gray and Kelman and cult writers like Irvine Welsh (and the other guy – do I mean Alan Warner?). Gray is in the part of the alphabet which suffered particularly badly – alongside missing entries such as Jones (Gwyneth), Halam and Jackson (Shirley). Perhaps we ought to put together an encyclopedia of inexplicable omissions.

I wonder if what we might anglocentrally label the Celtic Fringe – Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and Eire – is more likely to produce fantasists in general. And are writers like Banks Scottish writers before they are sf writers? I think there is an identifiable Scottish trait in fiction – or perhaps I should say a trait identifiable in Scottish fiction – but Ill save that for an article which I really must write soon. ☘

Letters to Vector should be sent to Gary Dalkin, 5 Lydford Road, Bournemouth, BN11 8SN or emailed to ambulet@enterprise.net and marked 'For publication'. We reserve the right to edit or shorten letters.

# The Ryman Prescription

By Justina Robson

All right, I admit it. I was planning to write this great mostly-objective overview of Geoff's creative life so far, his books, the development therein, the dichotomy between critical acclaim and relatively modest sales... I was going to do all of that but something stands in my way. I haven't read all of Geoff's books. See, I would have read them if I hadn't realised very quickly after reading two that there really weren't that many left and that he doesn't produce them all that often.

When *Vector* asked me if I'd be interested in doing this article I leapt at the chance – writing about one of the greatest authors (I think) in and out of sf – it seemed as though it would be easy until I realised I ought to read the other books. But I was saving them. I was saving them because I was planning on living a good deal longer and if I read them now then they won't last me. Yes, I could read them over and over, probably even getting new highs off them each and every time. They have the same kind of power as Willy Wonka's bubblegum – no matter how long you chew it over it never loses its flavour AND it supplies you with a full meal every time. But still, there is no moment sweeter than the final page of a first reading. Therefore I have dipped a toe into *The Child Garden* and swung closely in towards *The Warrior Who Carried Life* but have only consumed *The Unconquered Country*, 253, and the breathtaking 'Was...'. I planned to explain how great these are and why I've resisted reading the others but I can't best the contribution from an anonymous reader on the Amazon.com site, who wrote (*The Child Garden*) simply:

A woman, a polar bear, a love story – Reading this book is like hearing the King James Bible set to music, or being presented with a holographic rose as big as Brazil, or discovering that you are in fact the cure for cancer.

And experiences like that come rarely in a lifetime, and when you possess things which have the power to put your crooked spirit straight, if you're like me, you tend to save them for a time when they'll be needed and don't just chow down on them like a starving dingo.

So, I didn't read enough to do the full monty. I'm sorry. Here instead is a short interview and some discussion on the smaller subject of 253, why it is back better than the other work so far, and what factors may have caused the mediocre of the sales of the other books.

Geoff Ryman's most recent novel, 253, is selling in reasonable quantities – about a thousand copies a week, or it was at the last count. 253 is a change for Geoff, being a book most firmly anchored in the contemporary world we all share, whereas the previous novels have all contained some aspects of history or science fiction or fantasy. It was created specifically as a hypertext entity on the internet, for viewing with a web-browser so that the reader could follow the links around at will, one of the first such fictions and one of the most successful.

Each page of the book contains 253 words about a single person and each person is either the driver or passenger on a London Underground Train – their total number, 253. As the reader slowly moves through the carriages, dotting from one person to another by whatever route they find most interesting, a narrative picture is built up which covers the time period in which the train travels a few stops to Elephant & Castle, where its journey comes to a sudden and untimely end. The beauty of 253 lies in the superficial simplicity of its design and concept and the vast possible complexity achievable in the reading of it; just shy of 5.4 million possible routes accumulate the same story, which, in its unselfish empathy for every character, is rife with both warmth and tragedy.

However, the book is curiously less satisfying than viewing the novel as true hypertext, because of the ordering of the pages and the concrete sense of just how long, how far, how much there is, which all comes as a series of small surprises on the internet, like genies popping out of small blue-word bottles. Nonetheless its popularity in paper format, particularly among younger readers, continues. I have an idea why 253 may be bucking the trend. The first possibilities that spring up are that it is a concept book, it is an easy read, demanding only a page of attention at a time, has a connection to something in London that everyone knows about, doesn't have any genre overtones and contains large doses of various emotions in a simulacrum of reality which gives a feeling of satisfaction without any of the actual horror of getting to know real people. And it has a trendy jacket and a much more trivial appeal initially (whatever your reaction to the innards) because it looks and sounds like a friendly and shallow kind of book, not a trawl through the heart of darkness. That's my cynic's analysis anyway. Then of course there is the fact that it is a fascinating book containing a snapshot of godlike omniscience, which everyone can participate in. Plus it has the internet edge so that readers can feel part of the technological revolution whilst reading a book. All the rest of the portrait of vulnerable humanity part is a bonus.

In the context of his career to date this lift has taken many people by surprise, not least Geoff himself. Although he has written several books and adaptations for theatrical performance, until now the majority of his success has been measured in critical acclaim rather than sales. Recently I asked Geoff a few questions as to why this might be the case and put forward a theory of my own about 253's emergence.

**JUSTINA ROBSON: Do you see a natural progression in your work – a coherent vision – or is each project an individual effort?**

**GEOFF RYMAN:** I think each book is very identifiable as a Geoff Ryman thing, though I'm speaking from a different platform each time. Like I have the same basic thing to say, and so keeping finding different venues for it. In retrospect, I'm proud of the range: sword and sorcery (*Warrior*), magic realism (Cambodia), theatrical adaptation (*Timothy Archer*, the *Beste* stories, performance and *Gilgamesh*) literary sf, historical/Hollywood mainstream, and 253 (web interactive

combined with cheery Cockney, combined with the usual grimness). The main difficulty comes when having learned how to write the novel I've just written I almost invariably try to write the same kind of novel again. This usually is a disaster.

**JUSTINA: To what extent have publishers dictated what you've written and how many ideas have you had rejected at early stages?**

**GEOFF:** Publishers never dictated a thing. After 'Was...', I had a kind of crash and tried to write a *Star Trek* novel (I still love my *Star*

*Trek* novel) and a three volume epic bizarre fantasy, which was so bizarre nobody wanted to touch it. Just lately I've become fascinated with the film form. It's pure story telling, in a way that is very difficult to do in a novel.

**JUSTINA: Do you think you've been marketed adequately in the past and have the reviews which you've received had much of a say in your success or lack of it?**

**GEOFF:** Every effort has been made to market my stuff. I blame its lack of success on two things – most of it is grim: Cambodia or child abuse. And I don't hang around with the right people.

**JUSTINA: You are more critically than financially successful – with the possible exception of 253. Do you think that writers have grounds to complain if the books they produce don't pull the customers at the bookshop or are they in denial about the fact that**

I still love  
my *Star Trek*  
novel

mass trading value is the ultimate arbiter of success whether the product is of quality (as judged by peer writers/critics) or not?

Geoff: Um. I'm not sure what the question means. You can get by writing the books that come to you. I have always had a readership, some of it devoted. But it's small. I'm like that Chinese filmmaker who just made the gay romance *Happy Together* as opposed to John Woo. John Woo is not a bad film maker, neither is the other guy. One just gets to spend more money because of his demographics. There is only one popular best-selling author I've read who I could not comprehend why anyone would read them. No, make that two. But Jackie Collins, even Barbara Cartland, I could see why a readership would buy them. It's not what I want to do, but they do it well. Certainly you have no grounds for complaint if you're not a best seller. If you get published that's wonderful, and if some people love your work, that's even better. Why some people sell droves of books is something of a mystery.

**JUSTINA:** To what extent has the reception of your work in the past affected the way you see yourself now? How do you see yourself, in writing terms, at the moment?

Geoff: Right now I'm a lucky guy. 253 is doing well and my publishers care what I produce next. I've also discovered that film is a way to write more simply and structurally, which I enjoy, and that might influence the novels... or not.

#### Afterthought

I must concur with Geoff's own opinion that most of his books tend to

the grim. In 'Was...', the 'real' Dorothy doesn't get to escape her horrific and abusive family for the safety and wonder of Oz, instead the situation drives her to madness. In *The Unconquered Country* a refugee moves from place to place, selling her body to gestate terrible weapons which are likely as not to be used against her. If there were no point to these tales other than to sentimentally say 'ain't life awful,' then it would be dreadful reading. But there is no sentiment. Despite the fact that there is so much suffering, or perhaps because of it, the lingering sense that wonder and beauty and compassion can exist at all seems the more miraculous and valuable. Precious things endure, even evolve, from horrible situations, although often individuals do not live to see or experience it. It's what you always suspected about life, but never wanted to seriously contemplate.

However, the experience of having read the books is far from grim. They do put you through something of an emotional mangle, but in this they satisfy where so many books instead sink into bathos. To read them is not to have the happy escapist experience offered by a Jackie Collins, it's more like having a dream which sometimes becomes a nightmare but from which you can awake renewed. Of course, when you think it over, since when did that kind of thing hit the best-seller lists? It's like the Calvin & Hobbes cartoon where Calvin complains when nobody will buy his 'A Swift Kick Up The Pants, \$1.00' – he says, 'Why not? Everybody I know needs what I'm selling.'

Doesn't everyone need to feel like they are the cure for cancer once in a while?

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## Telling the Tale: Ryman, Fiction, Cambodia

by Elizabeth Billinger

In his 'Afterword' to *The Unconquered Country*, Geoff Ryman justifies his fictionalised retelling of events in Cambodia in the early 1970s. He explains that whilst the story of Cambodia may have become something of a cliché, it was, for many years, an untold story, and it seemed to him unjust that the agonies of America in South East Asia should be told without examining the agonies, and joys, of the people of that land. Ryman records that he spent many years searching for a way to tell the story, after seeing a picture, during the Lon Nol period in Cambodia, of a woman looking at the newly dead body of her husband. For years he thought about the woman and her suffering, but it was not until he realised that she lived in a fantasy country that the story could be told, and eventually he wrote *The Unconquered Country* in 1982. It was initially published in a slightly shorter story version in *Interzone* #7 two years later. Some of the background detail was excised, resulting in a story which feels more immediate, and seems to be more of a straightforward allegory than a work of fantasy.

In May 1982 *National Geographic* carried several articles on Cambodia by a team of journalists who, during the autumn of 1981, had been allowed to take an extensive tour of what was then Vietnamese-controlled Kampuchea. This included the temple complex of Angkor which, after the French conservancy team left in 1972 had been closed to the outside world for a decade.

In the first of these articles Wilbur E. Garrett makes a plea for the demilitarisation of Angkor, a site of about 75 square miles where between the ninth and thirteenth centuries a succession of Khmer kings built their capitals. Having largely survived sackings by the Cham in the twelfth century and the Siamese in the fifteenth century, Angkor was widely rumoured to have been severely damaged or even demolished by the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese occupying forces. Garrett, who had visited in 1968 when Cambodia was still governed by Prince Sihanouk, was relieved to find the site much less severely damaged than was feared, but still in desperate need of the expert preservation programme previously financed by France and Cambodia.

In the second *National Geographic* article Peter T. White examined in detail the state of Angkor: the progress of conservation prior to the civil war, the continuing decay resulting from rain and the encroaching jungle, and the specific damage inflicted during the war and since his last visit in 1968. Amongst the depressing list of decay and depredation White describes the statue of Buddha disfigured with black paint:

Isn't that awful? Yes and no. The wavy pattern on the Buddha's chest is the same that many Khmer carry tattooed on theirs, for protection against illness or injury. By daubing the image, the dauber apparently hoped to gain protection for himself.

But what's that, painted on the Buddha's arm, a wristwatch? I got an authoritative explanation later as follows: In the time of Khmer Rouge rule, when all religion was officially despised, some underling defaced this image with the approval of his Khmer Rouge superiors; but deep inside he hoped that by presenting the Buddha with a symbolic wristwatch he might somehow acquire a real one himself – preferably a Swiss Omega, then the mark of high functionaries. He hoped to become a powerful man himself, by magic...

White reinforces Ryman's premise that ancient beliefs can resist even a brutal and planned elimination of people, culture and tradition; the form may change, but faith will survive and continue to be a source of strength.

Ryman's story has the dream-like quality of magic realism, weaving together the events of a specific life and the folklore and traditions of a people. In fact, it feels as though he has created a new folk story; a moral tale to frighten children, whilst at the same time conveying truths that go far beyond the story itself.

The story centres around Third, who is called 'our little princess' by her older sister because she arranges the house so beautifully that though it had no flowers, 'it looked as though it did', and because only princesses in stories have time to arrange flowers. Third is dutiful but not educated and not attractive, nevertheless, she finds a man who is patient and willing to take care of her, though he too is ugly and without social standing.

The two of them, however, are singled out, if not made beautiful, by their spiritual strength: after his death Crow, Third's husband, who had been a priest before becoming a soldier, returns in the form of a crow. This crow too is ugly, but it sings the songs of the People. The poor people hear, remember, and understand that the crow is a ghost and treat it with due respect. Third, maybe because of her suffering – or maybe because she has, all along, been closer to the traditions of the People – is able to see other spirits, and these spirits guide her and show her the way to survive.

In the tradition of fairy stories, monsters roam the Unconquered Country. The old monsters, the tigers, have almost vanished, but there are new monsters. There are the Neighbours, who look no different from the People, but who have coveted the Unconquered Country for generations. And before the Neighbours arrive, in the bellies of great flying machines, the People are attacked by Sharks. Sharks are 'long and sleek and freckled' and have round, happy faces, but they (huff and) puff their cheeks and breathe destruction as they fly over the lands of the People.

The third *National Geographic* article is entitled 'Kampuchea Wakens From a Nightmare' and in it Peter White examines the extent of the genocide under Pol Pot and investigates the recovery of the remaining Cambodian people. In 1982, as in 1998, estimates of the number of dead vary, but whether one million or three million people died under the Khmer Rouge regime, it was an inconceivably large proportion of the estimated population of 7.5 million Khmer.

White records many signs of revival: thousands of traders boarding the train to go and buy goods smuggled across the border from Thailand; resurgent market towns where sandals, cooking pots and aspirin can be bought; the re-population of Phnom Penh. What he could not foresee only three years after the lifting of the Khmer Rouge regime was the way that revival would be held back by corrupt government, political stalemate and a continuing fear that still prevents ordinary Cambodians from speaking or voting freely.

White summarises the words of some of the survivors of an ultra-nationalist Communist regime that sought to abolish all useless things – everything unnecessary to the growing of rice. Cities, markets, money, contaminating foreign vestiges, teachers, physicians, journalists, students were all eliminated:

In the countryside there was a basic division. The Old People, who had been there all along, and we New People, expelled from the towns. We could own nothing, not even a cooking pot. Families were separated - men and women had to live apart, collectively. Imagine sleeping in a 45-foot collective bed. We were expendable, treated worse than prisoners. We were used as machinery.

The echoes of these words are strong in *The Unconquered Country*, in Ryman's naming of the People and in his depiction of Third who 'rented out her womb for industrial use. She was cheaper than the glass tanks. She grew parts of living machinery inside her - differentials for trucks, small household appliances.'

The sense of fairy tale is reinforced by sentient houses, by the talking machinery that is being evicted from the hospital, the nurse whom Third cannot help perceiving as a large hen. The language too, with short, powerful sentences and simple but effective descriptions, that compare the new in Third's life with the old and commonplace, also has something of the feel of a timeless story told for children of all ages, a story that will endure because of the truths it contains.

It is, however, the very truths that Ryman incorporates in the story that leave me uncertain about how to appreciate this work. Many of the events described in the story seem little changed from actual events in Cambodia: In 1973 the United States conducted a bombing campaign on Cambodia as brutal as anything seen in World War II. Over a hundred thousand tons of bombs were dropped on a 'third world' countryside with no means of defence.

Jon Swain, in his autobiographical account of the wars in Indochina, *River of Time*, mourns the destruction of the traditional Cambodian house built on stilts, with wooden floors polished by bare

feet over many years, with Buddhist shrines and carved roofs, all condemned by the Khmer Rouge as decadent and bourgeois. The Khmer Rouge tried to eliminate all vestiges of the Cambodia's cultural inheritance. Books and Buddhist manuscripts were burned, traditional musical instruments and festivals done away with in an attempt to sever all links with the past. Swain reflects that the 'elaborate, joyful marriage ceremony steeped in Buddhist tradition [was] replaced by a cold handshake', something which is reflected in Third's perpetual looking forward to the wedding of her now-dead cousin, and the chain of flowers that would link all the village girls together.

Towards the end of his story Ryman offers a fantasy version of the evacuation of Phnom Penh, and in particular of the emptying of the hospital. Third is struggling along without her glasses, having been warned by her sister's ghost that she will be safer without them – and indeed people were killed by the Khmer Rouge on the basis that their spectacles were an indication of their being educated and therefore bourgeois. 'Something bumped into her, and apologised with two voices. It had wrinkled skin like an elephant, only it was blue: crumpled pyjamas. Two men missing legs were hopping together for support.' She also observes the life saving equipment as it is forced to leave the hospital and join the march to the countryside. Swain describes Preah Ke Mealea Hospital, full of wounded, but with no doctor able or brave enough to attend them, corridors literally awash with blood, an old man failing to keep his intestines from spilling out. He also describes the evacuation of the wounded – an estimated 20,000 of them – some being pushed on hospital beds, some with serum and plasma drips still attached.

Swain returned to Phnom Penh in 1980, having been one of the last Westerners to leave Cambodia after the fall of Phnom Penh. He observes the empty ground where the Roman Catholic Cathedral had stood. It had been blown up by the Khmer Rouge and not one brick remained. At the close of *The Unconquered Country*, Third turns at the sound of what she thinks are fireworks and sees the spires of all the temples in her city of Suprang Song rise on clouds of dust. She realises that the temples are being killed too.

Ryman talks a little of fantasy and realism in the afterword to his novel 'Was...', 'Reality Check'. He declares himself a 'fantasy writer who fell in love with realism', someone for whom realism 'deflates the myths, the unexamined ideas of fantasy'. Realism uses history, which Ryman describes as 'past truth'. He feels that fantasy, on the other hand, reminds us of our potential, of the possibilities for a better life and a better future; it frees us from history.

Thinking of Oz, another fantasy land, Ryman suggests that it would be possible for us to live in a land not so different from Oz, if only we looked at the world in the right way. Instead, we continue to live in 'an ugly, even murderous place'. *The Unconquered Country* is clearly not an ugly place. Third can see its beauty, in the things of the past, in the houses, in the people. Cambodia is not an ugly place, the land and the buildings are beautiful; when they are free from the terrors of an unstable and corrupt government it will be easier to see that the people too are beautiful. Third's Unconquered Country is certainly a murderous place.

Ryman attributes our failure to break free from our own ugly world to both fantasy and history; to the fact that we may be gripped by history, personal or our country's, and/or deluded by fantasy, personal or our country's. And though the explanation was made in 1992 at the end of 'Was...', it seems that it must have been very much what he was thinking in 1982 when writing *The Unconquered Country*.

Fiction, and magic realism in particular, have been powerful tools in telling the stories of oppressed or marginalised people. In Colombia Gabriel García Márquez famously uses it in his attempt 'to find out why history had devalued his people', but García Márquez is Colombian and they are his people. José María Arguedas tried to do the same thing for Peru, but found the problem of how to write in Spanish about the non-Spanish, entirely oral culture of the indigenous Indian population insoluble. Arguedas was better placed than most to understand the Indian culture: his Indian mother died when he was very young and as his white father was often absent Arguedas was brought up amongst Indians with Quechua as his first language. Nevertheless, torn between the need to write about Peru and his

conviction of the impossibility of writing about Peru he shot himself in 1969.

In *The Unconquered Country* Ryman is an outsider writing about Cambodian history and culture, though obviously writing because he cared about the plight of these people and demonstrably basing his story on thorough research. It is nevertheless arguable that the power of fantasy and magic realism as tools for expressing fundamental truths about a culture can only be matched by the understanding of someone writing from within.

Part of Ryman's justification for the fictionalisation can be discerned when he writes: 'All our words have worn out. Democracy, freedom, socialism, economics. They've all become kitsch. They summon up kitsch images.' He focuses on the word justice, believing that one of the places it can be maintained is in 'history's bastard child, fiction'. So it seems that for Ryman the factual account loses its power (its truth?) because it can only be expressed through cliché and words that have been overused, drained, leaving them with little or no impact. It can, perhaps, be argued that it is the novelty of fiction that restores the power of words, allowing a truth to be told that has been lost from other, historical accounts.

There is another argument, that by embedding the truth of Cambodia's history in a fantasy, Ryman is helping to spread that truth: more people will learn of the tragedy through this novella than would ever have been moved to read an historical account. More people will sit through Spielberg's film, *Schindler's List* than are likely to watch documentaries on the same subject. The process of fictionalising and aestheticising unspeakable violence makes the truth more widely known – the unspeakable becomes spoken.

*The Unconquered Country* is well-written and a fascinating story. If I knew nothing of Cambodia I am sure I would rate it highly. I cannot, however, overcome my resistance to the aestheticising of such a monstrous piece of history. I am left with a nagging fear that by transferring fact from the realm of the real into a land of fantasy that the truth may be lost, being perceived by the reader as fantasy alone.

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## FOOTNOTE (NOVEMBER 1998):

Prince Norodom Ranariddh was elected premier in the first, UN-sponsored elections in 1993, but the country was blackmailed by ex-Khmer Rouge Hun Sen, who threatened further civil war. The compromise was to make Prince Ranariddh and Hun Sen co-premiers. In July 1997, Hun Sen ousted Prince Ranariddh in a coup. Many Ranariddh supporters were murdered.

Elections were held in July 1998, reported by independent observers to be as free and fair as could be expected under the circumstances (if one ignores the climate of fear and intimidation). Hun Sen's CPP party won the most seats in this election, with Ranariddh in second place and the only credible opposition MP, Sam Rainsy, in third place. Unfortunately, for the people of Cambodia, Hun Sen does not have a majority and is unable to form a government without the support of one of the opposition parties. These two other parties do not have enough seats to form a government together and an unhealthy stalemate has existed since July.

There have been large-scale demonstrations against Hun Sen and some reports of murders and beatings. Anti-Vietnamese feelings are being stirred up (based on the fact that Hun Sen is perceived as a Vietnamese puppet) and ethnic Vietnamese in the capital have been murdered as a result.

Hun Sen's compromise solution to the stalemate has been to offer Ranariddh the position of co-premier...

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ELIZABETH BILLINGER VISITED CAMBODIA AND VIETNAM IN DECEMBER 1996. SHE IS THE TREASURER OF THE BSFA AND PART OF (ALONG WITH PAUL BILLINGER, COLIN ODELL, MITCH LE BLANC AND, UNTIL RECENTLY, JOHN ASHBOOK) COVENTRY 'L' FANDOM — EDS.

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# Uncommon People

An Interview with Elizabeth Moon by Dr. Kat Patrick

Summertime drought in Texas commonly sees people doing nothing more than avoiding the sun, staying cool, drinking long tall glasses of iced tea with half a dozen wedges of lemon, but the SF novelist Elizabeth Moon isn't common people.

I first met Elizabeth in 1997, when a mutual acquaintance invited me to a party celebrating the Hugo nomination for *Remnant Population*. Horses soon became our topic of conversation. I tentatively suggested to her that we go on a trail ride, but my plane for England left too soon thereafter. We kept in touch via e-mail.

Last summer, we carried out the plan. By now, my mom had moved to a new ranch, some sixty miles or more from Elizabeth's place in Florence, but nothing – not distance, glare, heat, or melting asphalt – would stand between her and a trail ride.

As the sun climbed higher into bright blue, cloudless skies, we saddled a paint as her mount. I climbed aboard a Quarter Horse I used to ride as a child; his granddaughter served for my mom; and away we went, sweating and grunting and gritting our teeth against the blowing red sand.

Elizabeth knew a lot of the common names for trees and bushes and flowers, probably more fuelled by her intense love for the land than her academic background in biology. Perhaps, too, she'd been brushing up on such things for her son's home-schooling. Whatever the reason, Mom and I listened eagerly, wanting to know as much about the new terrain as Elizabeth would teach us.

For me, the trail ended too soon: three hundred acres is surprisingly small when riding with Elizabeth. We were unsaddling and bathing the horses before I knew it. With a Coke in one hand and a water-scraper in the other, I suddenly had an idea (possibly the result of standing under an oak tree, its shade allowing the brain to work): would she, if Vector was interested, agree to be interviewed via e-mail? It was the first 'shop' we'd talked all day. She said, 'Sure,' took a sip from her soda, and started running the water hose over the paint. Brownish, salty water dripped onto the sand, and the horse stamped his foot. That was the last 'shop' we talked all day. An author of fifteen novels, a mother of an autistic teenager whom she teaches herself, a keen outdoorswoman who rides horses and takes fencing lessons, a church-goer, a former Marine.

I hope you, too, will see in the answers to the following sixteen questions what I mean when I say: Elizabeth Moon isn't common people.

**KP: What is your biggest professional challenge at the moment?**

EM: Maintaining any kind of organized work schedule when I'm also homeschooling a teenager and my husband's work hours keep changing (something we hope is about to settle down).

**KP: What has been the highlight of your career so far?**

EM: Meeting some of the writers whose books saved my sanity... Something I would never have had the nerve to do as a non-writer. (It's hard enough even now that I've been published.)

**KP: You've said before that *Remnant Population* is perhaps your favourite book so far – why?**

EM: Because I was able to honor the memory of some remarkable women – and celebrate those still alive. I first noticed that I wanted to say more about old women in *Liar's Oath*, when Dorhaniya appeared. The 'aunts' of the Serrano books didn't quite satisfy the need, largely because they were all so privileged. Ofelia gave voice to some of my experience which I'd never found a way to use.

**KP: In *Remnant Population*, the relationship between Ofelia and the indigenous creatures reminds me of Gulliver and the Houyhnhnms in *Gulliver's Travels* – how close to the mark is this comparison?**

EM: Not very, to my mind. It's been over thirty years since I read *Gulliver's Travels*, (it's not one of the books that's stayed with me) and what I remember is how unimportant Gulliver was to the whole thing. He was hardly more than a plot device, the observer with the right attitudes to allow an easy comparison of various alien societies to the presumed reader's experience; I could not imagine that a book about Gulliver at home would be interesting, because Swift had not intended that the story be about Gulliver. It was about the absurdities of the society Swift knew, exposed by the blank slate Gulliver going abroad. *Remnant Population* centers on Ofelia – on the individual old woman. Her encounter with the alien culture reveals her internal structure, her conflicts; though her conflicts result, in part, from her culture's conditioning, there is no direct comparison of culture except through her very chromatic lens.

**KP: Your experience as a paramedic reveals itself in your very first published short story, 'ABCs in Zero Gravity,' your stint in the US Marines informs the Heris Serrano series, and your love of horses turns up again and again – what other experiences, skills, or projects do you think play important roles in your work?**

EM: Everything I've done ends up in the work sooner or later. There are echoes of the microbial ecology I studied in graduate school in all those 'environmental systems' bits; life with a septic tank rather than a city wastewater system has certainly influenced all the fantasy. A passion (and very small talent) for music comes out in most of the longer works and some short ones (such as 'New World Symphony.')

Growing up the child of an engineer/architect mother gave me the chance to visit construction sites, handle tools, and grasp manufacturing processes. She also demonstrated fabrication in the household – she designed and made clothes and household furnishings. I was taught sewing, knitting, crochet, and needlepoint, as a matter of course. I'm not good at any of it, but knowing how it's done allows me to include these crafts with respect. I like walking, preferably in open country, where I can feel the shape of the land and store up quiet and beauty... this love of the land probably shows up in any story set on a planet. We knew a wonderful botanist, when I was younger, who taught me how to observe not just individual plants, but plant communities. And so on and so on.

**KP: Are there any experiences, skills, or projects you wish you had done, or hope you will do?**

EM: Dozens. I'd like to get back to painting, for instance. I'd like to learn rock climbing. Travel to more places. Make an entire sweater myself (no matter how funny it looks.) Sing in a production of Brahms's *German Requiem*. Do some white-water kayaking. Ride faster horses over bigger fences. Learn to play the trumpet. Learn to drive a pair and a four-in-hand. Learn to make soufflés that do not resemble cream-colored hockey pucks. Build a tower (even a small tower – this desire to pile stones on stones is something my husband and I share – some atavistic urge.) Learn to play one-step-more-difficult pieces on the piano (using all ten fingers, for instance.) Go into space in body, not just in spirit. Learn to speak in political meetings without losing my temper and staying up till long after midnight thinking of what I should have said. Become a formidable old woman.

**KP: One book reviewer claims your 1997 novel, *Once a Hero*, is a 'Space Opera Action Adventure Science Fiction with a gender twist'**

...this desire  
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share...

that nevertheless has 'Something Worth Thinking About' – what kinds of issues do you consider 'worth thinking about'?

EM: The old reliables: good, evil, life, death, age, power, justice, injustice, hubris, war, peace, family. Character, and the way that character interacts with events. Consequences, and the way that they were or were not foreseen by the characters. And every possible combination of these.

**KP: Which of your characters do you think is most like you?**

EM: Any one of the bystanders, the non-viewpoint characters who are concerned with keeping things going, and who notice a lot. In real life, and as a writer, I'm a behind-the-scenes stagehand, making sure that the right light is focused on the right character in this scene, and that the props for the first act aren't mixed with those for the third. Like most such offstage help, I'm sometimes convinced I could speak the lines better than the leading actors, but experience has shown that I'm not. What's fun about being a writer is that I can pretend to be on-stage as the hero, satisfying that itch for the spotlight.

**KP: Your husband and son are very important to you, but do they appear in your books in any way?**

EM: Husband yes, son no (except very indirectly.) Richard has a part in all the good male characters. I try not to steal the same traits for each of them, but the decency is always his. Michael has never appeared as a character; he's autistic, and only now able to discuss whether or not he would want a character based on him. However, his difficulty in learning language and my struggle to find ways to communicate did inform *Remnant Population*.

**KP: Which authors do you credit with influencing your work the most?**

EM: I'm hopeless at teasing apart influences in other writers, and certainly can't do it for myself. Besides, it would be arrogant to claim as influences the writers I most admire. But I can think of two who were materially involved in getting me to write, and then to submit my work for publication. When I was very young – three or four – my mother created two little picture books for me. One of them was a surprise; the other I was allowed to watch in progress. Watching her plan, illustrate, and print the text with her drawing pens – then bind it, and make a cover for it – taught me that books were made by real people. She told me later that I quickly copied her (at least as far as the writing and drawing went), and by the time I started school I was writing (very bad) little stories.

But over the years I became convinced that my work was no good, and the change in fashion in science fiction in the mid-to-late Sixties added weight to this belief. It wasn't until the early 1980s that the thought of writing for publication rose again. I had been writing all those years, of course (couldn't stop): plays, poetry, stories of many types, nearly all unfinished. A friend with a graduate degree in English literature (and thus, to my mind, an expert) had never been satisfied with what I wrote, so I drifted on, more and more depressed about the whole thing.

Then, within a year or so of 1980, I bought another sf book by a new writer. I don't now recall her name. But the book was awful – badly written, stupidly plotted, its characters mere political slogans. If that could be published – and by an unknown – then I'd waited long enough... I knew (with the arrogance of the unpublished writer) that my worst stories were better than that. Although at the time I was infuriated with that writer for wasting my money, she actually did me a good turn, because I quit moping about with writing, waiting for some celestial searchlight to land on me and pronounce my genius.

**KP: If someone were coming to read your work for the first time, what might you suggest they begin with and why?**

EM: I'd have to ask what else that person liked, because of the range of the work. Those who like heroic fantasy, for instance, are naturals for

the Paksenarrion books, starting with *Sheepfarmer's Daughter*. Someone who likes Warehouse might well enjoy 'Hunting Party', and it's appealed to people who like horses but not necessarily science fiction. Those who like hard sf should probably start with *Phases*, which has some of my early *Analogue* stories, pure science speculation. The advantage of *Phases* is that it has selections from each of the several areas: straight sf, humorous sf and fantasy, and so on. Older people who don't usually read science fiction at all have enjoyed *Remnant Population*.

**KP: What is the importance of Cons in your professional career?**

EM: Conventions allow me to meet other writers and a reasonable cross-section of readers. They're also a break from everyday life, and a good excuse for travel.

**KP: Your short story collection, *Phases*, has recently been published and, like your earlier collection, *Lunar Activity*, is a play on your name, but what 'phase' do you consider yourself in now?**

EM: Haven't a clue. The publisher picked the title on that one, and while it's a cute play on words, I don't feel connected to it personally. Perhaps the problem here is that, for any writer, personal life and professional career are very likely to be out of phase, making it hard to define which phase is dominating.

**KP: I have to say that my favourite story in *Phases* was 'Too Wet to**

**Plow' about a farmer and his family struggling with a flooding Mississippi River. How do you see your own relationship with the land, and does it play any role in your work?**

EM: Absolutely. My feeling for land is positively archaic. There's an emotional connection to it, easiest to feel when it's not covered with buildings but still there even when it is. It's rather like music – a connection I first made when I first heard Bach's *Prelude and Fugue in D-minor*, and a fully 3-D memory of a certain valley in Colorado popped into my head. Some landscapes resonated in my head and heart for decades: there's a particular miniature waterfall on the Appalachian trail, for instance, and Kolob Canyon area of Zion Canyon National Park. But farmland well-managed is almost as delicious. Where I grew up, the irrigated soil ranged from milk chocolate to dilute cocoa in color, striped with the varied greens of winter vegetables, edged, with rows of tall palms – almost edible beauty. I remember looking down on one farm in West Virginia, a narrow twisty valley below steep ridges, with its hay meadows bright green against the dark trees. This passion for land shows up in quite a few places – I have to fight the temptation to spend far too much time on the landscape.

**KP: Which of your books are currently available in Britain?**

EM: Currently available: the Paksenarrion books (*Sheepfarmer's Daughter*, *Divided Allegiance*, *Oath of Gold*), and the two books I co-authored with Anne McCaffrey, *Sassinak* and *Generation Warriors*. The Serrano books are scheduled for release over the next year or so, starting with *Hunting Party*.

**KP: What should we be looking out for from you in the near future?**

EM: *Rules of Engagement* will be out in a few weeks (or, depending on when this comes out, will be already out.) This is the next *Esmy Suiza* book, and I'm over halfway through the next. I have a couple of stories coming out in anthologies in the next year. My web page (<http://www.sff.net/people/Elizabeth.Moon>) has links to online bookstores, and more information on overseas publication, including links to publishers.

[NB: The website also includes several interesting essays about writing, Elizabeth's upcoming con appearances, biographical information, and FAQ].

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Where I grew up, the irrigated soil ranged from milk chocolate to dilute cocoa in color...



# Cognitive Mapping: Transformation

by Paul Kincaid

For much of his life, Algis Budrys was trapped by the Cold War. Since his homeland, Lithuania, had been swallowed up by the Soviet Union, he was effectively a stateless person.

Only when the Baltic States gained a measure of freedom, the first crack in the facade of the Soviet Union, was he free to leave America with the expectation of being able to return again. His powerful Cold War fable, *Who?*, is built upon the lack of identity his statelessness must have engendered. A leading scientist on our side is badly injured in an explosion near the Soviet border. The other side rescue him, nurse him, then return him; but now his head is encased in an iron mask that cannot be removed without killing him. He has been transformed, but has he been changed? Rogers is given the task of trying to find out if the man in the mask is who he claims to be, and Budrys presents us with the constitutes identity.

It is a question that science fiction has been asking throughout its history. One way this has been done is to confront humanity with other beings – aliens, robots, monsters – but it is far more effective, and chilling, if we are forced to confront the monster, the stranger, within ourselves. This is something that Robert Louis Stevenson recognised when he created *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1885) in which the familiar veneer of civilisation is scratched to reveal the violence of a human animal still close to the beasts. Ever since Stevenson revealed that Frankenstein's creature can be found within us all, science fiction's literature of transformation has found endless ways to strip away or overlay our familiar flesh in an effort to discover how much we are thus changed.

Sometimes such transformation has been the stuff of comedy. F. Anstey considered how it might be if a child and an adult swapped places in *Vice Versa* (1882). P.G. Wodehouse wrought exactly the same transformation in *Laughing Gas* (1936) (as did a number of later films such as *Big* [1988]), while Thorne Smith essayed a variation on the theme in *Turnabout* (1931) in which a man and his wife swap bodies. These are all essentially social satires, the humour, as in so much comedy, resting upon the sudden shift in perspective, and the satire stemming from the opportunity, as Robbie Burns put it, 'to see ourselves as others see us'. Wodehouse and Anstey both use the direct, uncomplicated viewpoint of a child to cut through the pretension and stiffness of the adult world, while an adult trapped in a child's body allows them to demonstrate how much we take for granted and how much we leave behind as we get older. Smith preferred a broader humour based on the differences between the sexes, keeping it to a superficial satire of style and behaviour rather than a deeper consideration of the subject attempted, for instance, in Samuel R. Delany's novel of sexual transformation, *Triton* (1976).

Generally, however, transformation has been the basis for tragedy, the further one goes from the familiar human pattern the

more opportunity there is for sadness, madness and death. No matter what the motives for making the change – and such transformations are usually entered upon for the best of motives – the end result is generally bad. Dr Jekyll sought to improve humankind's health but ended up becoming a werewolf as violently and as fatally as the young tourist in *An American Werewolf in London* (1981) or the central character in Gene Wolfe's *The Hero as Werewolf* (1975). Griffiths in H.G. Wells's *The Invisible Man* (1897) sought freedom but found only a trap as inescapable as the one confining the convict in Robert Silverberg's *To See the Invisible Man* (1962). Fred/Robert in Philip K. Dick's *A Scanner Darkly* (1977) took drugs also as a way of finding a sort of freedom, but ended up sundering his

mental landscape so violently that the one person became unknowingly both hunter and prey. All lost their identity in the change.

But such transformations cannot be all bad. Artificial limbs have been available for centuries, more recently we have added plastic surgery, pacemakers, transplants and a host of other ways in which medical science remakes the body. How can we be risking our identity by extending our life in this way: for all the metal and plastic that may be insinuated in among our flesh and blood, we remain the same person surely? The answer science fiction gives is: it's all a matter of scale. Yes, artificial means can enhance life, as in James Tiptree Jr's *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* (1973); it can even turn us into some sort of Superman as in Martin Caidin's *Cyborg* (1972) or the film *Robocop* (1987). Nevertheless, the further one goes along this route, as the man gradually transformed to suit the harsh environment of Mars in Frederik Pohl's *Man Plus* (1976), the more distanced one becomes from friends, family, the rest of humanity. Kevin Anderson has wrought a further variation on this theme in *Climbing Olympus* (1994) in which the human prisoners, transformed to survive on Mars, have the task of terraforming that planet and hence of destroying the only environment that can now sustain their life. Is greater strength worth such a cost?

Not when we are a social creature, as science fiction so resolutely paints us. Yet we cannot help pursuing our dreams. We are fascinated by the wonders and possibilities of being other (if we were not, we would not read fantasy and science fiction, would we?) and despite the moral lessons given out in sf stories and novels galore, we still welcome the chance to make our dreams come true. M. John Harrison tells what happens in his chilling novel, *Signs of Life*. Isobel dreams of flying, so intently that when she discovers a medical technique that can implant feathers in her body, she seizes upon it. The technique is meant to be purely cosmetic, but she imagines it will make her into a sort of bird. When, inevitably, it fails, it becomes a metaphor for the way all our dreams fail, for all the chances we don't take, for the way we have to continue trying to change our lives.

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*'That night they shot a needle full of some anaesthetic into my spine. When I woke up again, I had this arm.'*

*The motorised limb flashed up and his knuckles rang faintly against his skull. Either from the conducted sound or the memory of that first astonished moment, Martino winced visibly.*

*His face fascinated Rogers. The two lenses of his eyes, collecting light from all over the room, glistened darkly in their recess. The grilled shutter set flush in his mouth opening looked like a row of teeth barred in a desperate grimace.*

*Of course, behind that facade a man who wasn't Martino might be smiling in thin laughter at the team's efforts to crack past it.*

Algis Budrys, *Who?* (1958)

*She had discarded two cans of Gillette shaving foam, an old-fashioned safety razor of mine and some spare blades. She had slit her wrists. But first she had tried to shave the nascent feathers from her scalp, upper arms and breasts, hacking at the keratin until her skin was a mess of bruises and abrasions, indescribable soft ruby scabs, ragged and broken feather sheaths like cracked and bloody fingernails. Miami. In a confused attempt to placate me, Isobel had tried to get out of the dream the way you get out of a coat.*

M. John Harrison *Signs of Life* (1997)

THIS IS THE FIRST OF A NEW SERIES OF ARTICLES ON VARIOUS ASPECTS OF MUSIC AND SF AND FANTASY. FUTURE ISSUES WILL FEATURE TANYA BROWN ON CLASSICAL MUSIC, ANDREW BUTLER ON THE DEPICTION OF BLUESMAN ROBERT JOHNSON IN SF, AND GARY DALKIN ON FILM MUSIC.

## The Music of the Spheres – Part One: The Influence of Science Fiction on Modern Popular Music

by Ian J. Simpson

**Author's Note:** It is certain that someone's favourite artist, band or song will not be mentioned in this article. This is unavoidable within the space of a magazine feature. Also excluded for reasons of space are many references to fantasy in popular music (e.g. by Led Zeppelin, Marc Bolan) and horror (e.g. by Alice Cooper, Black Sabbath). There is no mention of key SF/fantasy band Yes as they were the subject of the article 'The Other Side of the Sky' by David Wingrove in Vector 131 [April/May 1986].

**Music** – 'art form consisting of sequences of sounds in time; any sequence of sounds perceived as pleasing or harmonious'. *Collins Dictionary, 1987*

Part of the idea of Science Fiction is to explore ideas and make social comment in a way that isn't always possible in other mediums, and there is another method of telling an original Science Fiction tale, other than on paper or celluloid. There are many original characters, stories, worlds, universes and ideas to be found in song lyrics, and sometimes interpreted from instrumental tracks.

Some comment for example, Charles Shaer Murray's article on music featured in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*; Clute and Nicholls, 1993) has been made that Science Fiction in popular music is a secondary event, resulting from narcotic, psychedelic adventures in the late 1960s. Obviously, the imaginative and often surreal concepts found in stories such as *Brave New World* and 2001, appealed en masse to the spaced-out and stoned rockers of the 1960's generation: The Steve Miller Band even named a track 'Brave New World' in 1969.

However, before this time popular music was restricted by the industry's commercial requirements. The middle to late 1960s was a period when popular musicians were finding their own creative energies and a new art-form was developing. Artists were genuinely interested in the new in all its forms, and it was natural that many such turn to SF and fantasy both for inspiration and as a means of expression.

Certainly the influence of drugs on the development of rock and pop music should not be ignored. It would take a brave individual to deny the influence of drugs on The Beatles. It would take a braver one to say what 'Yellow Submarine' was truly about, but, in 1968, it was the first time an original Utopian World had been described in pop music. The floodgates opened, and most of the major players in the development of modern pop dipped into either Science Fiction or fantasy during the late 1960s and onwards through the following decades. It was a fresh time for music, and for Science Fiction.

One leading band was The Pink Floyd. As part of the new explosion of music on the London scene in 1966, the Pink Floyd came to epitomise the psychedelia of the age. The 1967 album, *Piper at the Gates of Dawn* contained 'Astronomy Domine', while the following year *Saucerful of Secrets* featured the SF classics 'Set The Controls For The Heart Of The Sun' and 'Let There Be More Light', which begins with the words 'The spaceship landed at Mildenhall'.

Since then the band has used its Science Fiction themes: 'Childhood's End', on 1972's *Obscured by Clouds* LP, after the Arthur C. Clarke novel; the obligatory nuclear holocaust 'Two Suns in the Sunset' (on *The Final Cut* (1983)), and in the dystopian/fascist world of *The Wall* (1979). This complex double-album explored the relationship between a fictional rock-star and his audience, and is best remembered for the anti-authoritarian 'Another Brick in the Wall, Pt. 2'. The album inspired a nightmarishly apocalyptic film, *Pink Floyd The Wall* (1982), by Alan Parker, starring Bob Geldof as 'Pink' and complete with surreal animations by Gerald Scarfe.

A contemporary of these English experimentalists was Jimi Hendrix. Born in 1942, Hendrix grew up under the influence of his

Cherokee Indian grandmother.

This may go some way to explain the mystical yet earthy nature of much of Hendrix's powerful guitar-led rock. He arrived at a destination close to the spirit of New Wave with '1983 (A Merman I Should Turn To Be)'. The 1968 song explores Hendrix's, to use J.G. Ballard's term, Inner Space. Others notable songs by Hendrix include 'Third Stone from the Sun' which is a report from an alien coming Earth, and 'Delta Blues' which features water on Mars.

It was 1969 before the merger of popular music and SF was completed, and in the history of modern music, no one could have done it better than David Bowie. From basic folk roots, and following a similar path to Marc Bolan, Bowie created more dark mythologies and Science Fiction fables than any other contemporary music performer.

First came the single 'Space Oddity' (1969), which introduced the astronaut, Major Tom, a figure to whom Bowie would return throughout his career. Next Bowie invented a post-apocalyptic world and placed himself inside it; reinventing himself as Ziggy Stardust, a bisexual 'leper-messiah' leader of a rock band with finite time to live. Bowie described Ziggy as 'a well behaved tiger on Vaseline with a snow white tan, trapped in a cosmic jive'. The album which resulted was the rock classic: *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and The Spiders from Mars* (1972).

At this time Bowie was experimenting with both Tibetan Buddhism and acting, both of which in different ways added to the detached persona he created around himself as a singer. *Diamond Dogs* (1974) was a second post-apocalyptic tale, with similarities to 1984 and to Harlan Ellison's *A Boy and his Dog*.

Bowie also starred in genre related films, most notably in Nicholas Roeg's *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976). He was also commissioned to write the film score, but his recording commitment to his next album, *Station to Station* (1976), prevented him from doing so. Some of the potential soundtrack music was adapted for the 1977 LP, *Low*. Featuring a photo from *The Man Who Fell to Earth* on the LP's cover, *Low* was also Bowie's first collaboration with composer Brian Eno.

Bowie has flirted with Science Fiction throughout his career, with the 'Big Brother' idea appearing again in *Heroes* and *Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps)*. 1983's *Let's Dance* album contains the song 'Cat People', taken from the previous year's remake of the film of the same name. Other notable songs include 'Life on Mars?' (1972) and 'Video Crime' (1989) the latter with the Bowie's group Tin Machine. Bowie's interest in the world of fantasy carried over into starring roles in Tony Scott's contemporary vampire film *The Hunger* (1983), Jim Henson's children's fantasy *Labyrinth* (1986) and a cameo appearance in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (1992).

The 1970s were a veritable feast of original Science Fiction in popular music, perhaps as a result of the phenomenal success and perceived originality of David Bowie. Perhaps it is no surprise that friend and collaborator of Bowie's, Brian Eno became highly regarded, if not particularly commercially successful. 'The Fat lady of Limbourg' from *Taking Tiger Mountain (by Strategy)* (1974) is an original Science Fiction tale of espionage, and much of Eno's instrumental work feels like Science Fiction in the way that Pink Floyd's instrumental music

feels science-fictional. Music such as *Apollo: Atmospheres & Soundtracks* (1983), written for a documentary on the Apollo missions (Mike Oldfield scored an ITV documentary on the Apollo missions).

Using pioneering techniques such as tape-looping, Eno's music, often in collaboration with King Crimson guitarist Robert Fripp, was dubbed ambient, invoking mood and atmosphere rather than strong emotions, two decades before a 'dance' sub-genre adopted the term. This science-fictional sound can be heard on such albums as *Ambient 1: Music for Airports* (1979) and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (with David Byrne) (1981).

Eno was also a full time member of the group Roxy Music, and their 1972 eponymous first LP contains pure Science Fiction. The stand-out track, 'Re-make/Re-model', features a female android called 'CTA953B'. Further forays into Science Fiction include a Utopian journey in 'Amazona', (on *Stranded* (1973)) and 'Manifesto' (on *Manifesto* (1979)) is an original retelling of the Jekyll and Hyde story.

The rock bands of the 70's seemed keen on exploring either Utopias or Dystopias. Both are classic Science Fiction themes. However, it is possibly the cold war paranoia of the era that led to the post-apocalyptic vision to be the most common Science Fiction theme in music.

Crosby, Stills and Nash offered the depressing 'Wooden Ships' (1969) where in mankind struggles to survive in a post nuclear world. The Grateful Dead wrote 'Standing on the Moon', a story of Earth's petty war seen through the eyes of a singer standing on the moon. This was followed by 'Morning Dew', (1967) yet another post-apocalyptic vision, where two young lovers walk among the fall-out. These are but a few isolated examples of what was a very common theme.

Arthur Brown first came to prominence in the late sixties with the song *Fire*. In the early '70s he developed 'Time Captives', about a colony who crash their timeship. Other Science Fiction imagery can be found in his albums: *Galactic Zoo Dossier* (1972), *Kingdom Come* (1973) and *The Journey* (1972).

A more ambitious outing came from the Electric Light Orchestra, as they dedicate an entire LP to a Science Fiction concept. The time-traveller hero of *Time* (1981) explores a world in the 21st Century. Then, picking on a Dystopian vision, '10538 Overture' (1972) is either about the year or the name of a person (they won't say which).

It is well known that Queen's Brian May and Roger Taylor were Science Fiction fans, and this is reflected in the band's music. Their first dip into Science Fiction features a yet another dystopian fascist, who runs the world in 'Seven Seas of Rhye' (1972). Later, the concepts of relativistic travel are considered in 'Thirty Nine' from 1975's *A Night at the Opera* album. Although devoid of Science Fiction related music, 1977's *News of the World* features a cover by Science Fiction artist Kelly Freas, inspired by the 1951 SF film, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* as did ex-Beatle Ringo Starr's 1974 album, *Goodnight Vienna*. Queen came back to Science Fiction with songs for the Dino De Laurentiis produced film *Flash Gordon* in 1980 and with *Machines on The Works* (1984).

1983 saw Brian May, and some of his rock star friends collaborate on the *Star Fleet Project*, an album full of Science Fiction references and themes.

In 1986 Queen released *A Kind of Magic*, almost every track from which appeared, though some very briefly, in the fantasy film *Highlander*. Little of the remainder of Queen's music featured Science Fiction as the band continued, until the untimely death of Freddie Mercury in November 1991.

The three remaining members still publish under the name Queen, and have recently ventured into computer 'multimedia', with a CD-ROM game entitled *Queen: The Eye*. This game has a plot involving the voluntary euthanasia of the inhabitants of a future world. The game has been novelised, making Queen a rarity among rock bands: a group directly responsible for the existence of a Science Fiction novel.

Genesis visited the last man on Earth with 'Watcher of the Skies'

on the 1972 album *Foxtroop*. On the same LP 'Get 'em out by Friday', concerns a world of genetic control, 'One For the Vine' on *Wind and Wuthering* (1977) concerns time travel; while alien visitations feature in 'Keep it Dark' from *Abacab* (1981). Most impressive, however, is the concept double-album *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway*. This combines elements of Science Fiction with surrealism, telling a tale of the opening of a portal to another universe full of mutants and monsters. Much of the rest of Genesis' 70s career was based in fantasy.

The Genesis member's solos careers also deserve mention. Tony Banks' concept album *Please Don't Touch* follows the New Wave (in SF not music) and concerns the loss of memory and identity, and paradoxes of perception. The same year Mike Rutherford's solo album *Soxcreep's Day* has a variety of Science Fiction themes and elements, the title track being inspired by an SF novel by Peter Currell Brown. Later Rutherford's group Mike and the Mechanics would release the single 'Silent Running' (1988), inspired by the 1971 film.

...telling a tale of the opening of a portal into another universe full of mutants and monsters.

Science Fiction in the 70s, for all the bands and artists already mentioned, was dominated by a linked trilogy. Blue Oyster Cult, Hawkwind and Michael Moorcock. Having published around forty books, Moorcock wrote songs and collaborated with these two bands, as well as performing with his own band Deep Fix. Deep Fix occasionally featured some of the members of Hawkwind, and in 1975 produced the album *New World's Fair*, which was based on the concept of a fairground at the end of the world. Moorcock also wrote a novel called *The Deep Fix* under the name James Colvin.

Science fiction themes and references abound in the music of Hawkwind. Early in their career, at a time when the Portobello Road scene was heavily influenced by drugs and psychedelia (and it may still have those associations today), Hawkwind performed with Moorcock, who read out his poetry over the bands instrumental numbers. Their first collaboration, with Moorcock playing and narrating, was 1974's *Warrior on the Edge of Time*, based on the Eternal Champion books. Later, with Moorcock, they produced *Time of the Hawklords*, in which a band saves the world, the stand-out song being 'Veteran of Psychic Wars'.

The collaboration continued with the 1982 concept album *Choose Your Masques*, which featured typical Moorcockian chaos-related themes as well as Moorcock standards such as Coded languages. The final album of the collaboration was 1985's *The Chronicles of the Black Sword*.

Many of Hawkwind's other albums are heavily science fictional. This is particularly true of *In Search of Space* (1971) and *Sonic Attack*, (1981) but the influence of the genre runs deep through-out their career.

Blue Oyster Cult formed in USA under the shadow of the success of bands such as Black Sabbath and Deep Purple, and out of the ashes of the band Soft White Underbelly. The group members were fans of comics and the original *Star Trek* series. Their eponymous debut album feature lyrics heavily influenced by H.P. Lovecraft. 1974's *Secret Treaties* was set in an existential reality, and featured the songs 'Flaming Telepaths' and 'Astronomy'. With Michael Moorcock the band released *ET Live* in 1978, while their 'The Great Sun Jester' (1979) is based on Moorcock's *The Firedown*. Their final collaboration with Moorcock *Fire of Unknown Origin* (1981) featured Elic the Eternal Champion. Like Genesis, much of Hawkwind's and BOC's music is more accurately described as fantasy.

Rock music in the 70s was not the only form of popular music to venture into the world of Science Fiction. George Clinton became the funk equivalent to David Bowie, literally becoming his own Science Fiction device. With his two major projects; Parliament and Funkadelic, he adopted the persona of an alien bandleader. Noted for the album *Motherhip Connection* (1986), he is best remembered for lavish Science Fiction based stage shows, during which he would descend to the stage in his 'Mothership'.

The New Wave of Science Fiction had a cousin in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The term New Wave became a synonym for punk in the US, (and later for the surviving ex-punk bands in the UK). Rock's New Wave's exponents dipped into Science Fiction on occasion.

Blondie sang about a man from Mars on 'Rapture' (1981), while 'Dragonfly' described a race between spaceships.

More significantly, The Stranglers produced a concept album in the late seventies called *The Gospel According to Meninblack*. This concerns a group of aliens who have cultured the human race as a food source. The Meninblack first appear on their earlier album *The Raven* (1979). The Stranglers based their song 'Time to Die' (1993) on a speech from the movie *Blade Runner*. At the same time, The Clash warned of future Fascist states on 'Groovy Times', while the seminal *London Calling* and 'Atom Tan' are dedicated to the apocalypse. The old themes had returned.

The 1980s saw popular music diversify beyond imagination as pop came of age and new forms of experimentation took place. Traditional bands battled it out with electronic music based on first synthesizers and sequencers, and then, increasingly, on samplers. The variety of Science Fiction themes in 1980s music mirrors this variety.

Originating in the 70s, the German Kraftwerk certainly sounded as though they were a Science Fiction band, though in actuality, the majority of their work was not influenced by the genre. In 1983 they did produce tracks 'The Robots', 'Spacelab' and 'Metropolis'. The Kraftwerk spin off band, Elektrik Music, was perhaps a closer foray into Science Fiction, with 'Esperanto' (1994) concerning the act of love-making with a machine. Meanwhile Eloi, a German progressive rock equivalent of Yes and Genesis produced a series of albums littered with SF imagery.

In the early 1980s other electronic bands performed original Science Fiction songs. Of these, Gary Numan is noted for 'Cars' (1979), a tale of environmental disaster. His 'Praying to the Aliens' (1979) features a race of androids bent on taking over our planet. Although Giorgio Moroder's album *Electric Dreams* was the soundtrack to the film of that title, it told a story in its own right, about a machine that develops the capacity to love (1984).

As in the 70s, fear of the nuclear bomb provided inspiration. Ultravox took the matter to heart. 'All Stood Still' (1980) follows an accident at a nuclear power plant, while 'Dancing with Tears In My Eyes' concerns two lovers trying to find each other after a nuclear attack.

Kate Bush also visited the nuclear war theme on 'Breathing' (1980), and 'Cloudbusting' (1985) sees an Orwellian government kidnapping the inventor of a rain making machine. The machine in the video was designed by H.R. Giger of Alien fame.

The world of rock and alternative music seems like a natural home for Science Fiction in the 80s. Like their cousins in the 70s, the likes of FM, Megadeth and Queensryche were quick to look at the world we know it and extrapolate the future. While some post-apocalyptic themes persist from the paranoia of the 1970s into Reagan's Cold War of the 80s, the idea of fusing man and machine had become a central topic. William Gibson's cyberpunk world first aired in *Neuromancer* (1982) and the success of *The Terminator* and the influence of *Blade Runner* were reflected in rock and pop.

Megadeth's 'Psychotron' is a half bionic, half organic being. Much of Megadeth's other work is based on the post-apocalyptic scenario, for example 'Holy Wars... The Punishment Due' (1990) and *Peace Sells... But Who's Buying* (1986). But they also ventured into the increasingly fashionable world of UFO's with 'Hanger 18' (1991). Meanwhile, FM's album 'Black Noise' (1977) is entirely original Science Fiction, dealing with areas such as suspended animation. Their piece entitled 'RocketRoll' (1979) is about Science Fiction in rock music.

Queensryche also built an entire album around a Science Fiction theme. Early in their career (*The Warning* (1984) and *Rage for Order* (1986)) they dealt with sentient machines, with tracks such as 'I Only Dream in Infra-Red'. However, it was their groundbreaking *Operation: Mindcrime* (1988) video and album project that stands out.

Queensryche were a small and unfashionable heavy metal band out of the Pacific Northwest up until the released of this remarkable record. The band released a video of the album called *Video: Mindcrime* to compliment the album. Set in yet another Orwellian future, as the title suggests, it is about mind control. The hero is a junkie, and is programmed by revolutionaries as an assassin, to kill religious and political leaders. The villain and leader of the revolutionaries is Dr. X, who is determined to take over governments by first assassinating elected leaders then installing his own people. Queensryche have not ventured into Science Fiction since the success of *Mindcrime*.

One of the more unusual rock bands of the 80s were VoiVod, a Canadian thrash-metal outfit. Like Bowie, they created a Science Fiction image around themselves, in this case known as the VoiVod character. Their debut was released in 1984, and ever since they have been heavily influenced by William Gibson and the cyberpunk genre. Their most noteworthy piece is *Dimension Hatross*, in which VoiVod create a parallel micro-dimension and then watches the development of its inhabitants.

The idea of artificial intelligence crops up time and again throughout VoiVod's music. However, their last release, 1995's *Negatron*, moves into the realm of *The X-Files*. It conceptualises the government conspiracy theory, with the US Government allowing aliens to abduct humans in exchange for knowledge.

The 1980s saw an explosion of underground, alternative and independent music.

This loosely termed 'indie' music may have escaped the mainstream, but it failed to escape the world of Science Fiction.

American indie music was exemplified by the likes of Dead Kennedys and B52's.

The Dead Kennedys featured numerous songs in the post-apocalyptic vein. Their album *Give Me Convenience or Give Me Death* (1987) contains many such themes. The B52's take a humorous view of Science Fiction. 'Cosmic Thing' (1989) has aliens dancing, while 'Topaz' (1989) looks at a future Utopia.

As Science Fiction is represented by B Movies such as *Death Race 2000*, a musical equivalent sprang up in 80s in the music of The Dead Milkman. Along with 'The Thing That Only Eats Hippies' (1986) and 'Big Lizard in My Back Yard' (1985), the classic 'Stuart' (1988) concerns an underground homosexual population building landing strips for gay Martians.

In the UK, Sisters of Mercy offered yet another post-apocalyptic tale: 'Black Planet' (1985). Much of their work and band ideology was inspired by the urban apocalypse writing of J.G. Ballard, but this song proved to be their only original idea.

Julian Cope took these ideas and images into the 1990s, as musical styles lost many of their boundaries, and many bands cited a variety of both musical and non-musical influences.

Having started his career in the underground scene in Liverpool in the late 1970s, Julian Cope began to introduce Science Fiction elements late in his career. Cope's part in this melange was to produce the tracks 'Upwards at 45 Degrees' which concerns the harvesting of humans by an unknown alien race, whilst 'The Tower' (1992) is about a man who inexplicably wakes up in a land dominated by warrior women. Much of Cope's other work references Science Fiction, for example quoting Philip K. Dick in his album *Jehovakill*. Meanwhile, 1994's *Autogeddon* contains the track 's.t.a.r.c.a.r.' and concerns a police-state dominated by the car (though some might argue that this is not SF).

Roger Waters, ex-leader singer of Pink Floyd, released *Radio K.A.O.S.* (1987) about a psychic who hears radio waves in his head, which he learns to control, and uses them to take over a top secret computer. In 1992, he released *Amused to Death* which sees alien anthropologists examining a dead Earth, declaring television had killed mankind.

It would seem that Science Fiction in music is always a good ten years or more behind the novel. Perhaps it is because it takes time for popular culture to accept the harsh and often damning ideas found in hard Science Fiction. In the 80s, music was influenced by the likes of

Dick and Ballard, and gradually by cyberpunk. This theme continued to develop in the 90's, witness U2's 'Lemon' (1993) and much of the 1993 album *Zooropa*. The aforementioned song is about the development of technology to watch yourself. The concept is one of a shallow, consumer world.

Front 242 are an industrial band, founded in 1981 in Belgium, with definite cyberpunk leanings. One song features a future assassin; 'Headhunter v3.0' (1995) while 'Television Station' (1987) features vicious corporate politics. The band also invented the futuristic musical style Electronic Body Music. In typical conspiracy fashion, they coded the titles of their last two albums and hide the code within the lyrics.

Billy Idol went one step further, dedicating an entire project to cyberpunk. He called it, with one hopes some wit, *Cyberpunk* (1993). Using spoken narrative in between tracks to heighten the mood, the scene is a post-apocalyptic cliché where information not only rules but is vital to survival. A government is creating a new generation of cyborg to defeat the evil Constitution, the members of which hoard information. Individual tracks tell separate stories: 'Wasteland' tells of how religion died, to be replaced by the all powerful information. This album, like Queensryche's *Operation: Mindcrime* before it, is an important incursion into the world of Science Fiction, as very few bands have produced an entire album based on an original Science Fiction theme.

While much of the Science Fiction music in the 90s has direct relationships with big budget movies (exemplified by recent productions such as *Men in Black* (1997) and *Devlin and Emmerich's* remake of *Godzilla* (1998)), it is the lesser known bands who continue to write new Science Fiction based music.

Porno for Pyros song 'Pets' (1993) is about Martians who invaded Earth with the intention of making humans pets. Shonen Knife are from Japan. 'Parallel Woman' tells of a super-heroine from another dimension. Much of their work concerns flying in spaceships or travelling to the moon, although there are few stories, simply themes. The 90s equivalent of the Dead Milkman must be Fishbone. With a tongue firmly stuck into their cheek, 'Voyage to the land of the Freeze-Dried Godzilla Farts' suggests that Hiroshima was actually caused by Godzilla, well, farting.

Although the 1990s has seen significantly less original Science Fictional pop music than the previous two, there are two lesser known, but quite important artists to mention. Whereas Bowie and Clinton reinvented themselves as Science Fiction characters GWAR, from Richmond, Virginia, have become a story in themselves.

They say they travelled the universe millions of years ago with a gang of pirates called the Scumdogs of the Universe. They were

imprisoned underneath the Antarctic after killing-off the dinosaurs and accidentally creating man by procreating with apes. Released by a pimp, pornographer and record company executive, they claim, through their music, that there is a sleeping maggot beneath the Pentagon, which will one day wake and carry them back into outer space.

GWAR consists of around 18 members who dress-up and act-out their pulp Science Fiction fantasies on stage, telling tales of galactic conquest through their music (and with cartoon gore special effects).

Meanwhile, Man or AstroMan? have also made Science Fiction part of their identity, though they are mainly an instrumental band and tell no original tales. They claim to be from the future, where their music is misunderstood, and so they have to travel to our time to perform. They have been sent back under the directive of The Unmentionable One.

Like GWAR, they have taken their identity further than the likes of Bowie. Each member has his own persona, for example, Star Crunch who learned his guitar in the Neutral Zone and whose alien DNA allows him the flexibility of visual modification, while Coco the Electric Monkey Wizard is a cybernetic lifeform created by the other band members. In the tradition of the exponents of spaced out Science Fiction rock, they carry the future of original Science Fiction in modern music.

Science Fiction has influenced music in many other ways, from bands re-telling novels, to them using samples from films, and to the stars of Science Fiction films singing their own Science Fiction based soundtracks. It is evident, however that the telling of an original Science Fiction tale has touched all forms of contemporary music from the mid 1960s to the present day.

While literary Science Fiction is often credited with a vision ahead of its time, music almost always reflects the time that it exists in. As music is an art-form that reaches across barriers of ideology, it takes longer for the general populous to accept new concepts. Thus, original Science Fiction pop music reflects the mood of the times. The 1960s, is full of optimism and exploration, with a healthy dose of mysticism. The 1970's and 80s were times of paranoia, with a fear of nuclear war, but the 80's also saw the dawn of the computer age, as seen by the mass population, and hence opened concepts of man combining with machine. The 1990s have witnessed an amalgamation of cultures and ideologies. Similarly, musical styles diverged and merged and recycled. The future will undoubtedly see another Bowie, VoIVod or GWAR, while their themes and original Science Fiction will mirror the mood of the moment.

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ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR BRITISH SCIENCE-FICTION WRITERS IS IAIN M. BANKS, AND, IN THE READER SURVEY A FEW ISSUES BACK, HE IS CLEARLY A WRITER YOU WANT TO READ ABOUT. HERE WE OFFER YOU A CHANCE TO DO THAT, TRACING THE ORIGIN OF A BANKS TITLE...

## Poetic Licence: Iain M. Banks's *Consider Phlebas* and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*

by Gary Wilkinson

Gentle or Jew

O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,  
Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you.

From *The Waste Land* by T.S. Eliot, quoted at the beginning of *Consider Phlebas* by Iain M. Banks

Iain Banks had already published three innovative and imaginative multi-genre novels when, adding an extra 'M' to his name, he produced his first pure science fiction novel – *Consider Phlebas* (1987). It was in *Consider Phlebas* that Banks introduced us to his Culture: a utopian anarchist 'empire' of humans and AI Drones and Minds, its department of Good Works – Contact – and Contact's secret

service – Special Circumstances.

Banks had already written several novels, which remained unpublished, before his success with *The Wasp Factory* (1984). Some of these were later rewritten as the Culture novels *Consider Phlebas* (1987), *The Player of Games* (1988), *Use of Weapons* (1990), the novella *The State of the Art* (published in the collection of the same name in 1991), and the non-Culture *Against a Dark Background* (1991). When *Consider Phlebas* was eventually published Banks had been working on the ideas surrounding the Culture for a long time so it was no surprise that he produced such a rich and mature novel.

As can be seen from the quote at the beginning of *Consider Phlebas*, the title was a phrase taken from T. S. Eliot's poem *The Waste*

*Land*. This poem is recognised as one of the major works of literature of the twentieth century; it is a modernist masterpiece. So how much, if any, of *The Waste Land* is in *Consider Phlebas*? I was able to ask the author that very same question at a recent reading.<sup>1</sup> His reply was in part the same as that which he had given in earlier interview: 'Phlebas is the drowned Phoenician sailor in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* which is my favourite poem, if you exclude Shakespeare. Not that I like what Eliot stood for, but he was a genius and *The Waste Land* is his masterpiece. Well, his and Pound's, also of iffy political leanings. I just always like the words, "Consider Phlebas". They looked good, they sounded good. They just looked like a title somehow. I tried all sorts of titles for the story before I settled on *Consider Phlebas*, but they all sounded too much like *Star Wars*. I knew it was a weird title but I thought well, if it works it'll just become right for the book.'<sup>2</sup>

He also informed the audience that *Consider Phlebas* is dedicated to his cousin Bill Hunt, who was an officer on the bulk carrier *Derbyshire*, which sank with all hands in a typhoon in the South China Sea, in 1980. The choice of name was definitely not an attempt to gain literary credentials or he would have ditched the 'camp aliens and laser blasters.' He has acknowledged the similarities to the poem in that the main character in *Consider Phlebas* is drowning and later undergoes a 'sea-change' – this being a motif running through *The Waste Land* – but that is far as it goes.

But there are a number of parallels between the two works, whether deliberate or not on Iain's part. To prove my point I will take a brief look at *Consider Phlebas* and then at *The Waste Land*, followed by examples of how the latter informs the former.

### Consider Phlebas

*Consider Phlebas* is a very visual book, coincidentally the one that Iain would most like to see filmed. The plot has a number of action set-pieces which remain vividly in the memory: the megaship crashing into the iceberg; the fight under the hovercraft; the ship *Clear Air Turbulence* escaping from inside the somewhat larger ship, *The Ends of Invention*; and the final train wreck. Iain Banks has described the plot of *Phlebas* as: 'There's all this space paraphernalia but you can paraphrase the story as just being about a ship-wrecked sailor who falls in with a gang of pirates and goes off in search of buried treasure. It's a yarn set in S.F. terms.'<sup>3</sup>

To expand on the above and give an overview of the plot: *Consider Phlebas* is a Space Opera set against the background of a war involving the Culture and the imperialist religious-fanatic empire of alien Idirans. The reasons, wider implications and conclusions of this conflict are not fully explained until the Appendices at the end of the novel and the action of the novel takes place on the periphery of the war.

The Idirans hire the protagonist (it's hard to call him a hero) to recover a Mind (a highly sophisticated AI) which has hidden itself on a quarantined 'Planet of the Dead.' The protagonist, Horza (or more formally Bora Horza Gobuchul, Banks loves long and complicated names and this is one of his more restrained examples), who, although appearing human, comes from the militarist bio-engineered race of shape-changing mercenaries known as the Changers.

At the beginning of the book we find him captured during a spying mission and about to be drowned in his captor's own effluent. However he is soon rescued by the Idirans, only to shoot off into space when a Culture ship attacks to await rescue again. This arrives not in the form of the Idirans but a gang of pirate/mercenaries. He fights his way into the crew and then accompanies the group onto a disastrous mission to a temple. On the next mission to a megaship once again disaster ensues when the megaship hits an iceberg. Eventually he kills the mercenary captain, taking over his identity and escapes from a Culture trap and a Special Circumstances spy. He then heads off to complete his mission on Schar's World to recover the Mind. This mission also ends in a disaster with a train crash and most of the protagonists dead or dying. The Mind is rescued (by the Culture) but after reading the appendices, this seems to have little effect on the

main events of the Culture/Idrian conflict – a mere footnote to a footnote.

### The Waste Land

*The Waste Land* was published in 1922 in *The Criterion* after a major and devastating real-life conflict; the First World War. However, although the poem has an overriding air of depression and despondency, Eliot was not just referring back to the war but to the desolation of man's spirituality in the modern age. The 'Waste Land' of the poem is modern European culture, which had come too far from its spiritual roots. Human beings are isolated and sexual relations are sterile, loveless and meaningless. The poem itself can, at times, seem annoyingly obscure but rewards careful study. It is a mixture of past and present, pulling ancient myths into a contemporary urban setting, literary yet slangy and iconoclastic; it is truly a product of the Jazz Age. The poem itself was written after several years' gestation and Eliot incorporated many and extensive revisions suggested by his mentor, the poet Ezra Pound.

Eliot was on the verge of becoming a Buddhist when he wrote *The Waste Land* and the poem forms a counterpoint between Eastern and Western religions, including Buddhism and Hindu as well as to the medieval legend of the Holy Grail. It finds in them the common thread of the mythic cycle of the death and resurrection of gods.<sup>4</sup> More specifically, he found in a book by Jessie Weston, *From Ritual to Romance* (1920), the story of the Fisher King, a mythic figure whose loss of power or fertility produces a corresponding blight or drought in his kingdom. Only through the death of this king and his replacement by a new, young, and vigorous knight can the land be restored to fertility. The possibility of regeneration is represented by the fragments into the text of the poem such as allusions to the Chapel Perilous in the 'What the thunder said' section of *The Waste Land*.

As with any work as intricate as this, there is a difference of opinion among commentators with regard to its interpretation. In the analysis that follows it will be impossible to track every interpretation, allusion or reference. Instead I will deal with those that I think influence and inform *Consider Phlebas*<sup>5</sup> and areas where there seems to be broad agreement.

...a ship-wrecked  
sailor who falls in  
with a gang of pirates  
and goes off in search  
of buried treasure.

The poem consists of five sections, which vary in rhythm and rhyme from line to line. It is often seemingly fragmentary in structure as Eliot quotes from or alludes to a wide range of literary sources in a number of languages. Because of the variety and, frequently, the relative obscurity of Eliot's allusions it is impossible to appreciate the full depth of the poem without some form of guidance. However the general impression of isolation, decadence, and sterility comes through in every reading. The poem presents a series of conversations or

scenes that lead through the wasteland to a moment of hope, the expectation of rain, at the end. These sections are titled and numbered to indicate shifts of scene and speaker. A brief description of the contents of the poem follows to give some idea of the breadth and depth of the work.

The first part of the poem, 'The Burial of the Dead,' starts in the voice of a countless looking back on her pre-war youth as a freer, more romantic time. Her voice is followed by a solemn description of present dryness when 'the dead tree gives no shelter.' Then the poem returns to a fragmentary love scene of the past, perhaps the countless's. The scene shifts to a fortune-teller who reads the tarot cards and warns of death for the 'drowned Phoenician Sailor'. One interpretation of 'The Phoenician Sailor' is instead of an actual person it is a type of fertility god whose image was thrown into the sea to symbolise the death of summer. The final section of part one presents a contemporary image of London commuter crowds moving along the streets blankly, as if dead. One pedestrian calls out to another, grotesquely asking if the corpse in his garden has sprouted yet, suggesting the necessity of death before rebirth can take place.

The subsequent parts of the poem are similarly complex, shifting unexpectedly between different locations and speakers. This can be

seen in the second part, 'A Game of Chess', subdivides into three sections: an exotic description of a making up table, a neurotic rich woman frustrated by her male companion's reserve and by a gossiping barroom monologue about sex, infidelity and abortion.

The third section, 'The Fire Sermon,' mingles snatches of an old marriage song celebrating the Thames River with a contemporary image of the filthy, trash-filled Thames. Then the ancient seer Tiresias (who been both male and female) narrates a banal and loveless scene of seduction of a typist by her lover, a real estate agent. The scene is squalid and passionless and the sexual act is meaningless to both participants. This is followed by contrasting images of Queen Elizabeth I boating on the Thames with her lover, the Earl of Leicester.

The fourth section, 'Death by Water,' is where the 'Consider Phlebas' quote is taken from. It fulfils the prophecy made by the fortune-teller in the first part. This brief section both marks death as the end, or, in keeping with the whole poem's structure, situates death as the prelude to transformation and rebirth.

The final section, 'What the Thunder Said,' begins with images of a journey over barren and rocky ground. The thunder is sterile, being unaccompanied by rain. Through the journey chaotic images of rot and of a crumbling city lead up to a when a cock (a symbol of Christ and hence rebirth) crows, announcing the coming rain. The poem ends with the exposition, almost a jazz riff, on three terms from Hindu lore: *Datta* (to give alms), *Dayadhvam* (to have compassion), and *Darmaya* (to practise self-control). Then the poem finally seems to collapse into a rush of quotations and allusions – a flood of meanings and suggestions ending with the word 'shanti' (peace) repeated three times.

## Influences

Initially it seems that as writers Eliot and Banks could not be further apart. Eliot, an American (later naturalised British) was a religious pro-marchist and politically right-wing literary poet whilst Banks is a Scottish, atheist, republican, socialist, popular genre novelist. However Banks's writing is very poetic and for a popular writer in places very experimental and non-populist. This is noticeable in works such as *The Bridge* (1986) and in particular, the recent novel *Song of Stone* (1997) which was based on a long poem written by Banks some years ago. *Consider Phlebas* even includes a snatch of quasi-poetry at the beginning which is repeated towards the end, which to me seems very close in style to a fragment of Eliot's.<sup>8</sup> Although Banks has said he does not want to be part of the literary establishment, he is clearly a literary writer despite his protestations.

Banks sees what he was trying to do in *Consider Phlebas* as what Brian Aldiss describes as 'Wide-Screen Baroque – a kind of free-wheeling interplanetary adventure, full of brilliant scenery, dramatic scenes and a joyous taking for granted of the unlikely.'<sup>9</sup> This was originally used to describe Alfred Bester at his prime and it seems Banks has inherited his mantle. It is also ironic that one of Bester's most well known works – *The Stars My Destination* (aka *Tiger! Tiger!*) – was modelled on the classic text, *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

*Consider Phlebas* reflects the despondent atmosphere of *The Waste Land*. In a number of interviews Banks has indicated that he was trying to break out of the straight-jacket of right-wing Imperialist American space opera and regain the intellectual high ground for the left.<sup>10</sup> He has done this in a number of ways. Unlike the majority of space opera there is no clear cut division between the Good Guys and the Bad; no evil empire and noble rebels. The Culture (although clearly Banks's 'favourite') at times seems to behave as badly, if not worse, than the Idrans who, although misguided, seem noble in comparison. All the major characters die or are near death at the end of the conventional narrative. In fact the reader is even cheated out of a conventional conclusion with the 'Dramatis Personae' section killing off most of the survivors of the previous narrative so that only the very minor protagonists, to whom we have little attachment, have a happy ending.

Also unlike say, the gung-ho atmosphere of something like *Starship Troopers* or a John Wayne war-movie, *Consider Phlebas* is more reminiscent of an anti-war film such as *Apocalypse Now*.<sup>11</sup> Banks is reiterating the old cliché that 'War is hell'. All the conflicts in the book

at best produce pyrrhic victories and are non-heroic and squalid affairs, filled with chaos and confusion where luck plays a large part in whether characters live or die. This was a deliberate step away from the attitude of novels such as *Dune* where everyone acts out a predictable chess game where all opponent's moves are known in advance. The Vietnam War has taught us how false an attitude this is.

Additionally, technology in *Consider Phlebas* is not completely reliable, failing in spectacular and lethal ways, mostly through lack of attention by the user, such as the 'failure' of the Antigravity harness on the megaship and the 'gun barrel crash' towards the end.<sup>12</sup> Another reaction against conventional space opera is the novel's treatment of so called Big Dumb Objects. In Banks's work, instead of spending a whole novel (or two or more) exploring an object such as the Vavatch ring and its megaships, it is merely used as backdrop to the main action and casually destroyed.

As I have already mentioned, Banks has acknowledged two deliberate connections between *Consider Phlebas* and *The Waste Land*; the fact that the protagonist Horza is drowning at the beginning of the novel and that he undergoes a 'sea change'<sup>13</sup> halfway through. Unlike the Phoenician Phlebas who drowns, Horza is rescued from death by drowning. In fact this 'rebirth' is needed for the Mind to be ultimately rescued. However it is only a temporary measure and throughout the book Horza is living on 'borrowed time.'

The 'sea change' referred to is an allusion in the poem to the image of the 'sea change' in Ariel's song in *The Tempest*.<sup>14</sup> This occurs twice in the poem, at the tarot reading scene and during 'Death by Water' section immediately before the lines in the quotation prefacing 'Consider Phlebas'. In the novel it is thought that after the disaster on the megaship Horza has drowned but he has survived, which is a mirror of the situation in *The Tempest* where an absent character is thought to have died.

The transformation<sup>15</sup> that Horza undergoes on the crashed shuttle roof during his 'sea change' is a double pun on change – not only does he decide to start the process of transformation into the identity of the mercenary captain, this is also the first time he decides to 'change' his destiny – to take control over fate. The nature of fate is a large theme in *The Waste Land*. In the poem the Phoenician 'turns the wheel': this is the 'wheel of fate' of both Tarot and Buddhist symbolism. In the novel Horza makes very few decisions of his own and for most part he is led by fate. Up until the 'sea-change' he is swept along in the events – captured then rescued, rescued again, then accompanying the mercenaries on two missions, accepting the lead of the captain. His eventual downfall is mostly brought about by the actions or inaction of others rather than his own decisions.

The poem prophesies death and in the novel the message from the Dra'azon – 'THERE IS DEATH HERE' (p. 293) could be interpreted as, rather than a description of the dead Changers and Idrans on the planet below, a predication that death awaits most of the crew of the *Clear Air Turbulence*. Another connection to the poem is the use of cards in the novel, although they are not used for prediction in the latter. Instead they are used in the gambling game of Damage, a feature of which allows the audience to dip into the thoughts of the participants which, coincidentally, is exactly what the poem does, with the reader dipping into the thoughts of others.

Although concentrating mainly on Horza the novel does have some different points of view, though not quite so many and varied as *The Waste Land*. As well as the Mind (whose potential is so vast that we can only begin to understand its mental processes because it is crippled), we also see one of the distant Culture agents who are supposed to direct the action. She however proves ineffectual to the main events; she even has a limb cast in plaster to symbolise this.

Eliot's poem has many religious images and, although not directly about religion, so does Banks's book. The Culture are fighting a war based on a post-religious ideology (their 'Good Works'), whilst the Idrans want to capture territory for religious reasons. The first place that is attacked by the mercenary group happens to be a religious temple, the monks of which are saved by the walls of their place of worship, although not in the conventional sense. Horza's beliefs are very close to those expressed in *The Waste Land*. He thought the Culture was decadent and lacking a spiritual centre having abandoned

its 'soul', its evolutionary destiny to machine intelligence (p. 29). The Dra'Azon is treated as it was a godlike being. It certainly has godlike powers and it is something, if not exactly to be worshipped, then to be placated.

The novel, being a quest, shares the same epic roots as the poem. One of the main themes of the poem is the legend of the Fisher King, which is a precursor of the Grail legend. In this a wounded, maimed or simply old king – connected with the fish symbol, both the Christian or pagan symbol of life (hence the Fisher King) – has to be rescued by a knight who passes certain tests and who above all suffers an ordeal in the Chapel Perilous (the location of the Grail). The ordeal involves ascertaining the significance of the symbols of the lance and the cup: the lance pierced Christ's side on the cross and the cup is the one used at the Last Supper. He may be challenged by a lady, a hag who later turns out to be a beautiful young girl, or he may be beguiled by a young woman who tries to seduce him. If he succeeds in his quest, the king is healed and with him the whole land returns from drought and sterility back to fertility and fruitfulness.

It is relatively easy to fit some of the events of the novel to the above. The Mind, which is crippled, is the Fisher King – it being the Minds that 'rule' the Culture. Horza, the knight, has to undergo so many trials and tests until he gets to Schar's World. Schar's World itself could be seen as the Chapel Perilous where he undergoes an ordeal (physical rather than intellectual). The train could be identified as a lance and the underground caverns as a cup. Once the ordeal on Schar's World is completed and the Mind is rescued (and later healed) the novel comes to its conclusion.

In the Appendices we are informed that the Ildrians are eventually defeated and in Banks's terms the land is brought back from the intellectual drought of religion to the fruitfulness of more sensible policies. Bavevda can be seen as the woman. She, like Horza, changes her identity and although she does not physically try to seduce him she tries to intellectually seduce him and especially his companions into the ideas of the Culture. Horza can also be identified as Phlebas from the poem, one a Phoenician and hence a seafarer whilst the other is a spacefarer. One suffers death by drowning, the other escapes death by drowning.

Another theme in the poem is the sterility of relationships. There are literally sterile relationships in the book because of the lack of fertility between different species of human (p. 82). However Banks reverses the situation of the poem in that the protagonist has found love both in his old relationship with the Changer on Schar's World (although this taken away from him) and with Yalson during the novel. In fact a large part of his motivation in returning to Schar's World is through the love he has for the Changer. It is of course heavily ironic that we find out that Yalson is pregnant only for that potential to be taken away and we are informed that, as almost the last sentence in the book, 'The Changers were wiped out as a species during the final stages of the war in space' (p. 467). Other examples of sterility in the novel are Schar's World which is virtually devoid of life, and the ideological positions of both the Ildrians and the Culture, are seen as sterile and non-progressive by each other.

The final part of *The Waste Land* takes place of a journey across barren and rocky ground and the final part of Phlebas takes place on an equally barren but frozen world and the end game takes place in a rocky and barren underworld. The captured Ildrian description of his journey that his companions endure is a nice counterpoint to the end of the poem (p. 371). The poem dissolves at the end into a number of allusions and metaphors whilst the novel end is equally radical with its postmodern appendices. Instead of a cock crow at the end of *The Waste Land*, we have a rather noisier train wreck. We even have rain at end of the novel as well, although this takes the form of a rain of foam to extinguish the flames of the train wreck. But we have no peace at the end of the novel unless you count death for virtually all the participants.

## Conclusion

Does *The Waste Land* inform *Consider Phlebas*? Well I think the above shows to some extent that it does. Horza can be identified as

both the knight from the Fisher King legend and Phlebas from the poem. However in some ways the book is the opposite of the poem. Clearly Banks thinks the secular Drones and Als of the Culture are a good thing and Religion is a bad thing and humanity will only mature when they throw off the constraints of old belief. In the end of course it is the religious Ildrian civilisation that is defeated and dies. This is opposite to what Eliot was implying with *The Waste Land* in that we should embrace old myths. Banks see the potential in progress whilst Eliot is disturbed by it.

It is interesting that Banks was contemplating having Horza survive but felt it would not be true to the book<sup>14</sup>. I have read several reviews (mostly on the internet) complaining about his death at the end of the novel and that somehow the reader has been cheated. His actions, on a cursory examination, do seem futile; Horza tries to get the girl but first his first love and then his new love is killed and he himself are killed by the actions of his former allies. The Mind is rescued, but by the Culture, the protagonist's opposition and the only survivors of the final confrontation are the drone and the Mind leading to a 'triumph of the machines' and the opposite of everything the protagonist stands for. This is indeed in keeping with the desolated nature of the poem.

However, buried in the appendices is the fact that once healed the Mind 'survived' the war despite taking part in many important space battles' (p. 467) and takes Horza's name so that after his death he becomes a hero as in those old epics the poem refers back to. Perhaps Banks is saying that the events of the novel contribute to the earlier ending of the war and therefore Horza is in the end heroically successful. The novel, like the poem and many of Banks's other works, is a puzzle, waiting to be solved.

Well, there is always the problem of taking too much poetic licence and writing too much into a text. Eliot himself said the reader should come to his own conclusions. I will leave you to do just that.<sup>15</sup>

## Notes

1. At the Iain Banks Song of Stone reading and question and answer session on 2 September 1998 at the British Library, London. Banks has also repeated much of this information in a number of interviews.
2. Interview with Iain Banks, *Science Fiction Chronicle* (October 1994). In *The Bridge* the protagonist's girlfriend loves T. S. Eliot too (Pan, 1987, p. 102).
3. Interview with Iain Banks, *Radical Scotland* # 42 (December 1989 / January 1990). His wish to see *Consider Phlebas* filmed is repeated in many interviews.
4. Eliot also studied Buddhism and Hinduism whilst reading anthropology at Harvard.
5. For the description and analysis of the poem I have referred mainly to *Brodie's Notes on T. S. Eliot's Selected Poems* by Desiree Hunt and *A Student's Guide to Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot* by B.C. Southam and especially *English Literature From 1785* by Kathleen McCoy and Judith Harlan.
6. 'The Jimnoti of Bozlen Two kill the hereditary ritual assassins of the new Yearling's immediate family by drowning them in the tears of the Continental Empathaur in its Sadness Season' p. 9, repeated p. 467 (All quotes taken from Orbit, 1993 edition).
7. Interview with Iain Banks, *Wired* (June 1996).
8. Interview with Iain Banks, *Wired* (June 1996).
9. This could be said to another reading of *The Waste Land*, as well as *Heart of Darkness* – but that's another story.
10. See *SFX* (June 1995) and *Consider Phlebas* pp. 116 and 351.
11. *Science Fiction Chronicle* (October 1994), *SFX* (June 1995) and also reiterated 2 September 1998 at the British Library, London.
12. See *A Student's Guide to Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot*.
13. The poem involves changes of identity, in particular the seer Tiresias who as both male and female can be seen to stand for all the characters in the work. Not only Horza but also Bavevda change their appearance and identity during the novel.
14. Interview with Iain Banks, *Wired* (June 1996) and other interviews.
15. See *A Student's Guide to Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot*. The notes to his poem which appeared after its first periodical appearance can be regarded as a spoof to trap the unwary as well as a guard against charges of plagiarism and a means to fill out an otherwise slim volume.

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GARY WILKINSON'S ARTICLE ON ALIEN<sup>3</sup> AND THE GRAPHIC NOVEL ADAPTATIONS APPEARED IN V202 — EDs.



# First Impressions

## Book Reviews edited by Paul Kincaid

Note: All novels marked: [ ] are eligible for the 1998 BSFA Award for Best Novel. All collections and anthologies marked: / contain stories that are eligible for the 1998 BSFA Award for Best Short Fiction.

### Poul Anderson – *Starfarers* [ ]

TOR Books, 1998, 383pp, \$25.95 ISBN 0 312 86037 4

Reviewed by Colin Bird

I remember eagerly purchasing a copy of Poul Anderson's *Mirkheim* back in the late seventies; not because I was seeking a literary adventure in the company of the author's merchant hero, Nicholas van Rijn, but because the book had a bright gleaming cover showing spaceships and exploding stars. However, I soon developed a taste for Anderson's intelligent space opera on its literary merit.

Most of us grow up and our reading habits become twisted by hormone explosions and a battery of life experiences. So it's interesting to approach a new Anderson book when I haven't read anything of his since cyberpunk and a shitload of other sf trends have passed us by.

*Starfarers* is a concentrated epic; detailing the search for an extraterrestrial race whose 'star trails' glimpsed by astronomers strongly suggest they have cracked the secret of interstellar travel. Mankind, having just invented its own potential interstellar drive, prepares to launch a ship on a journey of 60,000 light years. There's some fiddling about with relativity and time dilation here but, in essence, the crew face a journey of a few years while everything they hold dear back on Earth will disappear with the

passing millennia. With Anderson briefly interspersing their narrative with events back in 'real time', the crew of the *Envoy* encounters a series of adventures before they reach their goal, finding the titular starfarers together with a threat to the very fabric of the universe.

There are traces here of former glories: for example, the consequences of relativistic time debt are well evoked and reminiscent of the author's much earlier *Tau Zero*. However, the prose is clunky and the characterisation poor: beware of characters who speak like Yoda – 'Go I will' indeed! And as for the annoying Scot (sample dialogue: 'I ken verra well wha'ye didna mean, laddie') ...

Anderson has always excelled in tightly controlled, erudite storytelling, but this book has too many meandering conversations to grab the attention. He also includes a reworked short story, 'Ghetto' from 1954, as one of chapters. Laziness perhaps, or just a lesser work by a fine writer past his best. All I know is that my spotty younger self would have hated the insipid black and white cover on this advance proof copy.

### Tom Arden – *The King and Queen of Swords* [ ]

Gollancz, 1998, 528pp, £16.99 ISBN 0 575 06371 8

Reviewed by Mat Coward

This is the second part (I haven't seen the first) of a fantasy quest epic, in which Jem, 'true prince of Eiland and Key to the Orokon', seeks the fabled magic crystals of the gods. The setting is a version of eighteenth century England, or possibly Europe (the uncertainty is mine, not the author's), and the mood is closer to Georgette Heyer than to standard fantasy fiction.

The blurb describes the book as 'rich in magic, mystery, horror and humour', and that seems about right: certainly the sheer

quantity of creation that has gone into it is pretty impressive. One of the more interesting strands of the story concerns the persecution of a Romany-like travelling race of storytellers.

Unfortunately, I just couldn't reconcile myself to Arden's style sufficiently to allow the story to take me over. It's intensely mannered – lines of dialogue like 'Priestess, how can you believe in her sway, when the King himself is the merest puppet, jiggling on the First Minister's wires?' are not uncommon – monumentally

camp, and told with what seemed to me excessive leisureliness. I'm afraid it's one of those books of which reviewers can only, in

all honesty, conclude that if you like this sort of stuff, you might well like this example more than most.

### John Barnes – *Apostrophes and Apocalypses*

TOR Books, 1998, 351pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0 312 86147 8

Reviewed by Gary Dalkin

Here we have 13 stories, four of which are previously unpublished, seven articles and the text of a speech. The non-fiction pieces are generally short and forgettable, though 'Two Cheers for Ned Ludd, One for Crazy Eddie' thoughtfully examines history from the Luddite's perspective. The one lengthy article, 'How to Build a Future', details Barnes's application of computer-aided modelling of economic and social trends in the creation of his sci scenarios, specifically with relation to his novel, *A Million Open Doors*. It is remarkable for the amount of effort Barnes puts into the process, only to disregard the results and make something up when what the spreadsheet suggests doesn't suit the needs of the story. It left me wondering why he didn't just make it up in the first place.

The stories are enormously varied though, as the title might suggest, several are set in recovering, post-catastrophe near futures. Often America is falling apart, or under occupation, or in the grip of a repressive theocracy. Of these tales 'Stochasm' is merely dull, a snapshot of a party at which nothing of significance happens. 'Finalities Besides the Grave', featuring a UN Monitor in a sexually draconian America, amounts to little, while in a similar future 'Under the Covenant Stars' is a powerful story of a recovering space programme and religious persecution.

'Gentleman Pervert, Off on a Spree' is a novella-length voyage through his thoughts during a week in the life of Ken Greer, and the technologically-tepathetically assisted psychotherapy he receives for his Compulsive Sexual Disorder. The story is set in the

same universe as the novel *Mother of Storms* but is previously unpublished; it is easy to understand why, as the graphic representation of Greer's misogyny is frequently nauseating. This is a seriously intentioned, well-written story, and the sense of hope and redemption, ending on Christmas day, seems too glib for Barnes the atheist. The author admits this tale has had several endings, and I still don't think he has found the right one. As the therapist comments: she isn't sure whether the horror of sharing Ken's mind was worth the good it did him. I feel the same.

Another controversial story is 'Restricted to the Necessary'. Barnes tells us that he had more angry letters about this than anything else he has published. In fact the 'gay wolf sex' is a red-herring in a splendid shaggy-dogma comedy about the insanity which follows when ideologies make thinking taboo.

There's laugh-out-loud comedy in the ingenious 'Why the Stars are Always so Bright From Cousin Sid's Farm', while the equally imaginative 'Enrico Fermi and the Dead Cat' offers a chill Clarcean answer to the mystery of what happened to all the aliens who aren't sending us signals.

The strength of this collection is not in the individual pieces so much as in the diversity and range of imagination on offer. I very much doubt you will like everything here, and you may even actively object to some stories, but you will also be entertained, delighted, and made to think. If you meet John Barnes afterwards you'll probably want to have a good friendly argument with him, and that's a sure sign of a book worth seeking out.

### William Barton & Michael Capobianco – *White Light*

Avon Books, 1998, 343pp, \$13.00 ISBN 0 380 79515 9

Reviewed by John D. Owen

Science fiction in which heroes have transcendental experiences are not exactly uncommon in the genre, but they have a formidable track record, with a number of recent illustrious entries swelling the ranks. The granddaddy of them all was probably Olaf Stapledon, but more recently Arthur C. Clarke's works have often had transcendence as a culminating climax. You have only to think of *Childhood's End* or *The City and the Stars*, or the final stage of transformations in *2001, A Space Odyssey*. Recent authors to tackle transcendental issues are David Zindell with his *Requiem for Homo Sapiens* trilogy, Vernor Vinge in *Beyond Realtime*, and Dan Simmons' *Hyperion/Endymion* books. All feature various transformations and translations of humble homo sapiens into something else, either superior or at least very different.

In *White Light*, William Barton and Michael Capobianco take a rather different approach. In their book, the very Universe is being transcended, is transformed, but the characters stay unchanged. It's as though Barton and Capobianco had gathered together all the wondrous ideas they could find in contemporary sf and speculative science, then decided to earth them in reality by showing flesh and blood people having real human problems. Fine idea, but the trouble is they've chosen a cast more suited to

an earthly soap opera of sexual antics than a heavenly drama played out against a backdrop of galactic mega-engineering.

The characters (two adult males, one dominating the other weak, two adult females, one educated but older, the other uneducated but sexier, plus a pair of teenagers, girl and boy) are obsessed with their own sexual needs. While around them wonders are unfolding as their spaceship is caught in a network of jumpgates leading deeper into the Topopolis (a Universe-wide construct which is reaching out towards Earth), the crew of NR-598h are busily shagging each other, or agonising over having shagged, or wondering why shagging is giving them such problems. Whether it be the aptly named Wolf (captain of the ship, naturally) or the boy genius Stu, the prevailing atmosphere in the ship is concupiscent. I suppose it is a determinedly human trait, this urge to procreate whatever the odds, but in this case it does rather detract from the storyline.

So, nine out of ten for the ideas (though none of them are totally original), three out of ten for characterisation, and minus five for absolutely the crappiest clever-clever cover I've seen in years (white on white over blue just won't stand out in the bookshelves at all).

### Greg Bear – *Dinosaur Summer*

Voyager, 1998, 367pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 00 648367 4

Reviewed by Andy Mills

Dinosaurs have an enduring appeal, as *Jurassic Park* has served to remind us in recent times. But for this stirring adventure, Greg Bear has reached back to the roots of their fictional representation, to Arthur Conan Doyle's classic Professor Challenger story, *The Lost World*.

It is 1947, in an alternate history exactly like our own except

that Professor Challenger really existed, as did his *Lost World*. Some dinosaurs had been brought back from Venezuela into the Western world for amusement and display; most had died, and the last dinosaur circus is about to close. Vince Shellbagger, the circus's dinosaur trainer, is leading an expedition to return his charges, after decades of involuntary exile, to their homeland. He

is accompanied by filmmakers Willis O'Brien and Ray Harryhausen, and by writer and photographer Anthony Belzoni, on a commission from *National Geographic*.

Anthony brings along his somewhat reserved and bookish fifteen-year-old son Peter ('I wanted to balance out your experience... You need to see what the world is all about'), and it is from Peter's point of view that the story is told. And what a story it is! Early on we are introduced to the dinosaurs:

Peter volunteers to be Shellabarger's assistant and builds a relationship

with some of the creatures on the voyage to Venezuela, but one of them – the venator – is a vicious killer whose relationship with Shellabarger is very personal:

It stood on two tensed legs, muscles corded beneath smooth scaled flesh. Its three-toed feet scratched the dirt beneath the iron cage, reminding Peter of a monstrous chicken. The beast's long tail swished back and forth stiffly, its tip slapping the bars behind, making the entire cage shudder. Along its neck and over its head rose two ridges of long, stiff flat scales tipped with red, as if dipped in blood. Two long arms



stretched from its trunk, ending in three expressive curling dactyls with black scimitar claws.

Peter stared at the beast's snout and jaws and wanted to run... The venator had eyes only for Shellabarger. It did not even look at Anthony or Peter.

The reader knows that the creature will prove to be the trainer's nemesis, and in a way it is. The expedition (of course) does not go to plan, and Peter undergoes a rite of passage as he and his companions are marooned on the plateau of dinosaurs, where they endure a succession of perils. (Having just avoided death once more, the young Harryhausen comments at one stage, 'I never want to see another dinosaur as long as I live.')

This is not the sort of novel one would normally associate with hard sf writer Greg Bear, but it is obviously one which he wanted to write as a homage to some of his heroes. And it shows. Bear has a fine old time introducing a succession of nail-biting set-pieces and inventing his own variations of known dinosaurs for this unpretentious and wonderfully exciting novel, a worthy addition to the lost worlds canon. A treat for fourteen year old boys of any ages and sex.

### Walt Becker – *Link*

Morrow, 1998, 388pp, \$14.95 ISBN 0 688 15822 6

Reviewed by Stephen Deas

*Link* is a story about the origins of man. Extra-terrestrial origins, drawing on the work of Graham Hancock (who the author credits as the inspiration for the book), von Daniken, et. al. Becker has clearly done the background research on this (there's a substantial bibliography, which is a nice bonus); sadly, he's not very good at making it sound interesting.

Becker's biographical blurb says he lives in California and he's a scriptwriter; *Link* reads like it wants to be a film (*Romancing the Stone* without the charisma), so I'd like to propose a cast:

- Brilliant, stubborn, macho young scientist whose contradictory ideas have made him an outcast among his peers: Charlie Sheen, with all sense of self-parody surgically removed.
- Brilliant (but not as brilliant as the male lead, obviously), stubborn, career-girl, Pathfinding For Her Gender In The Man's World Of Science: previously unknown blond airhead pinup with no acting ability, but a breathless voice and a willingness to wander around in scanty outfits and occasionally take them off.
- Even more brilliant, but physically unappealing and thus

unimportant, somewhat older scientist: the exhumed corpse of John Candy.

- Megalomaniac South-African pharmaceuticals magnate-cum-arms dealer: Gary Oldman reprising his role in *Fifth Element*, chewing the scenery and generally stealing the show.
- Evil South-African's mercenary henchman: Gary Busey, also chewing the scenery.
- Supporting cast: The cardboard cut-out shrubs from *The Magic Roundabout*.

Doubtless in a few years time, someone will spend a hundred million dollars making this nightmare come true, someone else will spot me in the cinema, thoroughly enjoying myself, and I'll be forced to live out the rest of my solitary life in a swamp. This is, for all its flaws, *Link* has a reasonable pace, once it gets going, and thankfully doesn't take too long about it. This is an adventure story for boys, nothing more, nothing less. Challenge your intellect it won't, and I'm not even going to talk about character development (see supporting cast, above...). But better than staring out of the window at the rain for a few hours? Hell, yeah.

### Marion Zimmer Bradley – *Gravelight*

TOR Books, 1998, 350pp, \$14.95 ISBN 0 312 86507 4

### Marion Zimmer Bradley – *Heartlight*

TOR Books, 1998, 416pp, \$25.95 ISBN 0 312 86508 2

Reviewed by K. V. Bailey

These books belong to a cluster of novels that are cross-referential rather than sequential. They suppose the existence of a mundane world and an Unseen World, interlinked, not by magic, but by magick. *Heartlight*, however, contrasts with *Gravelight* in that its episodic action takes place chiefly in cities; its time span running from World War II to the millennium, while *Gravelight's* action in

and around Morton's Fork, a hillbilly Appalachian village, occupies only weeks of some year of this present decade. The plot-dynamic in each book is the resistance of supporters of the Light to intrusions from the Shadow.

*Heartlight* imagines a corruption of the American Dream through half a century. It is the work of ex-Nazis, active at the

heart of a nurturing American Establishment, an all-pervading, demonologically-rooted conspiracy, the contrived fruits of which include the Kennedy assassination, Vietnam and Watergate. An armoured knight (literally so on critical occasions) opposing it is academic Colin MacLaren, long-dedicated to serve the Lords of Karma. Sacked from his professorship at Berkeley for expounding the occult in his teaching of parapsychology, he becomes a sort of freelance field worker in the sphere of magick. It's not crudely, though in essence is, bell, book and candle stuff, as MacLaren solves problems and heroically tackles such crises as the débacle of the Nuclear Lake Coven, the incarnation of the blonde beast, and the resurgence of the Ancient Rite. One incident is suggestive of a model: MacLaren settles down to ponder what is allusively called 'a three pipe problem'. In this succession of cases one can quite see him as a Holmes of the occult, with the blonde beast, Toller Hasloch, a persistently resurgent Moriarty.

The shorter novel, *Gravelight*, could well have been an episode from *Heartlight*, save that here the academic investigator, Dylan Palmer, is the coolly sceptical head of a psi-tracking team

which has come to the moribund mountain village of Morton's Fork, known to be a centre of such phenomena. Converging on it also are Wych Musgrave, an alcoholic playboy dropout, and an actress, Melusine (Sinah) Dellon, returning to seek solitude on her ancestral patch. The locals reject her, fearful of her sorcerous heredity, and she is, in fact, possessed and sporadically controlled by a predatory ancestress who had escaped to America after the Monmouth Rebellion. Wych and Sinah become sexually, eventually romantically, involved. Dylan is led, through the intervention of a psychic colleague, Truth Jourdemayne (his fiancée, and also a character in *Heartlight*), to engage in the process of sealing and controlling the Gate by which Sinah's ancestral 'parasite' is able to emerge from the Unseen World. It all boils up to a spectacular necromantic – exorcising climax.

Whether you are intrigued by her fabling metaphysics and the liberties taken in historical interpretation, or are irritated by them, and perhaps by certain fictive stances (including, in *Heartlight*, a species of teutonophobia), Bradley invariably spins a good yarn. *Gravelight*, in particular, is a regular page-turner.

**Rebecca Bradley – *Lady Pain* ☞**

Gollancz, 1998, 336pp, £16.99 ISBN 0 575 06430 7

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

After the two earlier volumes of this trilogy, *Lady in Gil* and *Scion's Lady*, I was keen to find out where Bradley would take the story next, and I wasn't disappointed.

The whole trilogy is about power and the problems of power. The end of *Scion's Lady* left the protagonist, Tigralf, struggling against a source of power which he himself could have used for good, but which would in the end lead to unimaginable evil. At the beginning of *Lady Pain* twenty years have elapsed in which Tig has continued to struggle, and the effort has left him, to say the least, peculiar. The central character and narrator of this book is his son Vero, whose life has been shaped by his father's fate and his attempts to discover the way to put an end to the evil. Obviously the family had some fascinating experiences during these twenty years, but Bradley picks up the story as events begin to draw towards the final confrontation.

All this makes the book sound a bit portentous, but as well as its serious themes there's a gripping storyline that bats along at a tremendous pace. It's also very funny. Vero's wry acceptance of his fate – rather like Tig's in the earlier books – gives the book its tone. Laughter keeps madness at arm's length. And along with the big events that shape history, there are the smaller events that matter in the characters' personal lives. It's easy to become involved with them. In the end, Bradley says, 'The important

things these days are all small'. Individuals matter more than the sweeping fate of kingdoms.

Bradley also takes her readers into an unusual and solidly imagined fantasy world. Her writing is very visual. I felt a strong sense of different places and cultures, and of the long history which is now coming to its climax. This isn't basic genre fantasy at all; it's detailed and real, and the story is told with energy and style.

For readers who haven't read the earlier volumes, don't start here. Although this book offers a separate story, so much depends on what has gone before, in plot and in emotional development. Go back to the beginning and read all three.

**Rebecca Bradley – *Scion's Lady***

Vista, 1998, 320pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 575 60161

The second part of this trilogy is now available in paperback. Cherith Baldry was just as enthusiastic when she reviewed this volume in V196: 'Rebecca Bradley ... is not a second rate writer, and the new version of events which the second book introduces is perfectly legitimate in terms of her fantasy world... part of the interest of the second book is the way in which [our] perceptions are changed.'

**Terry Brooks – *Running with the Demon***

Orbit, 1998, 303pp, £5.99 ISBN 1 85723 607 6

**Terry Brooks – *A Knight of the World* ☞**

Orbit, 1998, 311pp, £16.99 ISBN 1 85723 677 7

Reviewed by Alan Fraser

Terry Brooks made his name with *The Sword Of Shannara* which, though tremendously popular, brought heavy criticism which persists to this day of being folksy American sub-Tolkien pastiche. He has since written lots more Shannara novels and a second folksy series set in the Magic Kingdom of Landover. To be fair, while elves, dwarves, trolls and Dark Enemies abound in his work, it is still eminently readable, and he has shown the skills of plotting and character that keep the pages turning.

*Running With The Demon*, set in present-day America, starts off this new series about the continual struggle of Good (the Word) to prevent Evil (the Void) from taking over. On a Fourth of July weekend a demon arrives in the small town of Hopewell, Illinois, to carry out a devastating coup that will forever change the balance of power in favour of the Void. Also to Hopewell comes John Ross, a Knight of the Word, sent to find out the demon's plan and thwart it. In Hopewell, fourteen-year-old Nest Freemark lives with her grandparents near a large park. Nest

shares her grandmother's and late mother's secret gift of being able to see the supernatural creatures who live amongst the trees, and to perform minor acts of magic. It becomes clear that for some reason Nest is the key to the demon's plan, and Brooks builds an engrossing and generally unpredictable tale from this. A worthwhile read.

So far, so good. Now we come to the shorter sequel, *A Knight Of The Word*. It is five years later, Nest Freemark is nineteen, a college student and a champion runner who has neglected her powers of magic. After failing to prevent a schoolroom massacre, John Ross has renounced his role as a Knight of the Word. He has found a very beautiful and loving partner, and works with her in Seattle for the charismatic head of a high-profile charity. Nest is visited by a messenger from the Word, and told that in a few days, on Halloween night, a demon will suborn John Ross to the service of the Void – his loss will help evil take over. (Shades of Darth Vader!) Nest must go to Seattle and stop this from happening.

Unfortunately, from here the whole book is built on the premise that, unlike in the first book, we don't know who this demon actually is. However, I worked it out two pages after we meet the demon for the first time. From then on, lines like 'Beware, Mr Ross, one of your closest friends is really a demon. It's... Arggghhh!' are all a bit pointless, and the intended stunning denouement is just a confirmation that I was right after all.

### Pat Cadigan – *Tea from an Empty Cup* [1]

Voyager, 1998, 218pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 586 21842 4

Reviewed by Steve Palmer

Whether cyberpunk?

People were asking that years ago, but the question is still relevant, since authors continue to write cyberpunk novels and culture still ponders computer technology and its associated phenomena.

The great, and possibly only problem of cyberpunk is that the first novel of the genre was *Neuromancer*, which had exactly the same effect on genre literature as *The Lord of the Rings* – both being brilliant novels, both unique, and, crucially, both giving birth to an entire subgenre that has continued without sign of decay. Such novels appear rarely. In *Neuromancer* we have a defining moment in the history of genre literature: it is a novel the like of which we may not see for decades. Yet that moment of brilliance has set the tone for everything that has followed. Nothing in fantasy will ever touch the genius of *The Lord of the Rings*, whatever publishers would like to tell you, and nothing will ever again have the same impact as *Neuromancer* in the cyberfield.

Which brings us to *Tea from an Empty Cup*. As a reader who has never read a word of Ms. Cadigan's output, I looked forward immensely to reading this. And it is superb. The problem is, it is cyberpunk.

The novel has a curious timeless quality; the narrative covers events in great detail over a short period of real time, while the sections inside AR (Artificial Reality) have no sense of time at all. It is a style of narrative that could be called fractal: intricate, hypnotic, yet covering little ground on the larger scale. Fortunately this isn't a problem, since the detail offered by the

author is compelling. She could easily have devised a few gimmicks and relied on them, but instead she conjures up a mesmeric tapestry of sleazy, dangerous, and plain weird characters living in a sleazy, dangerous, and just plain weird environment. Despite the focus of the novel being the solving of a series of murders, that focus is usually below the surface, as the characters 'do their thing'. I never particularly cared about the murders and their *raison d'être*, but that probably doesn't matter. I wasn't convinced that the characters cared much, but that probably doesn't matter either, since the novel has that typically amoral cyberpunk feel (so brilliantly depicted in Bruce



Sterling's *Schismatrix*).

This novel is actually closer to *Snow Crash* than *Neuromancer*,

sharing the lovingly described intricacy of Neal Stephenson's novel, and the same mysterious harking back to older things, in this case Old Japan before earthquakes destroyed the actual country. I got a sense of greater things outside the scope of the novel, but they appear as hints and ghosts of futuristic culture. If the music of the Future Sound of London could be transmuted into literature, this is how it would read. The fractal phrases of the author's prose is the DNA of the whole thing.

So. Whether cyberpunk? I think it should now look further than the next hundred years. A *Neuromancer* set in 3000 would be great.

Recommended for those at ease with the vicissitudes of cyberpunk.

### Stephen Donaldson – *Reave the Just* [2]

Voyager, 1998, 357pp, £17.99 ISBN 0 00 224691 0

Reviewed by Jan Malique

These eight stories, ranging from the fantastical to ironically humorous, tell of heroes (of both gender) embarking upon great journeys, both inner and outer, of ancient mage wars and of love and hate. Stephen Donaldson shows a deft touch in the weaving of these stories; some are bleak, at times bloody, even faintly puzzling, but they hold the attention as they should when a good storyteller performs his art. I have to admit to liking some stories more than others – that is only natural in any collection such as this.

The book opens with 'Reave the Just', which illustrates the power of suggestion and its consequences. Jiljet of Forebridge, by claiming kinship with Reave, initiates a chain of events which culminates in a terrible exacting of justice. Through the spinning of fantasies of love and delusions of power, Jiljet becomes enmeshed in a triangle of cruelty and deceit; while Reave is

drawn by the mystery of the stranger who claims a blood tie and whose salvation he eventually comes to.

In 'The Djinn Who Watches Over the Accursed', a young man has a curse laid upon him by a cuckolded husband: those he loves and befriends will be taken away by a horrible death. People he comes across go the way of all who come into contact with this angel of death – for this is what he has become. There is an underlying streak of black humour about this story...

Mage wars form the background to 'The Killing Stroke', in which three martial arts masters are drawn unwillingly into a battle between the forces of 'good' and 'evil', and are subsequently shown that the forces of order can be as unjust as their enemy is just, and honour and integrity do overcome in the end. In 'By Any Other Name', a man incurs the wrath of a blood necromancer in his refusal to conduct business with him, which

results in loss of identity, possessions and home as he strives to escape the evil influence of the man.

The psychopathology of a despotic ruler is explored in 'The Kings of Tarshish Shall Bring Gifts', in which a man becomes obsessed by the visions in his dreams and his inability to meld with them which result in the eventual disintegration of his humanity. 'What Makes Us Human', meanwhile, illustrates the tenacity of the human spirit to survive catastrophe and overcome insurmountable obstacles to pursue cherished dreams and hopes.

A vampire seeks redemption in 'Penance'. He is feared as his kind always have been, a dread spectre inhabiting the shadowy

recesses of human consciousness; but a ray of hope reveals itself as he is given the opportunity to escape the darkness within and do penance for former acts.

Finally, 'The Woman Who Loved Pigs' is a strange story of a young woman whose very being is changed by her contact with a warlock in the guise of a pig. The pig causes a shift of consciousness within her childlike mentality which cause her to face up to the true reality of her existence and shatter her peace and safety forever.

**Sara Douglass – *Battleaxe***

Voyager, 1998, 674pp, £6.99 ISBN 0 00 651106 6

Reviewed by John R. Oram

In this first book in a trilogy by a new Australian author, Axis is the Battleaxe of the title, commander of the Axewielders, the elite military arm of the church and the Seneschal of Artor. The main job of the Axewielders is to hunt down members of the 'forbidden', two races who are condemned by the church as monsters.

It's just unfortunate that Axis is the Starman of an ancient prophecy who will unite the three peoples and defeat the Destroyer, Gorgael, who is also his half brother. As if he doesn't have enough problems, his other half brother, Berthold, wants him dead as well. And just to confuse the issue even more, he falls in love with Berthold's betrothed, Faraday. The feeling is reciprocated, but she still marries Berthold to stay his hand against Axis. But then, she too, is a pawn of the prophecy: she is the Treefriend who will lead one of the 'forbidden' people, and who

has powers in her own right. Both are heading for a clash with the Seneschal. There is more, much more, but it would be impossible to cover in a brief review.

I first began reading this with some trepidation. The title seemed as if it had been lifted from a Dungeons and Dragons game, and I began to think that it was just a clone of Tolkien or, worse, David Gemmell. But I persevered, and I'm glad I did. The plot was complex, the characters well delineated, and I found myself engrossed. Nothing was either simple or simplistic. Underpinning the story is the subtext: the bigotry of organised religion, racism, and environmental vandalism. Sara Douglass is a real find, and I look forward to reading the next book. She deserves more promotion from her publishers, so, if you want something a bit different, this is it. Buy it, and enjoy.

**Bruce Durie – *The High History of the Holy Quail***

Citron, 1998, 231pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 7544 0003 4

**Mick Lewis – *The Bloody Man***

Citron, 1998, 223pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 7544 0009 3

Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

These are two very different books from a new authors' (and new authors) co-operative.

*The High History Of The Holy Quail* is supposed to be a comic fantasy – but the fantasy, involving wizards, faeries and quests for ancient talismanic objects, is routine and unimaginative, while the comedy is wearisomely unfunny. The author, as the biographical notes suggest, may have been a successful stand-up comedian, but he has clearly failed to grasp the different approaches required by spoken and written humour – in particular, that to succeed the latter has to arise naturally from the material, and that trowelling it thickly over the top never works. Compounding this, for someone who was once director of the Edinburgh Science Festival (the biographical notes again), is the extraordinary puerility of his comedy, resulting in a novel which reads as though written by a fourteen-year-old who's just discovered innuendo and is too busy laughing up his sleeve at his own cleverness to notice how distasteful his so-called 'jokes' actually are (for example: a tribe of hairy barbarians called the Kuntz, and a city named Al Faq'Ah ruled by a Dikkeahd). The first volume in a projected trilogy, it is grossly overwritten – tauter editing would probably ensure that the whole trilogy fitted into one volume – and the blurb's comparisons with Fritz Leiber and Lord Dunsany are risible.

*The Bloody Man* is different in every way – better written, better plotted, more stimulating (at least initially). Lewis's subject

(again, initially) is the underworld of video nasties and the corrupting effect they have on their audience, explored via the dead-end life of an over-educated under-achiever sliding gradually into it because he is too inured to the dullness of his everyday life and the apparently routine atrocities of the real world to resist. The experience coarsens him even as he knows he's being coarsened by it; yet still it fascinates him – as it clearly fascinates the author, whose biographical notes hint clearly at first-hand knowledge of the underworld he's describing. But closer examination of this world and its (al)maloties is denied us: instead, the story dodges off into the usual horror fiction lunacies, on this occasion the psychic rebirth of an eighteenth century Scottish cannibal cave-dweller in the body of the protagonist's long-lost brother. The prose, too, declines into clichés (at their worst when attempting to describe the music of the brother's black metal goth band); everything ends gorily. We are no wiser about the video nasty underworld than when we began; and in consequence the novel must be classed as a failure.

*The Citron Press Book Club is a new venture for new authors, who pay a fee to see their book in print but then have it promoted through a book club and, if successful, presented to mainstream publishers. Interested authors should contact 0800 0136533. The address is: Connors Corp. Ltd., Suite 155 Business Design Centre, 52 Upper Street, Islington Green, London N1 0QH.*

**Greg Egan – *Luminous***

Millennium, 1998, 295pp, £9.99 ISBN 1 85798 552 4

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

Greg Egan is currently the best science fiction writer in the world, so securely established in that position that it calls to mind the celebrated race result 'Eclipse first, the rest nowhere'. His work,

never less than brilliant, has made steady progress throughout his career. Egan's second story-collection, *Luminous*, is markedly better than his first, *Axiomatic*, and warrants comparison with

such classic collections of *contes philosophiques* as Jorge Luis Borges's *Labyrinths* and Primo Levi's *The Sixth Day*. The ten stories were published between 1993 and 1998, seven of them in *Interzone* and three in *Asimov's Science Fiction*. The collection opens with the futuristic chase-thriller 'Chaff', one of only three stories in the book to dabble in cyberpunkish violence (the other two being the offbeat mysteries 'Cocoon' and 'Our Lady of Chernobyl') and then proceeds to the outright satirical 'Mitochondrial Eve' and the flamboyant idea-as-hero story 'Luminous'; however, the real heart of the book, and its most stunning achievement, is a series of more meditative tales which painstakingly examine the implications of contemporary scientific theory in regard to the nature of consciousness, the theory of identity and the quest to discover and enact values appropriate to an emergent era of sophisticated biotechnology and neurotechnology.

This sequence begins with 'Mister Volition' and 'Cocoon', which set a very high standard that is spectacularly advanced by the three following items. 'Transition Dreams' is a pure *conte philosophique* which carefully develops a deeply disquieting logical argument. 'Silver Fire' is a devastating assault on the New Age fascination with 'spirituality'. 'Reasons to be Cheerful' is a meticulously analytical and magnificently harrowing tale of a hypothetical case-study in neurophysiological disturbance and treatment. All three of these stories appeared in *Interzone*,

although I cannot imagine that they did so because they had been rejected by magazines that reach a wider audience, and they provide eloquent testimony to the value of that periodical as a vehicle for intellectually serious fiction. The concluding item, 'The Planck Dive', combines an unrepentantly esoteric account of an experiment which could only be carried out by a very special band of heroes (borrowed from the same startling future history as that mapped out in the novel *Diaspora*) with a bitterly satirical account of the imbecilic interpretation imposed on the endeavour by a clownish critic who presumably stands in for all the reviewers who have found Egan's work intellectually difficult and lacking in 'warmth' and 'spirituality' (which it certainly is, which is why it is so thoroughly worthwhile and so desperately necessary).

This is the science fiction book of the year, and it should be on every sf lover's shelf. Owing to the fact that the label 'science fiction' has now been appropriated by retailers of film and TV-related merchandise, however – to the extent that books can no longer be successfully marketed under that label in the UK – the only mention of the term 'science fiction' in the B-format paperback of *Luminous* is in the title of one of the magazines from which review-quotes are reproduced. The quote on the front cover is from *New Scientist*, and the description of the book given there is 'A Collection of Stories'. For good or ill, this is the shape of things to come.

### David Gemmell – *Sword in the Storm* ⚔

Bantam, 1998, 364pp, £15.99 ISBN 0 593 03718 9

Reviewed by Mat Coward

This is Book One in the Rigante Series. The Rigante are a Celtic-ish people, their homeland a beautiful mountainous region where they live in that charming kind of semi-communal, semi-feudal stage of class development which is more familiar to readers of heroic fantasy than to readers of Karl Marx.

The world is changing, however: beyond the mountains, over the sea, the relentlessly imperialistic (and Roman-ish) Armies of Stone are applying their unheroic, unsentimental, amoral and hideously efficient methods of warfare to conquering the Rigante's neighbours. Before long, inevitably, it will be the village of Three Streams's turn to surrender or die – or probably both.

But Connavar, the Demonblade, a natural born, fully-prophesied hero, believes the Rigante can defeat Stone, under his leadership. As a youngster he travels across the ocean, and even fights in the Stone army, to learn their ways. On his return home, he begins readying his people for the coming holocaust – but first, he must unite the squabbling tribes of the Rigante, who, it must be said, are partial to the old blood-feud.

This is heroic fiction at not far off its best. The plot is driven by the internal and external conflicts of its main characters, and by the political and economic contradictions revealed by a continent in turmoil. The characters themselves are fully and boldly drawn, and the author's style is never less than readable, and often much more than that.

The book's problems are generic ones: the slightly stilted dialogue (too few apostrophes, too much speech that sounds as if it's come through a diplomatic interpreter); too many rather repetitive battle scenes; and an unnecessarily episodic structure which occasionally breaks the flow. None of these faults is serious enough to obscure the richness of Gemmell's imagination, however. There's nothing particularly original in *Sword In The Storm*; what is impressive is that Gemmell seems to have created the sword and sorcery world in his head much more completely than most of his peers, and then to have set it on paper without losing much detail or atmosphere in the process. I really cannot imagine even an occasional reader of this kind of fantasy not wanting to see the second volume of this series, having read the first.

### David Gemmell – *Echoes of the Great Song*

Corgi, 1998, 446pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 552 14255 7

This novel tells of a battle for power in a post-apocalyptic world of ice and bleak seas. Reviewing the book in V197 Janet Barron said it: 'is crammed with additional characters ... all delineated with skill, but not infused with life. Though not a regular Gemmell reader, I suspect this is not one of his more memorable works.'

### Martin H. Greenberg (Ed) – *Lord of the Fantastic* ⚔

Avon Books, 1998, 373pp, \$14.00 ISBN 0 380 78737 7

Reviewed by Steve Palmer

I must admit to a certain trepidation when I began this collection of stories. The blurb describes it as: 'paying tribute to Roger Zelazny with original stories evoking the magic and wonder of his own best work'. Hmm, doesn't this mean: 'paying a few famous authors to copy Roger Zelazny's style and plots in the hope of making a fast buck'?

The answer is yes and no. Certainly it is a dubious concept, but the quality and number of the authors is rather surprising. To name just the best: Gregory Benford, Neil Gaiman, Andre Norton, Robert Silverberg, Robert Shekley, John Varley and Jack Williamson.

My own introduction to Zelazny came when I read the Hugo Award winning *Lord of Light*, to this day one of the great sf novels. However, it is the only novel by Zelazny that I've read so I'm not in a very good position to comment on the Zelazny-ness (or otherwise) of this collection.

Unsurprisingly, this is a patchy collection. To take some examples: Gregory Benford's 'Slow Symphonies of Mass and Time' comes across as *Timescape* meets Jack Vance, while Andre Norton's rather good 'The Outling' reads like *Catseye* on acid. Meanwhile, Robert Silverberg's 'Call Me Titan' feels like the Greek myths done for idiots, while John Varley's 'The Flying

Dutchman' is just silly. As for the stories by Bradley H. Sinor and Nina Kiriki Hoffman, well...

This collection can only be of interest to fans of Zelazny: a brilliant author, certainly, but perhaps he is rolling in his grave at this moment. My feeling is that he would have been flattered for about ten seconds had he seen this book, but then the awful truth would have sunk in.

Each story is completed with an Afterword, and some of these make interesting reading. Silverberg's, for instance, shows the kind

of motivation that led to this anthology (Silverberg knew Zelazny well for three decades); others are paeans to the art of cringe, the one by William Sanders in particular is the pointless rambling of a man very impressed with himself.

I have left the worst to last. On the very last page is a paragraph about the editor, Martin H. Greenberg, which states that he has assembled an anthology in tribute to J.R.R. Tolkien called *After the King*. Aaaargh! Is nothing sacred?

### James L. Halperin – *The Truth Machine* □

Pocket Books, 1998, 323pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 671 01040 9

Reviewed by Gary Wilkinson

*The Truth Machine* tries to be a number of things. It tells the story of the creation and development of the one hundred percent totally reliable lie detector, The Truth Machine of the title. It tells the life history of the Truth Machines inventor, a Bill Gates like prodigy, from his tragic childhood to his life's resolution. It is also a general history, a faction, from the recent past to the middle of the next century and a polemic for the 'Futurist' philosophy that science will be the cure for all societies present and future ills and the eventual saviour of mankind with a global government and the end to death and poverty. Finally it also tries to be a thriller and courtroom drama when the inventor is accused of murder.

Unfortunately, this jack of all trades is master of none. The development of the Truth Machine is essentially down to the efforts of one man, which seems unrealistic: a large scale 'Manhattan Project' of this nature would involve the efforts of many, with many gains and setbacks. Essentially the technical development all comes down to one problem. Yet again it's another writer who knows nothing about programming. This author seems more interested in the inventor's company's stocks and shares.

The main character is such a wimp that you feel little sympathy for him and his predicament. The other characters are very two dimensional and the author makes the mistake of describing in minute detail a number of characters then only using them for a few walk-ons later on.

It is possible that someday all books will be written by computer; this one just pretends to be – which may give some explanation for the clunky language. The text is also continually interrupted by the computer's informative 'notes' – (Note: The image quality of primitive 'television' screens of the late 20th century was measured on the basis of pixel density) – which is annoying to say the least. There is, in addition, a lengthy appendix stuffed with tables of relative men's and women's heights, apparent ages, and how inflation effects the relative value of the dollar over the next 50 years, along with speeches that the author mentions in the text.

However the murder and subsequent trial keep you reading. It is not a masterpiece but it passed a few hours without much pain, though to tell the truth I think I would have rather spent my time reading something else.

### Peter F. Hamilton – *A Second Chance at Eden* ♪

Macmillan, 1998, 431pp, £17.99 ISBN 0 333 74125 0

Reviewed by Gary Dalkin

Filling the publishing gap between the second and final volumes of *The Night's Dawn Trilogy* comes this collection of 'a novella and six stories set in the same brilliantly realised universe'. The stories are arranged by internal chronology, rather than original publication. Five have seen print before, but have undergone slight revisions to fit better the future history outlined in *The Reality Dysfunction*.

Of the three really short stories, 'Sonnie's Edge' recounts savage bioengineered gladiatorial combat in London; set on a colony world farmstead, 'New Days Old Times' is a low-key, quietly bleak sketch of anti-Semitism and *realpolitik*, and 'Deathday' tells a jet black tale of genocide, lost love and revenge.

At 166 pages the title novella could once have been published as a novel in its own right. 'A Second Chance at Eden' is a police procedural set in the bitek space habitat in orbit around Jupiter which is familiar from the *Night's Dawn* books. Here Eden has only been occupied for a handful of years, and a complex murder mystery leads to pivotal events in the history of the settlement.

Two lengthy tales are set amid the verdant tropical isles of the planet Tropicana. 'Candy Buds' concerns a plant which can encode fantasies into memory. It is a sultry fable of corruption and

elegant retribution, which is affecting despite an over-reliance on coincidence. 'The Lives and Love of Tiarella Rosa' is an ingenious love story with a similar atmosphere to 'Candy Buds', let down only by an odd moral blankness.



The volume ends with 'Escape Route', a space opera adventure featuring Joshua Calvert's father and the ship the *Lady Macbeth*. Hamilton applies an unusual twist to a familiar situation, the discovery of a derelict alien space craft.

*A Second Chance at Eden* is a solid, well balanced collection, with a varied range of stories casting fresh light on aspects of The Confederation future history. Though there isn't a bad story here, Peter Hamilton is a writer for whom expansive works seem to come naturally, and it is the longest stories which are most memorable. Indeed, while 'Sonnie's Edge' works as a short sharp shock, it leaves the reader wanting to know what happened next. It could easily be the first chapter of a future novel.

All the stories are well crafted, featuring inventive plotting and strong resolutions, often with an underlying, particularly English melancholy. This is especially so in the two Tropicana tales, with their genuinely science-fictional evocations of lost innocence, love and deception played out amid small harbours and islands not so

many light-years in memory from the work of Michael Coney, Christopher Priest and, more recently, Eric Brown. The title novella revisits a familiar location, and the murder mystery is the sort of thing Hamilton did in his Greg Mandel novels. Yet overall this collection shows a different, more reflective side to a writer some may imagine they have effectively pigeon-holed as simply right-wing and gung-ho. This though is an excellent first anthology, showing Peter F. Hamilton clearly maturing into one of Britain's finest sf writers.

### Peter F. Hamilton – *The Neutronium Alchemist*

Pan, 1998, 1273pp, £7.99 ISBN 0 330 35143 5

Alongside his new collection, the second part of Hamilton's epic trilogy now appears in paperback. When it first appeared in 1997, Gary Dalkin greeted it (V196): 'Peter F. Hamilton makes no great claims to profundity with his sf, and the political ideology implicit in his work appears to have alienated some readers, yet as a pure storyteller his organisation of his material is unsurpassed, and is breathtaking in scope and invention.'

### Andrew Harman – *It Came from on High* 📖

Orbit, 1998, 326pp, £5.99 ISBN 1 85723 678 5

Reviewed by Jon Wallace

The Catholic Church is always good for a laugh, right? I mean look at *Father Ted*, that was funny. And Americans, they're intrinsically funny aren't they? All that good old boy stuff. Oh, and slimy aliens... well, what else can I say...

Stuff all of these things together, mix well, add spies to taste and you've got a plot. A bit of one anyway.

But what is it? Take a new Pope, some aliens, the Vatican hierarchy, Church astronomers... No wait, I've done the recipe thing. I'll start again. This is a full book. Not necessarily of jokes, but certainly full of shots at targets. These don't always hit. It isn't always clear just why the things that are happening are happening, but enough of it works to make this a pleasant diversion for the couple of hours that it takes to read.

Flaws, well there are flaws of course. Sometimes the characters seem to be acting out of character, the Vatican politicians seem particularly unsure of who they really are. Sometimes the plot direction seems to falter, and sometimes it is all too obvious that some character or situation has only been created because they are funny. Or funnyish anyway.

So, is this a great book? No. The characters and situations just aren't strong enough for that. Is it a bad book? Again, no. The writing is sound enough and the humour hits often enough to be diverting. I suppose it must be somewhere in the middle. Taste it and see.

But don't forget just a pinch of salt...

### Alexander Jablokov – *Deepdrive*

Avon Books, 1998, 311pp, \$14.00 ISBN 0 380 97636 6

Reviewed by Andrew Seaman

Unpublished in this country, Alexander Jablokov has, over the last decade, been quietly building an impressive body of work, ringing never-less-than-entertaining changes on traditional science fictional themes. The baroque space opera of *Deepdrive* initially promises much, but frustratingly fails to deliver more than the sum of its (admittedly) intriguing parts.

Hundreds of years from now the solar system has been settled by a number of alien species, some sociable, some enigmatically aloof. In this future humans are the poor relations of the galactic community. Without knowledge of the faster-than-light deepdrives used by the aliens, humanity is denied access to the stars. However, the crash landing on a terraformed Venus of Ripi-Arana-Hoc, a renegade alien, provokes a race amongst various interested parties to become the first to recover the lucrative secret of deepdrive technology.

In time-honoured tradition, a group of mercenaries, brought together in a marriage of convenience, become embroiled in a plot whose labyrinthine complexities owe more than a little to classic *film noir*. As the action ranges across the solar system, alliances shift, motives become obscure and betrayals inevitably ensue. At the novel's heart is a complex alien political intrigue that has startling implications both for individual characters and

the fate of humanity in the galaxy.

*Deepdrive's* main flaw is that too often the reader is left with the feeling that Jablokov has invested more energy in tweaking the already involved plot, or adding another telling detail to his imagined future, than in creating a fully-rounded novel which successfully integrates characters, background and action. Credible though his protagonists' shared histories, personalities and motives are, they never truly arouse the sympathy or interest you feel they should. Equally, the author's often over-enthusiastic exploration of his surreal alien societies ultimately tends to detract from, rather than enhance, the reader's appreciation of them. Though Jablokov tries hard to impress with a constant flow of clever invention, he sometimes fails to pay proper attention to other aspects of the novel, particularly pacing. This becomes evident in the increasingly episodic nature of the narrative and the somewhat forced resolution of its various plot strands.

Disappointingly, for all its pyrotechnics, *Deepdrive* is a curiously uninvolved reading experience. However, on this (and past) evidence, Jablokov is certainly a writer to watch, particularly if he can learn to curb an enthusiasm for revelling in his own imagination at the expense of other facets of his writing.

### Edward James & Farah Mendlesohn (Eds) – *The Parliament of Dreams: Conferring on Babylon 5*

Science Fiction Foundation, 1998, 177pp, £9.00 ISBN 0 7049 11952

Reviewed by John Newsinger

It was with some trepidation that I approached this book: a collection of articles on *Babylon 5* that had been previously delivered at an academic conference! Now I've been to a few of these conferences myself and one recurring feature has always been the presence among the speakers of aliens from the planet Baudrillard, who never seem able to get their intergalactic translators working properly. These creatures beam down from the spaceship *Postmodern Jargonaut*, deliver their incomprehensible papers to mesmerised human audiences, and then disappear before the Men in Black arrive. They claim to bring enlightenment, but only spread confusion. What is even more

disconcerting, of course, is the discovery that these various Baudrillardians, Lacanians (the ones with pointy heads), Foucauldians and whatever don't even understand what each other is on about. This complete breakdown in communication is sometimes known as the 'linguistic turn', presumably an example of alien humour!

Fortunately, my fears were groundless. This book comes from the *Foundation* stable, edited by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, and is admirably lucid, clearly written and accessible.

Some people might entertain other reservations about the

volume, for example, why a bunch of academics should be spending time studying such ephemera of popular culture as *Babylon 5* anyway. For my money, no apology need be made for taking seriously a drama watched, enjoyed and talked about by thousands of people week after week. This is not an aesthetic judgement, but one acknowledging the significance of popular culture in the social order. Nevertheless, I must confess that the fact that I lost interest in *Babylon 5* quite early on did make me wonder whether the Conference organisers were jumping the gun. Not that I would pretend to be an arbiter of good taste. Far from it! I really enjoyed *Invasion: Earth* and thought *Ultraviolet* absolutely brilliant. Once again the volume put these fears to rest and made me wish I had persevered with Straczynski's saga.

What of the volume itself? There are thirteen articles plus a useful 'Introduction' by James and Mendlesohn. Inevitably they vary in quality and relevance, but there is much of interest here not just for *Babylon 5* fans, but for anyone concerned with science

fiction. The contributions that I found of greatest interest were Gareth Roberts's 'The Philosophy of Being', Anne Schofield and Nickianne Moody's 'Reconsidering Gender and Heroism', Andy Sawyer's 'The Shadow Out of Time: Lovcraftian Echoes in *Babylon 5*' (one can only wish Andy went into print more regularly!), Karen Sayer's 'Every Station has its Phantoms': Uncanny Effects and Hybrid Spaces', James Brown's 'Cyborgs and Symbiosis: Technology, Politics and Identity' and Kevin McCarron's 'Religion, Philosophy and the End of History'. A strong collection that well repays reading. One missing contribution that I would have found useful would have been an overview of the development of science fiction on American TV, putting *Babylon 5* in that particular context. Perhaps another time.

The editors and contributors are to be congratulated on a handsomely produced, stimulating and literate volume. It is the first in the new 'Foundation Studies in Science Fiction'. Hopefully it will be followed by many more. Highly recommended.

### Oliver Johnson – *The Nations of the Night* [1]

Orbit, 1998, 493pp, £6.99 ISBN 1 85723 600 9

Reviewed by Kathy Taylor

This is the second book of *The Lightbringer Trilogy*, and by and large it reads like the middle book of a trilogy. The author brings new readers up to speed by providing a massive, and turgid, information dump in the first few chapters, during which I struggled to keep any level of interest going. Having persevered I found a dramatic change in pace, the novel rattles along like the best, or worst, D&D campaign. The characters plunge from one deadly danger into the next, barely escaping as red coats, sorry guards and other minor characters, are picked off along the way. The most extreme of these is the case of the Baron, who starts off leading a company of a hundred and thirteen, having killed the rest of his army off in the previous book, and ends up with nine. Even the villains join in this merry game, blithely losing companions and guards as they track down the heroes. All this stops at brief intervals for some unconvincing emotional soul searching, usually by the 'hideously scarred priest of Flame' Urthred. There are Gods who, of course, act just like larger versions of mortals with a bit more magic. I know in some ways this is traditional but in this book their actions are merely

predictable, and at times used as an obvious mechanism to move the plot along.

If I haven't already put you off totally I'd like to point out one or two redeeming features, the last of which is a spoiler so if you're going to buy this, and tastes do differ, don't read on. First is the names: they are all pronounceable and not full of absurd extra letters. The second: it is readable – while I couldn't class this as literature it does have the virtue of sound use of English which means it doesn't get in the way of the story. The third is that, apart from the first few chapters, it isn't actually boring. The final redeeming feature is one I rather appreciated for the irony: the *Lightbringer*, Thalassa, spends most of the book turning into a vampire and avoiding the light. Needless to say, by the end of the book she is cured thereby precluding any interesting development of the idea in the next novel.

There are worse fantasy books about, but there are many better as well. My recommendation is that unless you are desperate for brain candy give this one a miss.

### Guy Gavriel Kay – *Sailing to Sarantium* [1]

Earthlight, 1998, 438pp, £16.99 ISBN 0 684 85169 3

Reviewed by Andrew Adams

Guy Gavriel Kay's seventh book is the first part of a two book

sequence called *The Sarantium Mosaic*. As with his previous three novels it is based upon European history (the geography and history behind the story being thinly disguised) with leanings towards the Middle East in this case: as suggested by the title, the Byzantine Empire is the main inspiration. Some of his earlier works have been described as Byzantine, so it does seem fitting. His previous books rewrote some terrible historical events (reversing the outcome of the Albigensian Crusades in *A Song For Arbonne* for example), and each has moved further away from fantasy and towards pseudo-history. In this book, the magic has come back. While I liked the last two novels (*A Song for Arbonne* and *The Lions of Al-Rassan*) I found them to pale in comparison with *Tigana*. *Sailing to*



*Sarantium* has re-captured some of the spirit of *Tigana*. To find out whether it will equal or surpass his earlier work, one must wait for the second instalment (due in a year to eighteen months time, judging by Kay's usual writing rate).

The main character is a mosaicist from Rhodias (Rome) whose elder partner is summoned to Sarantium (Byzantium) by the Emperor to work on a religious monument. His partner being unwilling to make the journey, Caius Crispus is persuaded by various events that travelling to Sarantium in his partner's place is necessary. *Sailing to Sarantium* shows Crispus's inner journey from grief over the deaths of his wife and daughters in the plague, back to life, through the physical and his love of art. Behind all this is a background of magic

(represented by the alchemist Zoticus in Rhodias and the pagan ceremonies Crispus becomes involved in during his journey) and politics (starting with a secret visit to the precariously placed ruler of Rhodias and culminating in his involvement with labyrinthine plots in Sarantium).

The religious background in *Sailing to Sarantium* appears to be shared with that in *The Lions of Al-Rassan*. In *Lions* the Asharite (Muslim) and Kindath (Jewish) religions are more prominent; in *Sailing to Sarantium* the recent supremacy of the mono-theistic Jaddite (Christian) religion over older pagan beliefs is explored. Early Christian controversies (such as the divinity of Christ) are mirrored in the arguments over the status of Heladikos, a Promethean figure who sacrificed his own life in bringing fire from Jad (the Sun) to mankind. While Crispus is a (relatively) devout Jaddite, he is forced to re-evaluate his belief in the supremacy and solo existence of Jad while 'Sailing to Sarantium'

(actually he walks, but we are constantly reminded of the allegorical meaning of that statement), through his experiences with 'magic' beginning with Zoticus and continuing throughout his journey and on into Sarantium itself.

Kay has written the first half of a work which has the potential to be his best yet. The complexity of the political intrigue is worthy of the Byzantine background, and his extensive research into the real history gives a depth to his imagined version that many fantasies lack. Provided he can pay off the mysteries and intrigues of *Sailing to Sarantium* in the second book, *The Sarantine Mosaic* could become a modern classic.

*Guy Gavriel Kay will be Guest of Honour at 2Kon, Eastercon 2000 at the Central Hotel Glasgow. Contact 2Kon, 30 Woodburn Terrace, St Andrews KY16 8BA for details.*

### Greg Keyes – *The Blackgod* [1]

Orbit, 1998, 494pp, £6.99 ISBN 1 85723 663 7

Reviewed by John R. Oram

In this sequel to Keyes's debut novel, *The Waterborn*, Hezhi, the Rivergod's daughter, has escaped, along with Perkar, and wants to build a life of her own. But things are not that simple: the Rivergod wants her back and will use any means within his power to recapture her. To achieve happiness, Hezhi must destroy the Rivergod, and her only hope is the Blackgod, a trickster who has his own agenda.

The story is original, and the characters well thought out. But – and this is a big 'but' – I could not finish it; it bored me. The weakness of the book is that the author tends to long swathes of

description, which take up most of some chapters. Some authors, Tad Williams springs to mind, can get away with this. But Greg Keyes is simply not good enough. His paragraphs are too long and his sentences at times so convoluted, that I had to read them several times to make sense of what he was saying. Quite frankly, it needs a good editor. It needs tightening up and could easily lose a third of its length – I skipped whole chapters and still kept a sense of where the story was going.

In school report terms, tries hard but could do better. Needs to pay attention to English lessons.

### Stephen Lawhead – *The Iron Lance* [1]

Voyager, 1998, 499pp, £17.99 ISBN 0 00 224665 1

Reviewed by Lesley Hatch

Stephen Lawhead is one of my favourite authors so I had high hopes for this novel; I wasn't disappointed.

Although the book begins in Edinburgh in 1899, detailing an unnamed man's initiation into a secret order, and returns occasionally to relate his life story, it concentrates mainly on Murdo, a young man living on his father's farm in the Orkney Islands. When we first meet him, Murdo is being pursued by his brothers in an often-played game of hare and hunter. But his life is about to change drastically as the Abbot Gerardus comes calling, bringing news from the Jarl Erlend, the overlord of the islands, that he has no objections to his vassals going on crusade, if they wish, but they will get no material assistance from him.

Murdo is not exactly pious, and does not have a good opinion of the Abbot – 'Self-important meddler, thought Murdo, and entertained himself with the vision of the abbot's backside covered in ripe, red boils'. But Murdo's father, Ranulf, and brothers take the cross, leaving Murdo behind to tend the farm, which does not go well with him. At the feast which precedes the departure of the

pilgrims for the Holy Land, he is given a pilgrim's coin (which stands him in good stead, when the time comes).

All goes well until Murdo and his mother return from a stay at Cnoc Carrach to find that their home has been taken in the name of Prince Sigurd, and they have to flee back to Cnoc Carrach. On discovering the takeover has been sanctioned by the Church, Murdo decides to go and find his father and brothers and tell them what has happened.

Running parallel to Murdo's story, and creating an interesting counterpoint, are the adventures of Alexius Commenus, Emperor of All Christendom, in dealing with the hordes of pilgrims who come to fight the Saracens, most of whom are unprepared. It takes him some time to get various fractious lords to sign the oath of allegiance, but eventually he succeeds, and another piece of the puzzle falls into place.

Add the quest for the Iron Lance of the title, which Murdo gets involved with, three enigmatic monks, and Lawhead's rich imagery, and here is a highly recommended novel.

### Mark Leyland – *Slate Mountain* [1]

Hodder, 1998, 169pp, £3.99 ISBN 0 340 71607 X

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

*Slate Mountain* is Mark Leyland's first novel, and the winner of the Kathleen Fidler Award.

Ros has recently moved to a small Welsh village where she is bullied for being different. She also suffers from recurring dreams which grow more frightening until they become reality, and with two other children – one of whom is her principal bully – she is captured and forced to mine slate to help an evil being construct a pyramid that will destroy the world.

A book for children stands or falls on whether it tells an absorbing story, and *Slate Mountain* certainly does that. The pace is fast and the various threats have a nightmare quality. Another great strength is the range of effective characters. Young readers

will take an interest in Ros and how she grows through coping with her experiences, and in her companions on the work gang, who are taken from different periods of history. Eyda, the splendid Viking who is their leader, is surely Mark Leyland's favourite character, and works so well that she threatens to overshadow Ros.

The historical aspect of the book is obviously important to Leyland; often his characters have the opportunity to tell stories, deepening the book and giving it an immediate sense of place. The writer's note at the end shows that these legends are where the original idea came from and where his interests lie.

This may be one reason for what I found unsatisfactory: the lack of logical underpinning for the plot. We never find out whether the evil creature is a science fictional alien or a fantasy wizard, although the level of technology suggests the former. It's never clear why he uses such a cumbersome method of acquiring slaves, or why he warns his prospective victims in a dream. It could be argued that young readers will whizz through the book, enjoying the excitement and not asking inconvenient questions,

but I feel that children's sf, though it may be simpler, should be just as rigorous as that written for adults.

The climax of the book is effective, but Ros's return to her own world is perfunctory. We assume she will no longer be a victim, but there's not much chance to see this. I suspect that the length restriction of the Kathleen Fidler competition may have prevented Mark Leyland from doing as much with this thread as he would have liked, and perhaps the basic science fictional situation would have worked better with more space to explore it.

### Patrick Nielsen Hayden (Ed) – *Starlight 2*

TOR Books, 1998, 318pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0 312 86184 2

Reviewed by Janet Barron

Not having read the acclaimed first volume of *Starlight*, published in 1996, I can't say whether the second surpasses it, but the stories are all enjoyable and many are provocative. Don't expect froth – each of these thirteen stories deserve to be read with attention. But don't worry, while many of the stories are meaty enough to bear re-reading, none are so dense that they absolutely require a second reading.

There are two notable, not to say dazzling, highlights.

One is the closing novelette, Ted Chiang's 'Story of Your Life'. A first contact story like no other as Dr Louise Banks unravels the significance of an utterly alien language. This is a multi-layered and resonant narrative which is equally a scientific detective story, a very human tale of love and loss, and a mind expanding journey away from our perception that time is an arrow, and that cause precedes effect. The title refers to the narrator's daughter, whose quarter-century of life is spanned by her mother's ability to draw semagrams which, by their nature, require simultaneous not sequential information processing. The whole has to be known before any portion of it can be delineated. Thinking in such semagrams, there is no 'train of thought', premises and conclusions hang in perfect balance. And so with the story. Maybe there is no making sense of a child dying before a parent, but maybe, by accepting it as the necessary part of the whole, although it alters all that went before and after, equilibrium can be achieved.

The other is David Langford's 'A Game of Consequences' which coincidentally also has a female scientist narrator, and takes us into the world of quantum manipulation. All the more powerful

for its short length, it uses re-iterated imagery to memorably unfold a tale of disaster narrowly averted. More and more science, these days, is 'safe'; funded by committees who like to see evidence that the experiment will give the 'right' result before they will pay out the money to do it. But I recommend that anyone feeling nostalgic for the days when science was primarily the preserve of (male) boffins possessed of an overwhelming urge to tinker should read this story.

No such pyrotechnics in 'Snow' by Geoffrey A. Landis, a bag-lady tale with a twist, understated and moving. Equally poignant is Esther Friesner's 'Brown Dust' which also deals life on the street, in this case a telepathic street kid in Rio.

Resonances, re-iterations and correspondences abound throughout the anthology. In Robert Charles Wilson's 'Divided By Infinity' the personal is echoed by the cosmic. The narrator's continued existence, through a series of aborted suicide attempts, becomes increasingly unlikely, as does that of the human race. In Susanna Clarke's 'Mrs Mabb', an Austinesque faerytale, the correspondences are those between the tiny occupants of faerie and their manifestations in the full-scale world of the heroine. In 'Lock Down' by M. Shayne Bell, a single day is repeated until the time team, who do not, unfortunately, live in the best of all possible worlds, succeed in freezing it for perpetuity. And in 'The Death of the Duke' by Ellen Kushner, the additional resonance is not within the story at all, but comes from the fact that this is a coda to her earlier novel, *Swordpoint*.

An excellent, ambitious, and above all, highly polished science fiction and fantasy collection.

### Andre Norton – *Scent of Magic*

Avon Books, 1998, 361pp, \$23.00 ISBN 0 380 97687 0

Reviewed by Penny Hill

I was disappointed by the front cover: a dull copper background with some vaguely mechanical gold object lurking behind the bold white lettering. The back cover was much better: a warm inviting pre-Raphaelite picture of a stillroom where you could almost smell the herbs. The front cover object comes into focus as a dish set on a table at waist height, the centrepoint of a glowing magical event.

Once I started reading, I was quickly involved by the pace of the plot and the sympathetic characters, though some of the narrative switches caused events to lose momentum by appearing to backtrack. A certain clumsiness causes further confusion, for example when chapter 10 ends with Willadene falling asleep and chapter 11 opens: 'It was not only Mahart who was to dream deeply and to remember what she so dreamed that night.' – then takes us back to Willadene again. This clumsiness extends into the language; there was the occasional 'this sentence no verb', while other sentences are dominated by sub-clauses that I longed to rescue and present with sentences of their very own.

I was distracted by the names. Did our heroine really have to sound like a minor London Borough? As for the official 'dual ending-ric', it all too often became 'bric', leading me to envisage: a Germanic early learning building set 'Uttobric', a mediaeval Barbie doll 'Barbric', an examiner with a speech impediment

'Wubric', and to snort aloud over the serendipitously named suicidal mad Duke 'Rotonbric'. All this was as nothing compared to my childish glee when I discovered some mysterious fruits called 'plumferfs'.

The plumferfs did raise a serious issue though: just how alien was this world supposed to be? Sometimes it felt like a standard fantasy mediaeval kingdom – identical to earth except for working magic – at other times, plumferfs made me aware that this was supposed to be a new creation, or at least variation. However, when our hero uses a small round object to work out direction, why doesn't the heroine realise it's a compass? And is the chancellor's mysterious pet actually a rational ferret or not?

The importance of the title is that this is a world where aromatherapy and crystal healing combine to form powerful magic. This might have worked better had the author combined real scents with magical ones rather than relying on a description of their effects. The overall result was that of a watered down *Mistress of Spices*.

The tone of the book is fairly light and youthful – more children's fiction than adults'. Overall, it is an enjoyable conventional stand-alone fantasy novel (a rarity in itself), just let down by not being edited carefully enough.

**Terry Pratchett – *Carpe Jugulum***

Doubleday, 1998, 286pp, £16.99 ISBN 0 385 40992 3

Reviewed by Chris Amies

An envoy of the Church of Om, which used to burn witches and now chops logic, finds himself confronting a race of predators which have learnt to domesticate their prey. He's in two minds about it; and about a lot of other things.

Vampires, according to a tradition largely invented by nineteenth-century novelists and elaborated by the film industry, are reclusive, wear cloaks, and are quite easy to dispose of if one has some garlic or can open the curtains. The 'vampyres' that King Verence invites to the court of Lancre have had a long time to think things over, and they've modernised. They've come out of their remote castle to take

over human kingdoms, so as to obtain a permanent supply of blood. They can eat garlic, go out in daylight, and are unfazed by any of the Disc's hundreds of religious symbols. They've also managed to exert a glamour over the population, so that the vampyre takeover is accepted as reasonable. The scene in a town which has already been taken by the vampyres brings to mind Nazi-occupied Europe. Next on their list is the peaceful mountain kingdom of Lancre (combat-ready forces: Shawn Ogg and a troll).

The only way to avoid their mind-control, it seems, is to be in two minds. Thus Mightily Oats, the Omnian priest, and thus also Agnes Nitt, youngest of the trio of witches. She has a bitchy second personality called Perdita, who sometimes takes over, with varying results. Meanwhile Granny Weatherwax is lying asleep in a cave with a sign saying GOE AWAY in her hands, and Nanny Ogg may have to take over as 'the other one'.



The vampyres are cue for any number of vampire jokes, such as a servant called Igor (a man of many parts), and rebellious vampire youth who won't wear black, and call themselves nicknames like 'Cyril' and 'Pam'. There are vampyres who 'do not drink... wine', and also, for good measure, a couple of villainous lines from James Bond movies.

There's also a major role for Hodgesaargh, the palace falconer, who seems to have found a bird that isn't supposed to exist even in the Discworld, and there's a horde of blue pixies with more than a touch of Glasgow about them. Mightily Oats is that familiar Pratchett character, the naive youth who Makes Good (with a little help) and grows up in so doing.

**Terry Pratchett – *Jingo***

Corgi, 1998, 414pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 552 14598 X

Pratchett's previous Discworld novel makes its paperback appearance at the same time. In it, Pratchett presents his City Guard with the prospect of war caused by the sudden appearance of a new island. Reviewing it in V198, Andrew M. Butler said: 'despite Saddam Hussein's best efforts, the Gulf War and the supergun affair have made that transition from current affairs to recent history that means the satirical parody is a toothless pastiche – nostalgically amusing in its own way, but too comfortable to change or challenge the world'.

**Anne Rice – *Violin***

Arrow, 1998, 367pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 09 925315 4

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

Why is Anne Rice so popular? Was she always this erratic, or has twenty years made her a less, rather than more, accomplished writer?

If this hadn't been sent for review, quite likely I wouldn't have persevered much beyond chapter 2. By page 23, I was developing a real impatience and dislike for Rice's tiresomely morbid heroine, at this point in bed with the decaying corpse of her husband, while the second movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony plays over and over again on the stereo downstairs. All very tragic and gothic, I'm sure (although the effect would arguably be better if Triana was thin and interestingly pale, rather than a frumpy middle-aged woman who dresses like Mrs Slocum in *Are You Being Served?*)

While Triana is understandably distraught and bereaved, there is an uncomfortable sense of the histrionic and operatic in all this, underscored by the blurb's gushing 'Triana's grief is deep and almost boundless. Death has marked her, and taken her husband.'

Unfortunately, much of the first third of *Violin* seems to be written in that tone of repetitive overwrought gothic melodrama, to the point where, when Triana emerges from the other side of her morbid madness, I was so thoroughly irritated with her as a person that I didn't really care much about what happened to her when the real story gets underway.

With Karl's death, Triana is haunted by a wild-haired violinist, at first from a distance, and then in increasingly personal confrontations. His playing is brilliant, a fact he uses to taunt and torment Triana, whose love of music is far beyond her workmanlike ability to play an instrument. Until she wrests Stefan's violin from him, a rare Stradivarius which brings her an equally exceptional ability to improvise and launches her on a career of popular and critical acclaim, concert tours and recordings. Now the tables are turned: it is Triana's playing that haunts and torments Stefan, even as he tries to drag her into the

past, to his own time as a pupil of Beethoven, and an aborted career that ends in fire, patricide and death.

And yet Rice can write well, and shows she can in several pages of quite excellent and gripping writing halfway through the book, as Triana recalls a horrible childhood with her drunken mother, and one spectacularly revolting and chilling incident

where she discovers a discarded, soiled, ant-infested sanitary towel in her mother's bedroom. But it takes too long to get there, and on the way Rice displays a laziness in fleshing out her secondary characters beyond cardboard stereotypes, a tin ear for dialogue, and far too much overblown melodrama for this reviewer's taste, or patience.

### Frank M. Robinson – *Waiting*

Forge, 1999, 303pp, \$23.95 ISBN 0 312 86652 6

Reviewed by Colin Bird

Frank M. Robinson was most successful as a writer of seventies technothrillers such as *The Glass Inferno*; filmed as *The Towering Inferno*. An earlier, more science fictional novel about paranormal abilities, *The Power*, was also made into a successful film. More recently he wrote *The Dark Beyond The Stars*, a rather dated novel set on a generation starship.

With *Waiting* Robinson returns to the technothriller, albeit with an anthropological theme. This is a contemporary novel with a simple premise: 35,000 years ago, when homo sapiens became the dominant species on Earth, one of the related species, thought to have since become extinct, instead went 'underground'. This product of a different branch on the human evolutionary tree is living amongst us, breeding with humans, waiting for the opportunity to reclaim dominance.

Robinson uses the device of a conventional murder mystery to begin his story. Documentary maker, Artie Banks, is a member of The Suicide Club, a group of professionals who meet regularly to give talks to each other about the latest trends in their respective fields of expertise. When one of the group, Doctor Shea, is

brutally killed on the way to a meeting of the Suicide Club, Artie begins to investigate. He becomes convinced that Shea had discovered the existence of the Old People and was preparing to announce it to the group. The story then becomes a whodunnit as the Suicide Club are gradually knocked off while Artie tries to determine which of them is a member of the predatory Old People.

This is an easy book to read with very few of the infodumps you would associate with this kind of 'high concept' thriller. However, the drawback is that Robinson's premise is pretty unconvincingly developed, particularly his attempts to explain the Old People's rapid development of the power of suggestion which they use to drive humanity down the path to extinction. In the age of Crichton we like the ideas behind our technothrillers to have a bit more scientific rigour, even if the story is total tosh. As a thriller it's a fast and reasonably enticing read with a genuinely enthralling opening. But as Artie discovers more facts about the Old People the story becomes too wedded to the history of the Suicide Club instead of widening in scope.

### Robert Silverberg (Ed) – *Legends*

Voyager, 1998, 591pp, £17.99 ISBN 0 00 225666 5

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

Given the abundance of hefty fantasy trilogies or even longer multi-volumed fantasy series currently available, the publication of *Legends*, which contains eleven short stories by some of the most popular and prolific writers of modern fantasy, must be welcome – if only as a means for readers to sample each author's work without having to fork out a tidy sum on 500+ pages that they might not enjoy. In fact, *Legends* is much more than a sampler, for although the stories are set in imaginary 'worlds' already featured in full length novels, they are self-contained, and well worth reading in their own right. Each story has an introduction describing the 'world' in which it takes place, together with a brief summary of events in the novels, but these are not essential reading.

Editor Robert Silverberg contributes one of the most engrossing stories of the collection, 'The Seventh Shrine', a murder mystery set on the fantastical, gigantic world of Majipoor during the reign of the Pontifex Valentine. Stephen King's story tells of an episode in the travels of Roland, hero of *The Dark Tower* sequence. From Ursula Le Guin comes 'Dragonfly', a most welcome return to Earthsea. Equally welcome is Terry Pratchett's exceedingly funny Discworld story featuring the indomitable Granny Weatherwax and Nanny Ogg. Terry Goodkind proves himself able to produce a short story every bit as gripping as the novels in *The Sword of Truth* series. 'Runner of Pern' by Anne McCaffrey is self

explanatory, while Raymond E. Feist and Robert Jordan's stories are part of *The Riftwar Saga* and *The Wheel of Time* series respectively. The world of *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R.R. Martin is represented by a story appropriately entitled 'The Hedge Knight', and Orson Scott Card offers a further tale of Alvin Maker.

It has been said that the short story is the ideal form for science fiction rather than fantasy and I did wonder if the 'worlds' so vividly described by each author in the multi-volumed novel format would stand up to being presented in the necessarily more precise shorter form. However, the 'worlds' of the imagination with which I was familiar, and those I had not yet ventured within both lent themselves to this curtailment of their authors' usual method of telling a tale without detriment.

*Legends* can be described as a thematic anthology, not simply because all of its stories are fantasy but because each story demonstrates how its author has the ability to create an entirely credible background through which their characters move. Anyone who enjoys fantasy will enjoy the additions to their favourite series, and will certainly be inspired to try out the longer fiction of authors new to them. Particularly deserving of mention is a haunting, atmospheric story, 'The Burning Man', in which an aged narrator looks back to events of her youth – this reviewer will be purchasing Tad Williams's *Memory, Sorrow and Thorn* trilogy in the very near future.

### Robert Silverberg & Grania Davis (Eds) – *The Avram Davidson Treasury*

TOR Books, 1998, 447pp, \$26.95 ISBN 0 312 86729 8

Reviewed by L. J. Hurst

After the volumes collecting the works of Philip K. Dick and Theodore Sturgeon comes this big anthology (the cover calls it 'the definitive collection', though it is not complete) of stories by

Avram Davidson. He had been a writer for the Jewish papers in the early 1950s, but moved into sf and fantasy with his story 'My Boy Friend's Name is Jello' in *The Magazine Of Fantasy And*

*Science Fiction* in 1954. He obviously called on Jewish traditions for some of his inspiration, because his second published story was 'The Golem' four years later. Very few of his stories are science fictional, but to him fantasy did not mean princesses, wizards and magic. In Davidson's world, fantasy meant a very sideways edge to the reality that he, or you or I, knew. In 'The Goobers' (1965) an orphan boy is dominated by his grandfather and threatened that The Goobers will take him away if he disobeys the old man's abusive demands; and then in one paragraph The Goobers appear, consider the boy and shock the old man. Then they go away. In his last sentence the boy says he faced out his grandfather for two years and then ran away. It is the Huck Finn story, but seen differently.

Davidson travelled about the Americas. He lived in Mexico, and his stories reflected it. Later he lived in Belize, and used it as the setting of 'Manatee Gal, Won't You Come Out Tonight', in which a spirit of the hunted manatees may have hunted the hunter, but with an uncertainty that shows he knew the literary methods of the magical realists.

Equally, Davidson knew the problems of the immigrants who had arrived in his own country. The last story from the 1950's, 'The Woman Who Thought She Could Read', deals with an

immigrant woman who can read the future for her neighbours, and the misery it causes. 'The Slovo Stove' from 1985 deals again with immigrants being encouraged by thoughtless notions of citizenship to give up their energy-saving ethnic tools, but made miserable to become Americans.

Like another fantasy author, Jack Vance, Davidson was a contributor of short stories to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine (and both actually ghosted Ellery Queen novels). 'The Affair at Lahore Cantonment' won an Edgar in 1961 for best short story. It tells the story behind Kipling's ballad of the hanging of Danny Deever. 'Revolver' in 1962, shows how misery ultimately ends by reinforcing itself in the ghetto, and 'Crazy Old Lady' in 1976 shows how the ghetto had been allowed to degenerate further. Both are incredibly good, and according to Davidson's son suggested to Davidson by the conditions in which he was living at the end of his life.

Each author who introduces a story seems to ask why Davidson was not given the recognition he deserved. I can't answer, but I can't help feeling that Davidson's handling of The Goobers, only shows how someone like Stephen King skipped a few of the lessons he could have learned by reading the stories collected here.

### Tom Standing – *The Victorian Internet*

Reviewed by L.J. Hurst

Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1998, 216pp, £14.99 ISBN 0 802 71342 4

This will go on the shelf along with Sobel's *Longitude*, and other modern small studies. Its subject is not the internet, but the development of the telegraph in the last century – starting with the mechanical models used by Napoleon and the British authorities, through the development of the electric telegraph, Morse code, messenger boys, railway halts, and Western Union money orders. In some ways this is science, in others it is technology. But if fans can see more in it as well.

(I'll quickly jump over the descriptions of the mechanical semaphores, which explain what Keith Roberts's signallers would have done in *Pavane*, and the details of Victorian electricity which fill in some of the gaps of *The Difference Engine*, and more info which helps to illuminate other works).

What Standing succeeds in doing is pointing out how society is always experiencing changes, and that some people are aware of them. Nevertheless what might seem the most revolutionary aspects of these developments often serve very different purposes. For instance, authorities attempted to ban the use of codes in message sending, but finally abandoned the attempt. What then

happened was not that the telegraph became the nervous system of the revolutionary underground, but that businessmen directed their field agents to better opportunities without informing their rivals, and cut their communication costs by sending only key words which stood for agreed sentences. Standing has an example of a detailed message about American cereals in which a 68 word message is reduced to 9, while in India the Department of Agriculture's codeword 'envelope' meant 'great swarms of locusts have appeared and ravaged the crops'.

The Morse tappers came to know one another, women found more clerical work in which they might be treated more equally, and men and women courted on the line. Standing even has found examples of marriage over the wires, in shades of today's teledildonics. Cyberpunk novels such as *Vurt* and *Snowcrash* have portrayed scientific breakthroughs as likely vehicles of gratuitous pleasure, and abuse more than use, but the lesson that Standing can see in technological development is more a conservation of practise than any momentum to revolution.

### Sheri S. Tepper – *Six Moon Dance*

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

Avon Books, 1998, 454pp, \$23.00 ISBN 0 380 97479 7

By now, after a dozen science fiction fantasy novels (not counting as many Young Adult and 'True Game' books, and horror and mystery titles under several pseudonyms), a new Sheri Tepper title brings with it a whole raft of expectations. We know what it is going to be (roughly) about; her concerns, indeed obsessions, revolve around a number of pivotal issues: the relationship between the sexes, social, sexual and religious injustice; overpopulation, the instinct for aggression, and the destruction of the environment. The trick is the particular spin each book will give to each or any of these as they play against each other to pose a series of awkward questions and often equally awkward answers.

*Six Moon Dance* is no exception.

The setting is Newholme, a colony world with a curiously inverted sexual set-up, governed by a Panhagian matriarchy. For some reason, which the Hags attribute to a chromosomal virus, half as many girls are born as boys, which leads to a system of marriage dowering which provides substantial income for families

fortunate enough to have girls, while those with an excess of boys face the choice of having them gelded to serve as 'chatrons' or, like the unfortunate Mouche, sold into training as Consorts, male geisha-courtesans who provide erotic companionship to women at the end of their obligatory ten year marriage contracts. Men are also obliged to wear veils in public, to avoid exciting 'women's insatiable lusts' and are regarded as the weaker sex.

This is not Newholme's only problem, although it's odd enough to prompt a visit from the cyborg Questioner, charged by the Council of Worlds with upholding the Haraldson edicts on both human and indigenous rights. There's the vexed question of the Timmys, who were not present before the founding of the colony, and now are, in violation of the laws governing Newholme's settlement. They shouldn't be there, so they are therefore 'invisible', unspoken of, although they form practically all Newholme's menial labour economy.

And both the colonists and the Timmys have other worries, as Newholme's six moons begin to align in conjunction, causing

increasing volcanic and seismic activity that threatens to tear the world apart.

This would be more than enough for most novels, but Tepper adds a further plot thread involving an ancient spacefaring alien, the Quaggima, which has crashed with a hatchling egg on Newholme, and which is in some way responsible for the strange ritual dances of the Timmys. This is the weakest thread, but unfortunately drives the story's resolution, although it contains a rather neat reversal of preconceptions.

Six *Moon Dance* is typical, if not classic, Tepper, with pace, charm, awful puns (the acronymic HoLi-COW), surprises, and a

blend of fantasy and sf. It's a slight disappointment after *The Family Tree*, but mainly because it tries too hard, in too many areas, to pack in more than a single book can reasonably cope with. Tepper seems quite aware of both her (sometimes considerable) strengths and faults, the tendency to lecture, polemic and didactic finger wagging offsetting her skill at inventive storytelling. Unfortunately she seems too often unable, or unwilling, to fully confront them, and reading a new Tepper novel is akin to watching a high-wire act, often breathtaking, occasionally graceless, and hoping that she will make it without falling off.

### Sean Wallace & Philip Harbottle – *The Tall Adventurer*

Becon, 1998, 200pp, £12.00 ISBN 1 870824 32 6

Reviewed by L. J. Hurst

Philip Harbottle's earlier *Vultures Of The Void* described, like Steve Holland's *The Mushroom Jungle*, the world of British publishing in the 1950s. The publishers lived hand-to-mouth, and their writers, still in the world of shortages and rationing, wrote because their lives were even more hand-to-mouth than their employers. In the introductory interview to *The Tall Adventurer* Ted Tubb recalls with Vin Clarke some of that world. Tubb, though, did not despair, even when the pop publishers collapsed, and in the 1960s he was still around to start the Dumarest of Terra and Cap Kennedy series for American houses such as DAW.

*The Tall Adventurer*, in a small box on the cover (whose illustration spoofs one of Tubb's recent collections), correctly describes this book as 'An annotated guide to every book and short story'. And they are annotations by two admitted fans. So of the 222 stories listed and described, only number 88, 'Intrigue on Io', is described: 'Oh, dear – here we have Tubb's only genuine clunking piece of hackwork!'. While among their positives they point out that 'Precedent', which appeared in *New Worlds* in 1952, pre-dated Tom Godwin's 'The Cold Equations' by two years in dealing with the moral problems of stowaways and fuel consumption in interplanetary travel.

Every story (and in the second half of the book, every novel or collection) is listed, with its various publications, and dates, and

the pseudonym the author used. Tubb was trying to live by his writing, while other authors of the fifties (Clarke and Ballard, for instance) waited until their writing could support them, which perhaps threatened to write him out. He was a man of many names, and one of the most regretful things caused by the cheap magazine demand was that authors could not be identified. Either they had to use many names to hide their productivity, or else they became another set of hands for Volstead Gridban. Wallace and Harbottle argue that one of the identifying elements in Tubb's work is its use of logic – but that would not have been obvious at the time.

*The Tall Adventurer* is interesting in itself, but apart from sending readers out to look for copies of Tubb's work (some are being re-published now, but this bibliography is more likely to act as a check-list in the second-hand shops for collectors), it also points out that some novels and stories are actually responses or developments of other people's work: *City Of No Return* with C.A. Smith's *City Of The Singing Flame* and Simak's *The Voice In The Void*, for instance, or *The Tormented City* with Harbottle's *The Paradox Men*, and that could be the skeleton of a graduate thesis. But start looking for that source material now: many of those titles were not published for posterity.

### Terri Windling & Delia Serman (Eds) – *The Essential Bordertown* TOR Books, 1998, 384pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0 312 86593 7

Reviewed by Tanya Brown

Terri Windling's *Bordertown* – 'the finest of all shared worlds', according to *Locus* – makes its hardcover debut in this anthology. Guidebook chapters, frequently works of art in themselves, alternate with short stories by big-name fantasy writers, as well as those who are not (yet) famous.

*Bordertown* is where science and magic, the World and the (Faerie) Realm, meet: once an ordinary American city, it was transformed by the return of Faerie on the hills beyond the suburbs. Now *Bordertown* is a frontier town, populated by the rejects of both societies, subject to UN sanctions on faerie trade, and running a flourishing 'underground, under-thirty' economy.

Neither science nor magic can quite be trusted in *Bordertown*. In 'Arcadia', by Michael Korolenko, Jill's disappointment with the city is transmuted as she tries to film a documentary, and finds that her spell-powered camcorder records something quite different to what she sees. Steven Brust's masterful 'When the Bow Breaks' is the tale of a ship's captain who learns another lesson of magic: treat anything as alive for long enough, or personify it, and you've worked a spell. If the Mad River acts like a drug on humans, what might it do to the ships that sail its blood-red waters?

In many modern fantasies, elfen themes go hand-in-hand with Celtic myth and magic. *Bordertown*, true to its multi-cultural

manifesto, has room for more: Donnard Sturgis does wonders with voodoo and a gumbo recipe in 'Half-Life'. 'Argentine', by Ellen Steiber, pits an elfen thief, stealing whatever someone most loves, against the ghost of another thief whom she encounters in a cemetery on the Day of the Dead. This is one of the most accomplished and atmospheric tales in the book: Steiber's first fantasy novel is forthcoming from Tor, and if 'Argentine' is a true gauge of her style, it should be worth the wait.

The original *Bordertown* anthologies (none published in the UK, and all out of print in the US) dealt primarily with adolescent themes and obsessions. While this anthology embraces several of the usual rites of passage, there is a sense of emerging maturity. Caroline Stevermer's 'Rag', in particular, is a thoughtful exploration of the idea that 'hearts of fire grow cold'; that growing up means that you stop caring about the things that used to matter. 'Socks', by Delia Sherman, describes the conflicts of adults through the eyes of a sick, amnesiac twelve-year-old girl, subtly and with remarkable effect.

I've mentioned only a handful of the stories in the anthology, and they are not necessarily the best. There isn't a weak story in the book: if anyone still thinks that fantasy is an excuse for poor prose, let them read here and think again.

# Articles

These are some of the other books we have seen recently. A mention here does not necessarily preclude a review in a later issue of Vector.

## Sarah Ash – *The Lost Child*

*Orion*, 1998, 344pp, £6.99 ISBN 0 75281 683 7  
This is a medieval romance built around a lightly disguised version of the blood libel that led to pogroms against the Jews in the Middle Ages. In her review in **V200**, Sue Thomason described it as 'a historical romance, with a little magic added to spice things up' and went on to say, 'my main criticism ... is that it's far too nice a novel... the book closes in happily-ever-after mode, ignoring the fact that without divine intervention 80% of the cast are going to starve to death over the next year.'

## Chris Boucher – *Last Man Running* [ ]

BBC Books, 1998, 251pp, £4.99 ISBN 0 563 40594 5

## Paul Magrs – *The Scarlet Empress* [ ]

BBC Books, 1998, 283pp, £4.99 ISBN 0 563 40595 3

## David J. Howe & Stephen James Walker – *Doctor Who: The Television Companion*

BBC Books, 1998, 557pp, £8.99 ISBN 0 563 40588 0

Two more in the steadily accumulating series of novels by which the BBC continues to exploit *Doctor Who* without actually getting round to making any new programmes. *Last Man Running* sets the fourth Doctor and Leela down on a seemingly benign planet that is, of course, anything but, while *The Scarlet Empress* is yet another new adventure for the eighth Doctor and Sam which manages to combine an ancient planet ruled by magic and an eccentric time traveller called Iris Wildthyme. If I were to ponder whether Iris is the first time traveller in the series who isn't a Time Lord, I might do so by checking *The Television Companion* which is presented as 'the official BBC guide to every TV story' and does indeed contain just about everything anyone might be interested in knowing, including plot and cast and analysis, corrections of on-screen errors, snippets of dialogue and other trivia for every single episode ever screened. There's even a checklist of novelisations at the end.

## Dave Duncan – *Future Indefinite*

*Corgi*, 1998, 523pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 552 14501 7  
The third 'round' in Duncan's ongoing fantasy sequence, *The Great Game*, which has attracted quite a bit of favourable comment; Vikki Lee in **V199** said: 'It's a

fascinating book with lots of well drawn, if somewhat "whacky" characters'. This latest volume sees our hero, Edward Exeter, finally take on the mantle of D'ward, the Liberator.

## J.V. Jones – *The Barbed Coil*

*Orbit*, 1998, 667pp, £6.99 ISBN 1 85723 568 1  
First published in 1997, this is the paperback reprint of a stand alone fantasy from a writer who has already gained a very solid reputation for her earlier trilogy. It is a familiar tale of usurpers, revenge, and the people caught up in the mess when an ancient force calls for blood.

## Paul J. McAuley – *Child of the River*

*Vista*, 1998, 350pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 575 60168 X  
The First Book of Confluence is the first volume in the far-future epic that has grown out of his novella 'Recording Angel'. Reviewing this volume in **V197**, K.V. Bailey said: 'The notorious "second volume problem" poses its challenge, but plenty of impetus has been generated, and one remains curious about these strangely imagined far-future cosmographies and eschatologies.'

## Michael Moorcock – *Count Brass*

*Millennium*, 1998, 401pp, £6.99 ISBN 0 75281 720 5

Michael Moorcock has been so prolific throughout his career that one wonders whether he might ever complete his project of making every novel a part of his Tale of the Eternal Champion. This is the 14<sup>th</sup> volume and brings together (slightly modified and with a new introduction) *Count Brass* and *The Champion of Garathorm* (both from 1973) with *The Quest for Tanelorn* (1975).

## John Pritchard – *Dark Ages*

*Voyager*, 1998, 756pp, £6.99 ISBN 0 00 649637 7  
Dark forces from late Saxon Britain are unwittingly unleashed upon our modern world at the start of this epic horror novel. The period seems to have been well researched and vividly presented, making this an interesting exception to the usual mindless grue.

## Ian Watson – *Oracle*

*Vista*, 1998, 387pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 575 60226 0  
Ian Watson's sf thriller, which tangles a Roman legion brought forward by a time travel experiment with an IRA attempt to assassinate the Queen, was viewed more in

sorrow than anger by Brian Stableford in **V197**, who concluded: 'Happily, Ian Watson is the kind of writer who will already be moving on to pastures new – hopefully to pastures where his ingenuity and intelligence can be invested in a project more worthy of their deployment.'

## Alan Baker – *UFO Sightings*

*Millennium*, 1998, 297pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 75281 728 0

## John & Anne Spencer – *Alien Contact*

*Millennium*, 1998, 313pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 75281 727 2

It is probably the fault of *The X Files*, but these days it seems to be impossible to separate science fiction from Fortean. These are the latest from the ongoing series of Fortean books appearing under the Sci-Fi Channel logo, feeding a millennial hunger to believe there is something out there. At least the series is written by reputable authorities who are not so credulous as some when they present the evidence.

## Chris Carter adapted by Elizabeth Hand – *Fight the Future* [ ]

*Voyager*, 1998, 219pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 00 651190 2

*Voyager*, 1998, 153pp, £4.99 ISBN 0 00 651189 9

## Jody Duncan – *The Making of The X Files*

### *Fight the Future*

*Voyager*, 1998, 87pp, £4.99 ISBN 0 00 648362 3

*Voyager*, 1998, 128pp, £9.99 ISBN 0 00 224688 0

This is curious, but it probably says something about the audience the makers, and the publishers, see for *X Files* material, for both the novelization of the film and the inevitable picture book about the making of the film come in two simultaneous versions, one for adults and one 'adapted for young readers'.

## Timothy Zahn – *Specter of the Past* [ ]

*Bantam*, 1998, 386pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 553 50417 7

With the first film in the new *Star Wars* trilogy due for release within the year, the books continue to develop their own universe, and one can only ponder how much the two might overlap. This is the first of a new two-part adventure which sees the Empire trying to stave off total collapse with a last desperate gamble.

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**Reviewers Key:** AA – Andrew Adams, AF – Alan Fraser, AM – Andy Mills, AS – Andrew Seaman, BS – Brian Stableford, CA – Chris Amies, CB1 – Cherish Baldry, CB2 – Colin Bird, GD – Gary Dalkin, GW – Gary Wilkinson, JB – Janet Barron, JDO – John D. Owen, JM – Jan Malique, JN1 – John Newsinger, JN2 – Joseph Nicholas, JRO – John R. Oram, JW – Jon Wallace, KT – Kathy Taylor, KVB – K. V. Bailely, LB – Lynne Biphame, LH – Lesley Hatch, LJH – L. J. Hurst, MC – Mat Coward, P – Particle, PH – Penny Hill, SD – Stephen Deas, SJ – Steve Jeffery, SP – Steve Palmer, TB – Tanya Brown.