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The Critical Journal of the BSFA

Vector 221

THE CRITICAL JOURNAL OF THE BSFA

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Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial

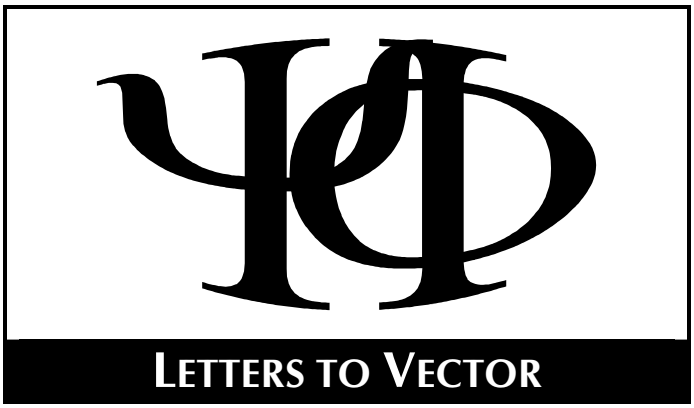
The View from a Darkening Isle

Christmas 2001 is still over a month away as I write this, and the nights are drawing in. It's exactly the time – had I got time – to curl up with a book, and lose yourself in another world. And by the time you read this, Christmas – even 2001 – will be a memory, and the nights will be shortening.

Some issues of *Vector* are designed and commissioned to the last detail, others are compilations of materials submitted and commissioned, and others – perhaps most of them – fall into place. Take this issue, with an unlooked for but very welcome focus on British writers. Given his first publication in the 1960s, it's probably fair to describe Chris Priest as a veteran; certainly he is part way through a full and varied career, and Andy Sawyer's article offers a useful overview of it. Gwyneth Jones first emerged in 1977 as a novelist, but it is 2001's *Bold as Love* which is the focus of her interview with Tanya Brown. And thence to two (relative) newcomers: interviews with Justina Robson and Michael Cobley. Michael has also given us an article on a British phenomenon: cyberpunk. Yes, you did read this right, and it's a revelation.

In the end there's so much good stuff that I'm curtailing my editorial rambling, and even having to hold an article over to next time, the centrepiece of which will (hopefully) be the annual review of the past year in science fiction.

by Andrew M. Butler, High Wycombe, Autumn 2001.



LETTERS TO VECTOR

The work of a Vector *contributor is never done – we demand rewrites, and query facts, but even so the odd mistake (or six) slips through the net. So we begin with a belated correction, resulting from a review in* V193 *(May/June 1997):*

From L J Hurst, via email:
May I correct a mistake I made when reviewing Jeff Noon's *Automated Alice* in *Vector* in 1997? By relying on the absence of mentions of sequels to Lewis Carroll's original books in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* I held a false belief, which was not negated by visits I made to the specialist children's booksellers off London's St Martin's Lane, that *Automated Alice* was, thus, a rare sequel.

However, there may have been many spin-offs of which I was unaware: *Alternative Alices: Visions and Revisions of Lewis Carroll's Alice Books* edited by Carolyn Sigler (Kentucky UP 1997), suggests there were at least 200 imitations, revisions and parodies, including Christina Rosetti's *Speaking Likenesses* (1874) and Edward Hope's *Alice In The Delighted States* (1928). The period covered by *Alternative Alices* ends in 1930, which might mean hundreds more of Carroll's bastard progeny exist as yet unacknowledged.

In mitigation of my error may I point out that Professor Sigler's book was not published until a year after Jeff Noon's, and does not mention it, even in passing. If any *Vector* readers are interested in this rare sideway of speculative fiction, though, *Alternative Alices* is a book of which they should be aware.

Should any reader feel a need to return to that back issue, I suggest that they do not cut this letter from their current issue of *Vector*. Instead, they should photocopy this page, and then marking the sheet 'Erratum', it can be inserted in their library copy. For should any student, fan, later member of the BSFA or general reader be reading *Vector* in chronological order, their ignorance might be extended for a unknown period, until they came on this correction.

In the meantime, I echo those words once heard by JP Martin's character, Uncle: 'My grief is deep, My grief is profound'. It does not extend to offering to pay anybody's photocopying bill, though.

Andrew M Butler responds: there's a sequel by Gilbert Adair, Alice Through the Needle's Eye *(1984), and I'd be surprised if there weren't many more; like Oz and Sherlock Holmes, it's a mythos itching to be added to.* The Encyclopedia of Fantasy *offers a couple of titles post-dating 1930, and a collection edited by Margaret Weis and Martin H. Greenberg,* Fantastic Alice *(1995). I did a quick internet search and failed to find a sequels page, but did find the following delicious sentence: 'The well-known story of* Alice in Wonderland *takes on a whole new view when read in its original form.' Well, duh... (You might have noticed this quotation made its way into* Ansible*).*

From Cy Chauvin, via email:
Thanks for publishing the interview with Geoff Ryman in *Vector* 218. Ever since reading 'The Unconquered Country', I've tried to follow his work. The question I would like to ask (of other readers, not just Geoff Ryman) is if they had any expectations of fantasy while reading *'Was...'*? I was, very much, and I'm not saying this as a criticism, but it was an expectation, and it was so strong it was like an undercurrent, even a subtext to the novel; and the only bit of possible fantasy we squeeze out of Ryman is the character's mysterious disappearance at the end. (And perhaps Dorothy's mad vision in a field of sunflowers, I believe.) Amid the pain in the novel, and with Dorothy and Baum the subject of the novel, it is hard for a steady reader of fantasy and sf not to have such an expectation. And perhaps the expectation added something to the novel even though it was never fulfilled. I understand now the desire of some writers not to 'give in' to fantasy, if they can achieve their story's purpose or effect without it – the novel can simply be more powerful by being completely real or possible.

I also thought it was very interesting for Ryman to say that he thought *253* worked better as a printed novel than as a text on the internet. I never saw the internet version, but I found the printed book very off-putting because the text format was copied from that on a computer (and I didn't buy it). But I think if it had been presented in ordinary typeface, I would have.

I looked and looked for *The Warrior That Carried Life* many years ago when I was in the UK, and found and read it – it was very interesting, but so bloody I finally decided to give it away after I was done so I wouldn't have it in the house.

One of my favorite Ryman stories wasn't mentioned: 'The Diary Of the Translator' (from *New Worlds Quarterly* #10). There have been any number of sf stories about diluting art for the consumer, but this is the best. And Ryman's love for Jane Austen certainly comes through, and it's rather rare for other art or fiction to be described in such specific terms as those used in 'The Diary Of the Translator' in science fiction. Other writers tend to be vague. Perhaps someone will reprint the story for the new century's audience.

AMB responds: I've seen plenty of copies of NWQ10 around (secondhand) over the years, but never picked one up. Even the copy I have lacks one story which as I recall bore an uncanny resemblance to whatever we're meant to call the first Doctor Who and Daleks story – 'The Dead Planet'*, I guess – and appears to have been razored out by the previous owner. The Ryman story was reprinted in an issue of* Nexus *in the early 1990s, I believe in the first issue. It wasn't included in the 1999 collection* Unconquered Countries*, but then it wasn't a novella.*

I wonder how many people caught the documentary on/video diary of Geoff Ryman struggling to write and edit Lust*, a volume which inexplicably was thought to be destined to be the breakthrough novel for Ryman in terms of sales? (We're a lot more tolerant of differing sexualities these days, and a long way on from shock! horror! exposés of the 1950s and 1960s, but even so the way the novel was described didn't strike me as bestseller material – it sounded too challenging and too likely to strike chords of homophobia. Still, it's more than twenty five years since* Dhalgren.*) The documentary was good stuff, although it's the first time I've seen erections described on TV at teatime.*

Letters to Vector *should be sent to* Andrew M Butler, D28, Department of Arts and Media, Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, High Wycombe, HP11 2JZ *or emailed to* ambutler@enterprise.net *and marked 'For publication'. We reserve the right to edit or shorten letters. Letters in* Vector *should either be about the contents and policies of* Vector*, or about sf and fantasy in general. Letters about the BSFA should be sent to* Matrix – *see p. 2 for their contact address.*

IT'S GOOD TO SEE NEW BRITISH WRITERS BREAKING THROUGH AND GETTING PUBLISHED, IN FANTASY AS WELL AS SCIENCE FICTION. ONE OF THESE IS MICHAEL COBLEY, ALTHOUGH HE'S BEEN WRITING FOR YEARS AND HIS FIRST PUBLICATION DATES BACK WELL OVER A DECADE.

A Dream Come True

An Interview with Michael Cobley by Andrew M. Butler

Andrew M Butler: You were born in Leicestershire but grew up in Scotland. Do you feel Scottish or English?

Michael Cobley: Both and neither. It seems to me that Scottishness and Englishness are both shared identities since both countries are themselves patchworks of a host of communities (as are all nations). Personally, I feel I have a right to both heritages, as well as the inclusive British heritage, not to mention the European frontier!

AMB: Have you been influenced by the other Scottish sf writers, most obviously Iain M Banks or Ken MacLeod, but also Jack Deighton?

MC: Yes, but not ones you might expect. Banksie is more of an inspiring example than a direct influence (mainly because I've not yet written stuff that's in that widescreen space opera ballpark). Ken MacLeod's work is very detailed and philosophical, and again it's an area that I've only come near in stories like 'The New Creatures' (*BBR*) or 'Dark Territories' (*Edge Detector*). Jack Deighton's *Son of the Rock* was a great novel but rather unlike my own style and obsessions, I feel. A great influence has been John Buchan – he was an evocative portrayer of locale, especially in the likes of *Midwinter*, *Path of the King*, and *The Free Fishers*. Buchan is a fascination to me, a Scot who lived in England, was a 'benevolent' Imperialist yet retained his Scottish identity. Contrasting with Conan Doyle who followed a similar path but became thoroughly Anglicised.

AMB: Buchan's an odd writer, who we only know these days for *The Thirty Nine Steps*, and that more through the Hitchcock and other film versions. And yet I know various people, all on the left, who'll pick up any Buchan novel they see. His characters are imperialists, even racists, and yet that doesn't seem to spoil their enjoyment.

MC: I can't say that I notice much overt racism in Buchan's books (although his characterisation of the Enemy in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* get pretty close to it). I see him as an enlightened Imperialist, but only comparatively so given the nature of British society at the time and Buchan's own fairly privileged upbringing. Some of his stuff I find a bit too much of its time, while the more thoughtful, evocative material is wonderful.

AMB: There's another strange move on the left to reclaim national identity from the right, that it's possible to be English without the ideological baggage of the National Front or whoever. In some ways, though, it's a backwards looking question to even raise, given we're now living in the period which sf writers of the 1950s envisaged as a united humanity under a UN banner. Personally the only time I *feel* English is when I'm in another country; being European doesn't particularly bother me although I don't know what a European identity would be like – but being exposed to more communities is exciting in itself.

MC: This reclamation is an odd parallel to what happened in the States in the 70s, where you had parts of the left/liberal/yippy movements trying to 'reclaim the Stars & Stripes' as their own. This is understandable, but it would be wrong to devote too much time to this symbolism-tussle. I feel it's much more important to get the arguments, the core problems that we face, aired and out in common exchange. And the presentation of a vision of how the country/Europe/the world could be run. My feelings of Britishness really derive from the things that I treasure about this country, laws, freedoms, the open exchange of ideas and argument, things that have been hard fought for in previous centuries.

AMB: Let's move from identity to writing. You were part (if I'm remembering correctly) of the Cassandra writers' group. How did that work, and what help do you think it was to you?

MC: It was so long ago that I can scarcely remember how the

Cassandra group operated. I think we circulated manuscripts around the group, a bit like the BSFA Orbiter (which I was also in at the time). They accepted a ghost story of mine for their anthology, *Writing for a Dying*, and that was my first acceptance but my first published piece was 'A Turret in the Fury Eternal' which came out in *Dream Magazine*. That was a heady time – I was producing a non-stop stream of stories, just writing furiously.

AMB: Your breakthrough should have been the story in one of the *Other Edens* anthologies, but that's a long time ago. How did you keep your confidence going through the intervening period?

MC: I sometimes wonder. The story you mention was 'Waltz in Flexitime' for *Other Edens 2*, but the real breakthrough I thought was going to be from when 'Corrosion' appeared in *Interzone* in 1992. I had a space opera novel out at a UK publisher whose sf editor made a lot of encouraging noises. I really thought this was it... then they seemed to change their minds and rejected it. I was pretty crushed, but ultimately was convinced that they were wrong.

AMB: At last you've got a novel out, the first of a fantasy trilogy. Why did you make the switch from sf?

MC: Despite my unhealthy lust for all things cyberpunk, I've always been a fantasy reader. The first substantial piece of fiction I ever wrote was a fantasy novella, at the age of 20/21 (I mean, real juvenilia, safely locked away from prying eyes). As for why the switch – well, 1995 was a fairly dark time in Europe with the ethnic cleansing going on in former Yugoslavia, and I'd had a relationship end unhappily, and few fantasy elements that had been in my mind for a while just gelled suddenly and demanded to be written.

AMB: You say that you read both fantasy and cyberpunk, but I wonder if they're really that different? Structurally *Mythago Wood* and *Neuromancer*, with their geography-busting dark spaces and people to be rescued from underworld, aren't that far apart. By the time you get to the fictional characters in the Vurt in *Pollen*, it's not that far from mythagoes.

MC: Uh, no, I can't agree with that view, I'm afraid. To me, the Mythago books were about power and personality archetypes, about the primal rooting of psychological personas. *Neuromancer* was a hybrid of the question of memory, and speculation about the autonomy of this part of human culture we call cyberspace, or the Web, what we put into it consciously or otherwise, and what the consequences might be. As for the Vurt in *Pollen*, I can't really comment – I don't particularly care for Jeff Noon's work. Er, sorry...

AMB: Was the Shadowkings trilogy all mapped out before you sold it, or did you just convince the publisher that you could pull it off?

MC: I'd written *Shadowkings* and presented it with a synopsis for the whole trilogy to my agent, John Parker at MBA, he sent it around and John Jarrold at Earthlight liked it and made an offer. It was a dream come true.

AMB: Among many influences you cite Tolkien, who is rather suffering from a backlash at the moment from inside and outside the genre (whilst obviously copies of the books are everywhere ready for the films). How would you characterise his influence upon you?

MC: It's the depth and breadth of Middle Earth that stays with me, and the brooding sense of loss because all the major characters do end up losing the world they love even though Sauron is destroyed. Maybe I'm just a dour Scot at heart after all... except when I'm reading Vance or Pratchett, that is!

AMB: Tolkien isn't exactly known for his strong female characters, but you have two active women central to your narrative. Was this a deliberate ploy?

MC: No ploy intended – it was a natural thing to do. It is also meant to be a reflection of the pseudo-medieval society of the fallen empire in *Shadowkings*, a recognition of the differences between the sexes while following traditions of shared responsibility.

AMB: The word being used to describe your novel is 'dark'. Where would you say this darkness comes from?

MC: You mean what twisted strand of my psyche generates this angst-ridden prose? Well, I am half-Scots... no, it's a number of things, the misery I endured at high school, the long years spent on the dole while honing my writing, the lack of success with women... er, I don't want to tell you more than you want to know, but at the same time I have written brighter, happier stories. It's just that darkness is more dramatic.

AMB: One of the websites listed on your acknowledgements page is a music homepage. How important is music to you? Do you need music to write to, or do you need silence?

MC: I really have to have music playing, usually of a mood reflecting what I'm writing. Been listening to a lot of old Black Sabbath this last year, as well as the likes of newer doomy, gothicky bands like Nightwish, Symphony X, and the magnificent Ark. I live in the city so silence isn't an option – music provides the required cocoon.

AMB: Are you going to be able to resurrect your sf novel, on the back of *Shadowkings*, or is the pressure going to be on to write more fantasy? I suppose I'm also asking you here what you hope the next book will be, after the trilogy's complete.

...music provides the required cocoon.

MC: First, that ol' space opry novel – well, it was meant to be a big, slambang adventure trilogy thingy, and I'd started work on the second volume when my enthusiasm ran out. I've recently had a story, 'Born In Eclipse', appear in *Roadworks* magazine, and that story is pretty much the only fragment from that fictional universe that made it into print. It might be possible to do something with that background, which was quite richly developed by the time I came to book two, but the rejected novel really was just a journeyman work which I don't feel deserves publication.

As for what comes after the Shadowkings trilogy, it really is a choice between either a wild, semi-Victorian, steampunk adventure or a monster space opera idea that I've been building up for several years, I mean a really gargantuan concept that so far no-one else seems to have thought of. I don't know if I have the smarts yet to tackle such an enormous project (I'm thinking in terms of three large books, plus other ancillary stories), but it might be a case of 'use it or lose it'. We'll see. In the longer term, I shall be returning to the *Shadowkings* world; still got stories to tell there.

AMB: A number of commentators have said that there's a boom in British sf, and to a lesser extent in British fantasy at the moment. Would you agree, and if so how would you account for it?

MC: I don't know if that's the case – I wonder if maybe there's more interest being shown in the runup to the *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* movies. Certainly, some of the Brit sf writers are doing better than we've done for a while, with Steve Baxter, Peter Hamilton, Eric Brown, Ian McDonald writing strongly and successfully. All we need is one big Brit sf blockbuster, kind of a fiction equivalent of *Short History of Time*, something that everyone *has* to read (and maybe understand).

AMB: One phrase which has been used to describe British writing – Roger Luckhurst used it in relation to M John Harrison, but I suspect it predates him – was 'Post-Imperial Melancholy'. Could your Scots dourness be tapping into that?

MC: My Scots what?

AMB: Dourness. You just said 'dour Scot' to describe yourself.

MC: Well, less dourness and more impatience and irritation at the world's inability to behave decently! No, I think we're some way past the post-Imperial melancholy now, don't you think? Is there anyone – under the age of, say, fifty – who sits around moping over the loss of the Empire? Doubt it. I feel more melancholic, more sense of loss about the gradual degradation of the BBC and the corporatisation of all the media through which our culture and our politics are filtered.

AMB: Justina Robson, writing in *The Alien Online*, suggests that 'We [British sf writers] offer neuroticism and narcissism and alcoholism and debt, struggle and loss and anger and sadness, corrupt governments and management gurus and psychobabble. And then, tired of that, we write space opera – the only sane choice, because it allows us to reflect the incomprehensibility and scale of the chaos we feel around us.' Given you've written that space opera novel, do you identify with this statement?

MC: Hmm, a bit, perhaps. But I want to use my fiction to deal with that scale of things, to make it manageable and understandable (whether in fantasy or sf), not just reflect it. I really believe that fiction, as well as being make-believe, should have a raison d'être, a beneficial social function. Of course, whether I achieve that with what I write is another matter, but when I return to sf it will be to pose problems of human existence and attempt to solve them. Sounds a bit preachy, but I promise to entertain as well!

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ANDREW M. BUTLER: AS AN EDITOR AND CRITIC I GET TO PRONOUNCE SENTENCES UPON THE WORK OF OTHERS, AND SO IT'S BEEN ODD IN THE PAST YEAR OR SO, WITH THE SFF COLLECTION *TERRY PRATCHETT: GUILTY OF LITERATURE* AND *POCKET ESSENTIALS* ON DICK, PRATCHETT AND CYBERPUNK TO BE AT THE RECEIVING END IN REVIEWS. AND THEN WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU BLAG YOUR WAY ONTO A PANEL BECAUSE IT'S ABOUT CYBERPUNK AND YOU COULD PLUG YOUR BOOK, AND A PANEL MEMBER STARTS CRITICISING THE BOOK? WELL, THEY SAY ALL PUBLICITY IS GOOD PUBLICITY...

Young, Wired and Fairly Dangerous: The Secret History of British Cyberpunk

by Michael Cobley

Some situations are made for blarney and disorder, while others give rise to things more constructive. That's my take on one of the last panels at Eastercon in Hinckley, 2001, namely the one entitled 'Whatever Happened To Cyberpunk?' As a first-time novelist (and arch-cyberhack), I managed to get myself onto the panel. Knowing that one of the other panellists was Andrew Butler, editor of this esteemed organ, I bought his natty little Pocket Essentials guide to C-punk, only to discover that there was no mention of a certain bunch of British writers and the distinctly CP stories that they wrote, people like Charles Stross, William King, Eric Brown, Ian McDonald, and (ahem) myself. On the panel itself, I began by spouting off maniacally in defence of my previous narrative identity, then berated the slightly bemused Andrew on the omissions in his microtome.

'Ah well,' said he. 'Reason for that is, a) the length of the guide, and b) personal time constraints. How do you fancy writing an article for *Vector* about the missing pieces, then?'

Momentarily wrong-footed by this entirely reasonable response to my fevered carping, I went 'Uh... er... yeah, absolutely!'

So – here's the way it was...

The year is 1984 and *Neuromancer* impacts on an unsuspecting sf field trying hard not to yawn at the award-winners of previous years. The effect is a bit like spiking the church fête punchbowl with import vintage vodka (*Ol' Brainkiller*), or strapping high-pressure waterjets to a river barge – a mixture of hellish enthusiasm and murderous dislike. With Bruce Sterling's *Schismatrix* clambering from the vat in the following year, Cyberpunk stirred up the kind of dissent and argument that was frowned upon by the field's elders and doyens, and injected a much-needed dose of visionary intensity into its discursive veins.

Of course, lead times being what they are, and the transatlantic laggardness being what it is, I didn't know any of this until late 1986, I think, when I picked up the Gollancz hardback edition of *Neuromancer* in Hillhead Library in Glasgow. I remember taking it home but finding it oddly unlike anything else I'd read before, strangely difficult to get into yet so intriguing I went back to read from the beginning three times.

The fourth time it was as if a switch went on in my head and new pathways of language opened up. I *got* it, and read it right through then went back and read it again. It was genuine life-changing moment. The fiction that we read isn't merely an entertainment, it is also a lens through which we see the world and make attempts to understand it, and the bleak, corporate-dominated future of Gibson's stories struck home with cold and truthful accuracy. Someone once told me that being a writer is a bit like being a bottle of milk – the milk tends to taste of whatever smells strongest in the fridge. At the time I was getting over my Harlan Ellison addiction and then Gibson came along and I *knew*, with hardwired certainty, that this was what science fiction was supposed to do. Yeah, the various hues of sf – space opera, Silverbergian psychoanalysis, feminista politics, gunz 'n' chain-o-command fetishism – were fine as far as they went, but this thing called cyberpunk... it really could deal with Now-plus. It had a function and its eyes were open.

What did it do to me? Well, I was in a writing frenzy at the time and this just stoked the fires a little higher, filling my head with images of wild science and technologies designed to violate the flesh. I came out with a bunch of short stories which, on reflection, really did have common themes – 'The New Creatures', 'Marbleye In Midnight Black', 'Dark Territories', and 'Corrosion'. All of them went to *Interzone* first, as all my stories did at the time, but only the fourth one was accepted, and that was in 1992. *C'est la vie*.

Shortly after my first intravenous shot of Gibson, I made contact with Bruce Sterling and duly received a bunch of photocopied pamphlets going by the name *Cheap Truth*. Inspired by its overt polemic and flagrant disregard for courtesy, I began my own broadsheet effort for truth, justice and the cyberpunk way, and called it *Shark Tactics*. For six demented issues, I (and others) wrote and criticised and cut and pasted (for lo! This was

pre-desktop publishing, y'ken) and gave the thing away for *free*, godammit, to anyone I thought might get the point. *Shark Tactics* later reappeared in the Glasgow critical journal, *Territories*, edited by Gary Gibson.

At much the same time, other writers were exploring this new word-terrain, Eric Brown being the most high-profile of them, and way ahead of the pack. His 'Krashbangg Joe and the Pineal-Zen Equation' (*IZ* 21, 1987) was an amazing piece of work, so different from the broad run of British sf (and utterly different from the more elegiac themes of Home Counties sf). It proved that you didn't have to be American to write cool! I asked him for his recollections regarding Gibson, and he said this:

> It was Gibson's 'The Winter Market' that did it for me – my introduction to the dark, mysterious, wolfish world of Cyberpunk. I liked its brutality, its drive, its angst-ridden characters – quite apart from its pared down, economical, supercharged prose, and its literary aspirations. Also, it wasn't about science and technology, but about the effects of science and technology on ordinary folks. So I went out and devoured the stuff – even wrote a few CP tales myself. It was a rich, heady time, and like all renaissances it couldn't last, and didn't – but sf is all the richer for its brief incandescence.

Many of Eric's more recent stories and novels have focused on the burning core of relationships, as well as themes of loss and redemption. His latest novel, *New York Nights*, first of the Virex Trilogy, plunges the reader neck-deep into the ideas of virtual reality, all shot through with a knowing nod at tec-noir.

That issue of *Interzone*, #21 in 1987, also saw Charles Stross's first professional sale, 'The Boys', a gleaming, highly-enjoyable riff on Sterlingesque orbital/genetic mayhem. Charlie and Eric both come from the Leeds-Bradford area, yet I'm sure that most who know them would agree that they are very different writers. Charlie had had short stories in small press mags like *Auguries* and the *Cassandra Anthology* (as did your humble author), while Eric's only previous form was a children's play called *Noel's Ark*. But at that point, at the end of the 80s they were both exploring similar territory. Charlie has this to say about where it all began:

a mixture of hellish enthusiasm and murderous dislike

> I'd heard some muttering about Gibson around 1982, but it wasn't until 1984 that I ran across a copy of *Neuromancer* for the first time.
>
> To say that it blew my mind would be an understatement. The density of imagery, pacing, and the vividness with which he'd realised a world that seemed to flicker like a faulty neon advertising display in downtown Tokyo was a revelatory experience: I hadn't realised that sf could show you a world so fully realised that it would etch itself on the back of your eyeballs. Reading *Neuromancer* for the first time was like growing up with black and white TV and switching on a colour set for the very first time. No matter if its metaphors were psychobabble, its technological and corporate vision fatally flawed, and the prose style occasionally dragged: you can fool the eye into perceiving depth by using colour, and Gibson had just handed us the red and green glasses.

Charlie has garnered recent successes with stories appearing in *Asimov's*, and his first novel is due to appear from Big Engine – no, it's not the legendary *Triune*, but a large book called *Festival Of Fools*. Nice one.

At about the same time that I was starting to make headway, with short stories appearing all over the small press, I met another aspiring Scottish writer from Stranraer, one Bill King. It was 1988, at an Albacon in Glasgow, and Duncan Lunan was introducing myself and a few members of the Glasgow SF Circle to the winners of the Glasgow Herald SF short story competition, one of whom was Bill King. His story, *The Price of their Toys*, a gripping story telling of the last ten seconds of a future pilot plunging towards the Arabian desert, was one of the runners-up and subsequently appeared in *Starfield*, an anthology of the Herald competition entrants. The following year he sold 'Visiting the Dead' (a story of virtual reality and cloning) to *Interzone*, and 'Skyrider' (tale of a bioengineered combat pilot slowly losing his sanity) to the Dave Garnett anthology, *Zenith*. I was amazed and envious and energised by Bill's obvious talents, and his understanding of technique – some of the most valuable discussions I've had about writing have been with Bill. Here's what he says about his CP origins:

> The first Gibson I read was 'New Rose Hotel' in *Omni* some time in the early 80s – I was stunned by the emotional intensity and the density of description and setting. You just knew the future was going to look like this.

Bill later went to work for Games Workshop, writing background and stories for GW's Warhammer Fantasy and 40K universes, then he moved to Prague to start his own games company, Manticore. He is now back working for Games Workshop, writing intense, hard-edged, fast-paced novels which have been published in several countries. A few years ago, a short story of his appeared in *Mindmaps*, a small press magazine; 'Easy Steps to Posthumanity' was the moving story of a man's transformation from flesh-and-blood life to an utterly cyborgised existence, devoid of the flesh and, amazingly, all told as a second person narrative. I am sure that we can expect much more from Mr King in years to come.

Another writer who has a place in the Britpunk pantheon is Ian McDonald (and weirdly, all of us are roughly the same age, born around 1959/60) (which means, I guess, that we're no longer hot, young writers but hot and young-looking...ish). His first big story was 'The Catherine Wheel', published in *Asimov's* magazine in 1984, set on a wild and extravagant future Mars where gigantic trains steam across the desolation between settlements and cities. As a story it was definitely cyberpunk, detailing the transcendence of a woman into a spirit of the wire, yet Ian's influences were more Joyce than Algren and his near-boundless creativity always seems to test the constraints of story structures to their limits. It's also the vitality of his storytelling that is entrancing, the succession of images both profound and comic that flicker through the mind like fragments of tapestries. Even in his more restrained stories – 'Scenes from a Shadowplay' or 'The Island of the Dead' – the intensity transmutes itself into lyrical evocation while in 'Winning', the story of an African runner whose enhancements challenge his own self-worth, this sense of energy and motion is interwoven with Sufism. This is what Ian has to say about his earliest encounter with the cyberbeast:

> First hit of the cyber white: 'Burning Chrome', in *Omni*. At last, a story that did exactly what it said on the (chrome finish) tin. There really hadn't been anything like this before, it had the same jolt you got when you stuck 'Anarchy in the UK' on your Dansette. And it's never quite had it since...

The Mars of 'The Catherine Wheel' saw a wider exploration in the novel *Desolation Road* in 1988, and returned to that world with the exuberant *Ares Express* in spring 2001. And his commitment to the cause (!) is unfailing, as shown by a new work,

Cyberabad, a 'Khyber-punk' novel set in a future India and due for publication next year.

So now, since we have passed the cusp of the new millennium with neither fire nor flood (although boybands have a lot to answer for, lemme tell ya!), it behoves us to ask of the Britpunks – *quo vadis*, dudes? Basically, we are all doing the very thing that Sterling warned would happen to the core cyberpunks, ploughing furrows of our own making, hewing at our own version of the literary coalface (don't ya love those manly metaphors?). Twelve years or more on, we're devoting a lot of time to novels, since it's nice not to starve, but the joy of short stories and the lure of cyberpunk... still undeniable, irresistible.

For all that we thoroughly enjoy what we're doing, be it space opera or fantasy, we know that C-punk is still the real deal. Sure, there have been several skilled and talented British sf writers producing cybershiny tales – Jon Courtenay Grimwood, Ken MacLeod, Simon Ings, Justina Robson, Kim Newman, and David Wingrove, fine people each and every one – but to my mind we've yet to see a unashamedly, full-tilt Eurostyle cyberpunk novel. And I think that we will see it – times have changed since the late 80s and British sf and the critical hierarchy have also changed. There isn't the same sniffy disapproval that hung in the air back then, and vigorous storytelling is more warmly welcomed (Peter Hamilton and Steve Baxter, for example). Not only that, the tendency to mix and match yer sub-genres opens up even more avenues of perception and depiction (although I draw the line at cyberelves hacking Cthulhu's shopping list while bike-kiting round Venus – no, really).

Not only that, we are living in a world that is transmogrifying itself into a widescreen, neo-apocalyptic cyberpunk saga. The tropes and symbolstream of cyberpunk, its obsession with corporate evil, chemical joy, electro-interfacing, and speed and violence, are all relevant, right here, right now.

The question, of course, is whether any writer feels they can write and sell c-punk now. Well, the wheel has turned before and will again, so all I can say for now is – watch this space.

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GWYNETH JONES IS THE AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF* WHITE QUEEN*, AMONG MANY EXCELLENT SCIENCE FICTION NOVELS, AND VARIOUS NOVELS FOR YOUNG ADULTS UNDER THE PSEUDONYM ANN HALAM. SHE WAS A GUEST OF HONOUR AT A CELEBRATION OF BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION IN JUNE 2001 AND AT NOVACON IN NOVEMBER 2001. IN BETWEEN SHE FOUND TIME TO BE INTERVIEWED AT THE SEPTEMBER 2001 BSFA LONDON MEETING

Don't Miss the Fun

An Interview with Gwyneth Jones by Tanya Brown

TB: *Bold as Love* is quite a departure from your other books.

GJ: I wrote the story 'Bold as Love' first, for Paul McAuley and Kim Newman's anthology *In Dreams*. It was not by any means the story of the novel *Bold as Love*, but it was the germ of the story. A bunch of rock stars – not immensely famous rockstars but just ordinary rockstars – are the leaders of the revolution. The story was about how lightly we would tread upon the earth if everybody lived the way they live at rock festivals: a bit of dodgy vegetable curry and everybody living in tents with diabolical sanitation. When that anthology was reviewed, the reviewers who mentioned my story all said 'it's a very strange aberration for Gwyneth Jones'. Which made me think... well, how little do they know? For the last god knows how many years I've been writing serious science fiction; but, in my spare time, I've been going to gigs and to festivals, and I've been buying music, as – no doubt – many other people who read science fiction have been doing. It's been a part of my life. When I came to writing that story I realised that music has been very important to me, and when I'd done it, I knew I wanted to write about those people, that world, in a novel. This is what I do in my spare time, and now I've decided to write about it.

TB: So the novel's a labour of love?

GJ: Yes. Terrific fun, great. It's much closer to my life, closer to my own personal feelings, than the serious science fiction that I've written before, which has been talking to people about things that were going on in the world, and that I thought were worth talking about. But this is my daily life. Nightly life, maybe.

TB: It's more light-hearted than your other novels.

GJ: Maybe this is one of the symptoms of middle age. You get to a point in your life when you look around and you think, 'Hold on. This is all there is. There isn't going to be any more. Isn't it great!' And you start enjoying what there is to be enjoyed. You don't stop wishing that you could change things for the better, but you make sure you don't miss any of the fun. *Bold as Love* is about that feeling: 'Hey! Not much time left. Don't want to miss any of the fun'.

TB: It's a very near future – not today, not tomorrow, not an alternate Now as one reviewer's posited, but perhaps ten or twenty years away?

GJ: Really, there is no date to *Bold as Love*. The *Locus* reviewer decided that it was set in 2007, because that makes 300 years from the Act of Union between England and Scotland. I had said at some point 'three hundred years', but I was rounding up, or rounding down... But I think this could be the real future, in some senses. All that has to happen really, to add to the mix we already have, is a huge economic crash, and I think that could be arranged... it could be very close. But of course, things wouldn't turn out half so benign in England as they do in *Bold as Love*. A paved-over police state, is more likely.

TB: Well, the character Ax is named after Axl Rose – but Guns'n'Roses weren't big in 1985.

GJ: If there *is* a date, it would be 2013. If you examine the text carefully you'll find information that supports this. It would mean Sage and Ax were born in January and February 1987, which makes them a Fire Rabbit and a Fire Dragon, according to the Chinese astrological calendar – which is where Dilip places them, when he's doing the PR publicity poster, I think it's the start of Chapter Nine. It also makes it possible for Dan Preston to have named Ax after Axl Rose, which is one of the jokes in the first chapters. It's very embarrassing for Ax, he's a musico, refined intelligentsia of the Indie Rock world, but his father is a pub-character, a total layabout with shameless heavy metal taste... Whereas Sage's parents were older, middle-class hippie drop outs, from whom he inherited a huge black vinyl collection, and the Grateful Dead fixation; and Fiorinda's miserable background is in the unfortunate-children-of-mad-megastar mode; there are plenty of examples. I'm talking 'bout my generation's children, fictionally speaking... and I worked it out carefully, in a way. But the dates

will not add up. There'll be anachronisms, and I don't mind. I like them. There is a crucial mention in one of the last chapters of 'Near Miss Year' – apparently ten years before the events of this story there was an asteroid near-miss, and everybody spent a mad summer thinking the world was going to end. I put that in because I was writing *Bold as Love* in 1999. Remember 1999? Eclipse Summer? That was a little Summer of Love, and I was in Cornwall for it, living on a beach, on the Lizard, and there were rock festivals all over the place. We didn't get much of an eclipse but it was a great atmosphere, English outdoors community experience. I wanted to put it in the book, so I did, regardless. If there should be a previously unsuspected Near Miss in 2003, then be very afraid... I had never written in a scenario so close to the present before. I had to make a decision. Is it going to be all dovetailed in? Or is it going to be freeform? The moment I thought of that, the obvious answer was 'freeform'. One of the things I might do on the website is make a little concordance of all the things that just cannot add up.

TB: You quote Marx at the beginning of the book: 'All mythology masters and dominates and shapes the forces of nature, in and through the imagination. Hence it disappears as soon as man gains mastery over the forces of nature'. And you've added, 'But, on the other hand...'

GJ: I've got a lot of time for Karl Marx. I really appreciate his writings. But I think he's wrong there. I think that mythology will always reappear, reintegrate itself, grow again – like fungus or something – and I think one of the things that's happening in *Bold as Love* is that the relationship between the technology and the human race has reached a cusp where it's possible for people – to coin a phrase – to take over the means of production. One of the things that happens – and again, this is one of the things that would belong in the concordance, because as science goes it is, as far as I'm aware, total balderdash – is people becoming their own powerhouses. We get very energy-conserved hardware, so if you want to power a computer, you power it with your fingertips. I can't bear to tell you the science, but it involves ATP – adenosine triphosphate – the molecule that is used in your cells for energy production. There is a sense in which technology reaches a point where it is loose in the community, and the big corporations – what am I talking about? They can always win – but in *my* world, in *my* vision, there comes a point where people can do it for themselves. 'ATP' means 'take the power into your own hands,' see, very literal. This is one of the things that made rock music a good metaphor, because this is the technology, for the feckless new millionaires of the first generation of big money rock and roll, and then again for the punks... where people, individuals and bands, were able to hijack the machinery, use it their own ways. The more available it becomes, and the more possible it becomes for somebody to say 'I don't need any of you, I'm just gonna bring out a record in my bedroom, and I'm going to press the discs and I'm going to sell them.' Doesn't mean it'll be a *good* record... but it can be done. Home publishing.

'Is politics really the new rock'n'roll'?

TB: Yes, there's an Internet-based music industry in the novel.

GJ: Don't ask me how the economics works. I know it does, I know people like Prince make stacks from download sites. But there's no accountancy strand in *Bold as Love*...

TB: That's all very futuristic, but you also have echoes of British – no, English – mythology. Possibly because of the novel having three protagonists – two men and a woman – who are, let's say, emotionally entangled, people are calling this an Arthurian fantasy.

GJ: It started with the idea of our hero, Ax, being a person who is a principled artist. He's learnt his craft, he can play the guitar really well. He believes that Western civilisation is worth saving, and he sees it falling apart. He never imagined he would be in Yorkshire with an assault rifle, but he has always thought to himself, 'I want to be one of the people that keeps things going. I can see that we're getting to the point where we might fall off the edge of something. I want to be one of the people who makes the choice for the future rather than the Dark Ages.' Once I'd got that hero set up, because I'm English and because I've read a lot of Arthurian myth – and because I'm a science fiction and fantasy fan – I thought 'Oh really? Well, this sounds like Arthur.' And we have Fiorinda who is magic. She's native magic, sovereign magic, that's not all she is, but it makes her the queen. So I've got Guinevere. I invented Sage as Lancelot when I realised what was happening. But this is Arthur in a modern mode, this is not re-enactment fantasy. My Arthurian sense of it, it's the sense of Ax being one of those people who tries to hold back the tide. I don't know who Arthur really was; I don't know if he's a total invention. But if the Arthur story, fifth century *dux bellorum* holding back the barbarians, is a story of somebody trying to preserve a civilisation when it's bound to go, then *Bold as Love* is an Arthurian story.

TB: Is mythology destiny?

GJ: Ax is not just *dux bellorum* of the British. Ax has an agenda, and his agenda is about art, friendship and concern for others... I don't want to say any more than that. The story does go on being Arthurian, but different things can happen with a myth.

TB: Near the beginning of the book, Fiorinda asks someone, 'Is politics really the new rock'n'roll'?

GJ: I was thinking to what extent music had been *my* politics. What happened to me was that I read these rock'n'roll biographies looking for rock'n'roll ideas the same way as I'd look for science ideas to put in a book. I realised this actually is the story of my life, because when Bob Dylan – and all those other people whose names we've forgotten because Bob Dylan became It – when they were looking for the roots music of America, I was looking for the roots music of England. I, and my sisters, and my friends, were getting into Cecil Sharp: we were playing and singing English folk songs. We were part of that Zeitgeist. Folk music was big when I was thirteen or fourteen, and that's where I was, and then... the Beatles, and all that followed. What I realised when I started writing *Bold as Love* is the importance of rock'n'roll – well, not just rock'n'roll, popular music, which becomes 'folk music' if it lives. That it goes right back to medieval times *in my personal knowledge*, which is quite amazing really, a thousand years. 'Sumer is Icumen in' was written in Reading, did you know? By a monk. Isn't that fascinating? Synchronicity, eh? Unluckily, most of our really well known English pop/folk music dates back to the Napoleonic wars (which makes it awkward in *Bold as Love* because the French are supposed to be our friends). I don't know if rock'n'roll is politics, but it's been my cultural history, it's had a significant part in shaping my life. I hadn't really realised that when I started writing *Bold as Love*, but now I do.

TB: I'm not going to ask you how close the politics are to your own.

GJ: Well, there are lots of different politics in the book.

TB: I probably will ask you which bands you had in mind, though.

GJ: There are three main bands in *Bold as Love*.... I should say, *Bold as Love* the book has a website. I've never done this before. I have a website of my own, which is autobiographical and has essays on it. I decided that if I was going to write a book about rock'n'roll bands, it had to have a website, and I have gone all the way. There's a quiz, there's a letters page, there's everything you would expect to find, and there's also merchandising – band T-

shirts and so on. Ax Preston is the lead guitarist and frontman of a band called the Chosen Few, who come from Taunton. You can get the Deconstruction Tour T-shirt for his band. The Chosen Few are just a virtuous indie guitar band, and I didn't have a closer model than that. Does the name Reef mean anything to you? West Country guitar band? Almost famous in 1999? Something like that. Held to be good, not famous yet but might be... There are always a few bands like that around. Or you might think of them as Radiohead, though of course they come from Oxford, not far enough west.

TB: Radiohead, only more cheerful?

GJ: More cheerful, and more metal-oriented. Some of you may know Deconstruction in this world is a very over-the-top heavy metal event that's been happening for the past few years. My Deconstruction's an eco-warrior deconstruction: theirs is just a chance to make a lot of noise, drink a lot... but I was amused when I found out there was a real 'Tour'. Many points in common with reality, that's a good sign, I think. Then there's DARK, from Teesside, the band Fiorinda plays with. There are several models for Fiorinda's band. One is that they are Nirvana: Nirvana's big album is *Nevermind*. DARK's big album is *No Reason*. They're the raving anarchist kids. Sage and Ax, the men, are the grown-ups. Fiorinda is the monster teenage loony.

TB: And she sounds like P J Harvey.

GJ: I thought of Elastica, but for a singer... I looked and listened, and listened and listened: and Polly Harvey, P J Harvey, she has the voice: she's Fiorinda, near as can be. Cerys Matthew, also, looning around in her party frocks... Then there's Aoxomoxoa and the Heads. There is an English band called the Heads, they come from Bristol, they're into psychedelic hard rock: but actually, my Aoxomoxoa and the Heads are, schematically, shall we say, the Grateful Dead. They're technos, not a guitar band, but they are carrying the futuristic-tech-in-Rock strand; and they have other Dead-like characteristics. But Sage is also a very contemporary figure, I mean 2001 contemporary. In many ways it's horrifying to me to realise that a lot of the things that Marshall Mathers has to say about himself, and that are said about him, could easily be said about my Sage, who is a very laddish sort of rockstar, who's made a lot of money out of making himself very popular with a bunch of deranged teenage louts. But he actually has a more responsible side. I don't know that Eminem does. I think that chap is a conceptual artist, really.

TB: I was thinking more Oasis...

GJ: Oasis?!

TB: Not for the music, but for the attitude.

GJ: Oh yes, yes. 'There is this plate-glass window saying "Throw a chair at me"'. Sage is a serious large-about, and to some extent there's some Noel/Liam stuff going on between Ax and Sage. But his bad taste is more calculated, I think, than anything Oasis were capable of. *Arbeit Macht Frei* is the title of Aoxomoxoa and the Heads' last album before the book begins. It means 'Freedom through Work', and it's written in wrought iron on the gates to Auschwitz. The Heads say it's a comment on global capitalism. This is where Sage stands, like Eminem: 'I'm saying really terrible things: yes. But it's because the world's a really terrible place...' I've worn the T-shirt. Occasionally someone will accost me and say 'Freedom through Work. That's German, innit?' Nobody has come up to me and said 'How *can* you do that?' which is rather shocking, really. How close the historical horizon is. How soon we forget.

TB: On to the artwork: the cover of *Bold as Love* is a pastoral landscape by Anne Sudworth

GJ: It's beautiful, isn't it? But it didn't grab the buyers! I had a dispute with the management about the cover. It was me going for guitars, the management going for unicorns and fairies... er, I mean, 'something that shouts 'Fantasy!' was the actual words. I said 'please, no' because I think if you put spaceships on the front of a book, people will not be happy when they open the book and there are no spaceships in it. They will realise that they have been tricked, and they will not be pleased. If it isn't a genre fantasy, don't give it a genre fantasy cover, was my argument. So we got an empty landscape... and I suppose I was wrong. I usually am. Sigh.

TB: Inside the book, by way of contrast, you have a frontispiece by Bryan Talbot, with Sage, Ax and Fiorinda. He's also done the sketches on the flyers for the book, and the illustration for the excerpt, 'The Salt Box', in *Interzone*.

GJ: I've known Bryan for a while, and I really admire his work. When I'd written *Bold as Love* I wanted people to read it for me to tell me what I was up to: because it was so different from what I'd done before. I sent the book to him, and he read it and liked it. So I said 'Would you draw them for me, Bryan?' And he did! The frontispiece of the book is a bit hard on Ax. I think it emphasises the Rock Dictator aspect. But that's fair enough. It's a reading. And the portrait sketch - that is Ax! When I saw the sketch of him coming out of the printer, I thought, 'Yeah! Now I know what Ax Preston looks like.' I really like the Sage picture as well. Fiorinda – well, she wasn't entirely Fiorinda for me when I first saw her (though now, I wouldn't have her any other way). She looks older than sixteen, and colder... But that's true to what I wrote, to the impression she makes, though not true to what I know, and what people will find out, if they read the book. A passionately loveable heroine, Roz Kaveney said, and that made me very happy, because that's what I meant her to be... But I'm really thrilled to have these brilliant pictures by Bryan.

TB: The excerpt in *Interzone* [#169], the first chapter of *Bold as Love*, was the subject of a complaint, wasn't it? You're Public Enemy Number One, accused of publishing material liable to incite paedophiles.

GJ: David [Pringle] was pretty doubtful about publishing this: he said, 'but there's no *fantasy* in it, Gwyneth'. He finally agreed to publish it because he liked the story, although it had no elves, dragons or werewolves in it. Poor chap! In the middle of July he got a crank letter which he naturally ignored. The crank letter said that 'The Salt Box', by Gwyneth Jones, was obscene, liable to encourage paedophiles, it was child pornography and he was going to report it to the police. David came back from holiday two weeks later, and the police turned up and took away copies of the magazine: 'Got to follow up these complaints, sir'. So I got a phone call – I was on holiday in California – to tell me that the first chapter of my book, which was due to be published the next week, had been seized by the police. I was, er, astonished. What happens in this story is that a twelve-year old girl, whose mother is a rock journalist, she has no idea who her father is, has a cold, miserable childhood. Then her mother's glamorous sister appears and introduces her to the world of celebrities, and the twelve-year old girl knows that her mother doesn't approve but that just thrills her the more. Her aunt takes her off to a country house weekend. The country house belongs to an ageing megastar. She thinks she's there because her aunt wants to give her an exciting time. Actually, she's been groomed and she is being presented to this elderly, fifty-plus rockstar as his treat for the weekend. Of course, he's paying for it: he's paying Fiorinda's aunt. She gets, shall we say, seduced by this rockstar. She is not fazed, she is not a victim, she does not feel herself to have been raped: her attitude is 'ugh, he's disgusting; but you never know, it might be a break'. I suppose that was what Disgusted of Wilmslow found so outrageous. I hadn't thought I was writing child pornography. I'd read and assimilated what happened in the back of the music business, and this was the milieu that I was writing about. And because I also write fairy tales, dark fairy tales, it struck me at once: well, this is what happens. The father goes after his daughter. And although it's not obvious from the version in *Interzone*, the rockstar turns out to be Fiorinda's father. Like the king in the fairy tale. In the modern form fairy tales don't tell you why the daughter's getting persecuted: it's because the father

wants her sexually, (and also magically, in this case); and she flees from him. That's some of what happens in *Bold as Love*.

TB: There are other sections in *Bold as Love* which deal with child abuse and paedophilia: I don't think any of them, unless the reader has a very hyperactive imagination, could be read as any sort of incitement. They are damning of the people involved.

GJ: Well, I was talking about was the counterculture, which has its demons, just as global capitalism has its demons. Hmm. Maybe, freedom from constraint corrupts, just the same as power... Everybody wants to be free. I wanted to show both sides of that, the good and the bad. And the bad's pretty bad. But thinking of some of the things I've written... I never expected to get into trouble with the police for *this*!

[Audience]: What's the final outcome of the complaint?

GJ: That is a dispute between me and David at the moment. David had a policewoman come round on August 2nd. (You remember the dates, because you imagine the day in court! That might happen). She took the stuff away, and she told him she'd be back to him in a couple of days. She wasn't. When I got back to England on 14th August, I rang him and said 'So what happened with the police?' He said 'Well, nobody got back to me, and I've mislaid the scrap of paper on which I wrote down the policewoman's name'. He would have been all right ringing the police station and asking to speak to a particular person, but he'd have had to ring up and say 'Er, you know about that obscenity charge?' He didn't feel like doing that, and I don't blame him! I said 'I'd really like to get off the hook: I'm sure they're not going to prosecute, but I'd like somebody to say that they think the story's OK.' But as of now, it seems I'm never going to get that. There's a lingering dissatisfaction about it, that I'm never going to be able to get somebody to say 'that was ridiculous'.

TB: There's a lot of grim stuff in the book, but despite that it's light-hearted, and almost Utopian. It's a better future than many.

GJ: It's a very optimistic version of what's going to happen in the next few years to this country. It's about dealing with all the problems that we have, and dealing with a lot of disintegration and collapse in a way that not only avoids major grief for major sections of the population, but has the people feeling that they've done a good job. Blitz spirit. It's total fantasy!

TB: You have that line about helping other people as routine medication: 'We'll give the patients rock'n'roll for heavy medication, voluntary work as routine antidepressants. If we pitch it with enough conviction they'll buy it.'

GJ: Ax's theory is that, since we're social animals, being good to others is a drug with a very pleasant kick. We all know it. It's the way we're wired. We're supposed to look after each other. Ax's theory that he tries to put into practice is that, in times of crisis, you can get people to go back to their wiring, go back to their original nature, and look out for each other.

TB: The paragraph goes on, 'We all know only too well human beings will do any fucking thing, no limit, if it's seen to be normal and taken for granted.'

GJ: One way or the other, yes. People will send the Jews to the death camps, or they will go and do voluntary stints in hospitals. You may not remember this – though of course I do because I had invented it the year before – but at the beginning of this year Gordon Brown suggested we should have a Volunteer Initiative. That's what happens in *Bold as Love*: people go along and do their two or three hours of hospital cleaning or whatever, as if there was a war on. Of course it's not going to happen. But *Bold as Love*'s a pantomime, and I hope it makes people feel better: that's what it's meant to do.

[Audience] Given the background of Islamists in the book, is there anything in it you would have rewritten in the light of the events of September 11th?

GJ: No. I had the largely Muslim – or at least *politically* largely Muslim – state of Yorkshire trying to declare UDI, and I had Ax and the Counterculturals going in and saying, 'No! We can't afford to break up any more! You've got to join in!' I don't want to change that. If you read the book, you'll find out what the result is.

[Audience] In the excerpt you read out to us, do we ever get an explanation for the ghoul?

GJ: Nope! But one of the things you'll find out in *Bold as Love,* which you can disentangle from the rest of the book if you look for it, is that spooky things are happening. It's very much a realist near-future fiction, but there are things like the ghoul, and Fiorinda's magic: and there are a couple of other strange things that show the rise of irrationality – no, not irrationality. The simplest way to put it is the way Sage keeps putting it: 'The world is getting stranger'. Something has happened and the world is getting stranger, and all kinds of things are coming out of the woodwork. It's not a new idea. No, you don't get an explanation of the ghoul: but if you read an Ann Halam book called *Don't Open Your Eyes*, (which came out in 2000 from Orion children's books) you'll find the very same ghoul. Er, sort of.

[Audience]: The very last thing in the book says 'Continued in* Castles Made of Sand*'. Is it written? When's it coming out? And how many are there going to be?

GJ: It's written, it's with Jo Fletcher now, I've talked to her about it, and I'm just about to start the revision. It'll come out some time in 2002. May 2002 is the date I have at the moment. How many are there going to be? If I have my way, there'll be quite a few. The world has fallen apart, there's been a huge economic depression, and there's trouble in Europe. I can get quite a few years' mileage out of that, and a lot of strange things can happen before I start writing *Bold as Love: The Next Generation*.

TB: Are you going to put excerpts on the website?

GJ: I've only put the first couple of paragraphs of *Castles Made of Sand* on the website, because I'm still working on it. But there will be chapters that probably won't turn out to be chapters, and I'll post them. Outtakes.

[Audience] Do you see Bold as Love as a complete departure for yourself from your previous material?

GJ: What I've got in *Bold as Love* is the idea that rockstars can be fantasy characters, and the rockstar concept, the music, is a thread through our times; and an idea of what's going to happen in the near future. I don't think it's original, but it's flexible and good as a framework. There are all kinds of topics to be dealt with, like AI, like... hmm, not to give too much away, anything that's science-fictional, can be dealt with in the *Bold as Love* fantasy scenario, with the *Bold as Love* characters. That's what I intend to do. I

don't think I've changed track, but I've come round to the idea of using a certain scenario, and a certain set of people, as the vehicle of what I want to write about. I want to tell these people's stories, as the story of their world.

TB: How did it feel to be writing two heroic, brave males after all those years of writing ineffectual, flawed men?

GJ: I don't think I've been writing about ineffectual, flawed men! Definitely not! That's a base calumny on Sid Carton, Atoon of Jagdana, Endang of Gamartha, James and Luci in *Kairos* and even on Johnny Guglioli... whereas, arguably, Mishy Connelly in *Phoenix Café* isn't strictly a man at all. My male characters are no more flawed or ineffectual than anyone else involved in my stories. They're sometimes heroic, sometimes childish, sometimes wise, sometimes stupid... but they're complete human beings. I've always done that. I've never been a woman who makes the men out of cardboard, or just brings them in for sex interest. Male characters that I've written before have been off the centre of the book, maybe: and I know to some people that seems like a deliberate insult to the male. But it isn't. Ax and Sage are not so different from their predecessors: it's just that they are in the centre of the book, and that was decided by the scenario.

[Audience] Have you ever considered doing a graphic novel with Bryan Talbot?

GJ: I'd love to. Alas, Bryan Talbot doesn't need anybody to do graphic novels with him. He's Renaissance Man, he can do it all. He doesn't need me: I need him to draw the pictures, but he doesn't need me to tell the stories. In a perfect world, maybe, one day. But how does it go? 'Time is short, art is long', and I think Bryan has enough to do with his own ideas.

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Christopher Priest: Grand Master 2001

by Andy Sawyer, Science Fiction Foundation Collection, University of Liverpool

This is the text of an address given at the 'Utopiales 2001' International Festival of Science Fiction held at the Cite de Congres, Nantes, birthplace of Jules Verne, from 30th October – 4th November 2001. This is possibly the largest international gathering devoted to sf literature, film, art, comic books and other related material held in Europe. The guiding light behind the festival is Bruno della Chiesa, who produced an anthology Utopiae 2001 *featuring stories from ten European authors. Deputy Artistic Director is Patrick Gyger, of the Maison d'Ailleurs (The House of Elsewhere), Switzerland. Together they directed a programme which included Brian W. Aldiss, Octavia Butler, Nalo Hopkinson, Norman Spinrad, James Morrow, Mike Resnick, Gardner Dozois, Kristine Kathryn Rusch, N Lee Wood, Terry Bisson, Ian McDonald, and just about everyone in French science fiction, including Pierre Bordage (who was President of the festival) and Jean-Claude Dunyacc and Ayderdahl, both familiar to readers of* Interzone. *Also present were writers and critics from Denmark, Poland, Belgium, Russia, Holland, Mexico, Germany and other countries: further details can be seen on the website http://www.utopiales.org/*

Each year a 'grand master' award, the 'Prix Utopi', is given. Previous winners have been Jack Vance, Brian W Aldiss, and Frederik Pohl. This year the award went to Christopher Priest, whose novel The Prestige (1995) *has just been published in France to enthusiastic reviews. I was asked to introduce Chris Priest at a programme event before the official awards ceremony on the 3rd November, and say a few words about his works. What follows is a slightly longer version of the 'address' I gave.*

Christopher Priest's career and mine have an uncanny parallel. Both of us have been Reviews Editor of *Foundation*. One of us has called the other 'one of Britain's most interesting living novelists'. One of us has used the other's name for a character in a forthcoming novel. At this point, however, the parallels break down. I don't want to deliver a formal *lecture* on Chris, but I would like to say how enormously pleased I am that he is receiving this award, the *Prix Utopia* from 'Utopiales 2001', and say a few words about why I admire his work.

First, some facts. As a librarian I enjoy facts. Following success in selling a number of short stories beginning with 'The Run' in 1966, Christopher Priest became a full-time writer in 1968. As a novelist, he grappled with the problem that, as a writer associated with the 'New Wave' of British science fiction in the late 1960s, he was faced with: how you reconcile ambitious technical questions of structure and viewpoint with the metaphors of science fiction. His third novel, *Inverted World* (1974) won the British Science Fiction Association Award and established his reputation in France, where it became a bestseller as *Le Monde Inverti*. By 1983 he had attracted the attention of a wider critical circle and a promotion of the time nominated him one of the Best of Young British Writers. *The Glamour* (1984) won the Kurd Lasswitz 1988 Best Novel Award for its German translation and *The Prestige* the James Tait Black Memorial Award.

In 'The Profession of Science Fiction: 13: Overture and Beginners', *Foundation* 13 (May 1978) he writes of his early training as an accountant that 'the august profession has never known a more unwilling, bored, lazy or unsuccessful student'. He then stresses what he learned about 'professionalism', doing one's best, and 'a confidentiality about his clients and his intelligence of them'. He tells us that the act of writing is 'a process of expression and communication [which is] inexpressible and incommunicable'. Yet much of his fiction (as Paul Kincaid and David Wingrove have certainly pointed out) seems to be about this very act, grappling with the nature of fiction. In interviews, he sometimes seemed not so much unwilling or even unable to talk about the act of creation, but rather concerned to exercise his duty of 'confidentiality', of not revealing too much about his professional secrets. (The medieval term 'mystery' for a trade comes to mind.) We readers are his 'clients' and he has a duty not to reveal the full nature of his relationship with us. Only through re-reading and re-evaluating what we have read in the light of the story, do we understand the nature of what one of his characters calls the 'Pact of Acquiescent Sorcery' which is shared by the audiences of conjurors and authors. He demands that we pay attention. In return he entertains us.

While *Inverted World* can be said to be, in part, about perception and *A Dream of Wessex* (1977) questions the links between 'virtual' and 'baseline' realities, *The Affirmation* (1981) and its successor *The Glamour* questioned narrative itself. Priest's novels have become works of illusion in which the author's sleight of hand demands attention from the reader. As he *seems* to

focus upon metafictional trickery – a book which exists in its own fictional world, narrative stances which seem straightforward enough but which undermine the viewpoint of the narrator – what we *receive* is marvellous storytelling. To retell what happens, and what is implied, in a novel such as *The Glamour* is to pile event upon event, reversal upon reversal, told in such a straightforward way as to make the revelation more effective. Later novels use our sense that as readers we demand from authors both plain-dealing and surprise, and deliver both in a way that makes the choice of stage-magic as both plot-theme and metaphor of *The Prestige* a delightful paradox. We could – but we won't – start considering postmodern fiction. All I will say is that I continue to be surprised that Priest is not studied in universities as a major writer of metafictions and self-referential textuality. Perhaps it is his background as a science fiction writer. Perhaps it is the strength of his plots and the page-turning qualities of his prose.

For the past twenty years, he has been not a genre science fiction novelist but one who uses some of sf's ideas and limitations to stimulate and challenge the reader. An alternative, and possibly more accurate, view might be that he is one of the few writers of post 'New Wave' science fiction who have accepted the challenge of the movement: that it need not be a literature of commercialism and trivia. One of Priest's main criticisms of sf is the way it limits itself. Even as it exploits devices like invisibility, alternate worlds, and time travel for their 'sense of wonder,' it often leaves their metaphorical strength underdeveloped, and creates 'gadget fiction' rather than emblems of human relations. Priest's early short stories exploited this dissatisfaction. They are at their best when most oblique. There is a starship offstage in 'Palely Loitering' (1979) and the story's time travel is through no 'time machine.' Time is manipulated again in 'An Infinite Summer' (1976) – the title story of his second (1979) collection – as mysterious future beings 'freeze' moments of time. The metaphor here is the frozen moment which is the eternal quality of art. The lenslike 'scintilla', the surveillance objects of 'The Watched' (1978), propel the story towards the psychology of obsession, as does the voyeuristic 'A Woman Naked' (1974). Later stories possess the same enigmatic qualities of the novels which followed, and may be seen as trial runs for some of them, for Priest's strength is the novel or story-cycle where he can develop at length his ability to construct both story and literary artifact.

Even in his first novel *Indoctrinaire* (1970), there are some fine scenes of absurdism. The hand growing out of a table which points at Wenkik during his interrogation foreshadows the way Priest was later to distort realities to paranoid effect. *Fugue for a Darkening Island* (1972) is much more ambitious. The title – whose abbreviation to *Darkening Island* in US and translated editions removes its full implications – fuses the concepts of 'fugue' as a mental flight from reality and as intricate musical composition. In a deliberately disjointed narrative, our understanding is built up piece-by-piece. The fractal-like sections into which the narrative is divided show, individually and together, how Whitman's liberalism is undermined by his lack of commitment. *Fugue* was written at a time when the collapse of a European state into warring factions was something the author could not have foreseen, but the post-Yugoslavia realism we now read into it, a 'visionary realism' to adapt a term Priest has sometimes used to describe his ambitions for his work, adds yet another twist to its exploration of personal and collective responsibility.

If *Fugue...* was Priest's 'disaster novel' – although closer to J.G. Ballard's fractured narrative than to the plain style of H.G. Wells or John Wyndham, to whom Priest has acknowledged debts – and *The Space Machine* (1976) was both pastiche and metafiction; *Inverted World* and *A Dream of Wessex* (1977) were to develop other areas of science fiction and increasingly explore perception, reality and truth. *Inverted World* experiments with physical form in perhaps Priest's most 'science fictional' novel. Following a prologue, it begins with one of the most quietly startling first sentences in recent sf: 'I had reached the age of six hundred and fifty miles'. On one level, *Inverted World* plays with Einsteinian relativity: space and time may be seen as parts of one continuum. However, this physical 'twist' is not the main part of the novel's examination of reality, as we learn more about how and why Earth City is being dragged across an alien landscape. More importantly, it juggles perception and viewpoint. *A Dream of Wessex* manipulates the same question. A group of scientists collectively dream an alternate future, in the hope of directing their present towards it, but some of them appear unwilling to return from their fantasy. Into this complex novel, Priest considers how we *construct* reality. The dreamers, whose lives are as real and concrete in Wessex as out of it, undergo changes in their realities:

> Memory was created *by* events, surely?
> It could not be the other way around.

...is there a difference between what a character sees and what he *imagines* he sees?

These borders between 'baseline' and 'virtual' realities are revisited in 1998's *The Extremes*. An FBI agent tries to find the parallels between the random shootings which killed her husband and similar events in a small English town. She is trained in a variety of virtual reality called 'Extreme Experience' in which simulations of life-threatening situations are revisited, again and again, until the trainee is able to 'change' them. An obvious metaphor here is how we constantly revisit traumatic events, 'rewriting' them until they become less threatening, but it is also suggested that in doing so we could lose our way among possible 'realities'. Although some of the reflections of *A Dream of Wessex* are so close as to suggest deliberate reworking, the later novel's depiction of the 'Extreme Experience' scenarios in which violence and pornography are being offered for entertainment is utterly contemporary.

With *The Affirmation*, *The Glamour*, and *The Quiet Woman* (1990) Priest was to develop the memory/reality relationship to which we have been led. In *The Affirmation*, he plays with objectivity. Only the most suspicious reader would notice the clues he lays for us. On the page, is there a difference between what a character sees and what he *imagines* he sees? How do we, the readers, tell? 'All prose is a form of deception,' writes the protagonist Sinclair. Each conclusion suggested by the text is undermined by it: the infinite regression it leads to (as Ian Watson remarks, it is its own sequel) defies resolution. We might also be aware that the 'Dream Archipelago' of *The Affirmation* is the location for a previous series of stories recently republished with new framing material in a revised English collection as *The Dream Archipelago* (Earthlight, 1999). These stories, many of which, such as 'The Watched' (1978), feature questions of surveillance and identity in a neutral zone in a world war fought with weapons reminiscent of the 'disturbance gases' of *Indoctrinaire*, are a kind of mental landscape. Their existence, however, gives the Archipelago's imaginary geography a kind of objective existence outside

Sinclair's mind. (Unless we are to assume that Sinclair has read the fiction of Christopher Priest.) Priest has created a kind of literary *trompe d'oeil* effect in which no settled interpretation can be made without immediately including its opposite; the literary analogue of an image by Esher. It is curiously unsettling to read *The Affirmation* together with, say, 'The Miraculous Cairn' (1980) which shares character-names and geography with the novel Priest must have been working on at the same time.

This effect is also present in *The Glamour*, which uses 'invisibility' to develop a powerful metaphor. While Sinclair is a most unreliable narrator, much of the narrative itself in *The Glamour* is unreliable, made up of false memories and differing viewpoints. What were three distinct viewpoints – four if we include 'Christopher Priest' the apparently impersonal author) turn out to be one. Richard, Sue and especially Niall possess the 'glamour' of invisibility, or rather of ensuring that they are not noticed: a glamour which the author of a literary text is meant to have. Like Sinclair, Richard Grey, a TV cameraman, has to recreate his life after an event – in this case, a terrorist bomb – has caused amnesia. While this itself leads to a startling reversal part-way through the book, the presence of the profoundly 'glamorous' Niall (the word includes the everyday meaning as well as the original idea of a 'magic spell') adds even more resonance. *The Glamour* is a masterpiece of indirection. It is also fascinating to consider how *The Glamour* has been adapted for radio: a medium in which the characters we hear are literally invisible to our eyes.

Both *The Glamour* and *The Affirmation* are metaphysical whodunnits, in which the question is not who committed a crime but who is the voice of the text. If the answer reveals endless *trompes d'oeil*, it is because, as Sinclair affirms, the act of even the most autobiographical writing is manipulative. *The Quiet Woman* enjoys more overt thriller elements. Like *The Extremes*, it is based upon a violent factual event, but it is also another exercise on misdirection and 'deceptive memories', with a character who perhaps teasingly goes by the name of 'Sinclair', whose viewpoint we experience several times in not altogether trustworthy fashion. The reflecting names and structures suggest that *The Quiet Woman* is in part a darker reworking of the way *the Affirmation* treats the reverberations of 'factual autobiography'.

...the question is not who committed a crime but who is the voice of the text.

It is, however, the metaphor underlying Priest's masterpiece *The Prestige* which, as many people have noted, illuminates Priest's work. Indeed, 'prestidigitation', 'sleight of hand' or 'legerdemain' have been applied to Priest's work so often that it is tempting to see this novel as a response to such comments. Although set in the context of a modern man's search for clues to his family identity, most of the narrative comes from the viewpoint of one or other of a pair of rival Victorian stage conjurors. Priest explicitly draws the parallel between how a conjuror misdirects his audience by stating the truth while withholding vital information, and how a writer can be both transparently honest and devious. 'As I am an illusionist I can make sure you only see what I wish you to see,' says Borden before writing an autobiographical statement true in all respects but which hides the fundamental assumption that would reveal the secret of his stage act. Borden uses the term 'Pact of Acquiescent Sorcery' to describe the contract between magician and audience: an obvious analogy to Coleridge's 'willing suspension of disbelief'. *The Prestige* takes a metaphor which, however apt, is obvious to the point of triteness and reworks it in several stages, from the literary-critical to the science fictional. Nikola Tesla's device is an amusing Victorian variant on one of the best-known science fiction stereotypes, but, as he has done with *The Affirmation*'s slant upon alternate-world fiction and *The Glamour*'s on invisibility, Priest uses it as metaphor rather than gadget. We are reminded of his early words on the 'confidentiality' of the profession of accountancy. A stage magician, like a writer, needs to both involve and distance the audience, creating a dazzling effect through complicated machinery and 'patter' which diverts the audience's attention from what is really going on. The audience knows that stage magic is not 'real' magic and that it is being fooled. The contract the audience enters into, however, prevents them discovering the conjuror's secrets. They willingly remain ignorant of how the trick is performed, enjoying the illusion.

Priest's re-creation of the world of Victorian stage-conjuring and its paranoid secrecy is impressive. It is remarkable, also, how little he reveals of the mechanics of the profession, despite his apparent openness. But it is his use of narrative as illusion which is most impressive. We often hear of a storyteller as 'casting a spell'. In *The Prestige* Priest uses his skill as a writer to weave a series of illusions and deceptions. Playing fair with the reader, admitting openly that the process of writing is itself one of prestidigitation, he nevertheless presents a plot it would take a long process of observation and analysis to unravel. Reviewing the novel in *Interzone*, John Clute called it 'a lesson to us in the joy of story': one of the most perceptive remarks made of Priest's fiction. However analytical and self-reflective his fiction is, however much it meditates on the critical act of writing or offers challenges to his audience, he never loses sight of the fact that he is dealing with the surprise and pleasure of reading a thoroughly constructed and plotted narrative.

Here, perhaps, his term 'Visionary Realism', describing the two poles of his fiction, is useful. The fantastic is always present, but it is firmly grounded in physical and psychological reality: never 'merely' a metaphor but also never groundless invention. Can we describe Christopher Priest as a science fiction writer? Certainly, very little of his fiction, and none of his later work, have the starships, alien worlds, and future scenarios that are the popular images of sf (and, to be honest, are scenarios that many of us still like). I think we can, not only because we can call other aspects of his work such as the virtual-realities of *The Extremes* and the matter-transportation of *The Prestige* science fiction (that is only a minor pleasure in reading them) but because: first, he is doing something interesting with the idea and second, because he is concerned with exploring reality through a heightened and (that word again!) *visionary* speculation about it. Even bad science fiction does this. That is its appeal to many of us. But how much better for everyone concerned to have science fiction which plays by the rules of fiction *and* is about science – real science; not just whether we can go to the stars but how, why, and above all *whether* we can know the world we live in. Christopher Priest is one of the few writers of his time and background who have lived up to their artistic promise, carefully honing his imagination and his craft. Compared to many sf writers, he has not been prolific. However, the achievements of *The Affirmation* and *The Glamour*, which brought him to the attention of the wider literary world, are now being matched by novels of equal quality, which justify his slow, painstaking approach. A novel from Christopher Priest is always something to look forward to. Thank you, Chris. May there be many more.

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Christopher Priest's new novel, The Separation *is scheduled for July 2002. Andy Sawyer is Librarian of the Science Fiction Foundation Collection — Eds.*

ONE OF THE MORE IMPRESSIVE DEBUTS OF RECENT YEARS WAS *SILVER SCREEN*, BY JUSTINA ROBSON, WHICH WAS SHORTLISTED FOR THE ARTHUR C CLARKE AND BSFA AWARDS. NOW JUSTINA IS BACK WITH A NEW NOVEL, AND SHE TALKED TO THE BSFA LONDON MEETING IN OCTOBER 2001 ABOUT IT.

Cultural Overspill

An Interview with Justina Robson by Tanya Brown

TB: 'A novelist of real vision', says Zadie Smith on the cover of *Mappa Mundi*. How did you get Zadie Smith to provide the quote for a science fiction novel?

JR: She wasn't actually solicited for the cover quote. That particular quote was drawn from her judge's remarks on the Amazon Bursary prize. She said it as a consequence of having to wind up the prize.

TB: You were the first winner with *Silver Screen,* weren't you? What was the whole story behind the Amazon Bursary?

JR: I found out about it on the Internet, quite by accident. Amazon were doing this writer's bursary, particularly for authors who'd just written their first novel and had a contract for another. The timescale was quite specific, and I just happened to fit into it. I thought I might as well give it a go; I probably didn't have any chance but it was worth a try. I found out in the November of that year that I'd got onto the shortlist, which I was completely amazed by because I thought it was going to be a literary-focus prize, and therefore that science fiction probably wouldn't get much of a look-in. I was wrong!

TB: What was the prize?

JR: I won £2,500, and I went to Queen Mary & Westfield College for one term at the beginning of this year (2001). I did two days a week. I was just supposed to be part of the faculty, while finishing my second book. The whole prize was designed to give you space and time away from home to finish your masterpiece, and also to have some interaction with the academic people at the college. I also gave the students a bit of creative writing tuition. I did that for an hour a week, and the literary group and I got together for chats. It was fun. I was a bit scared at first. I kept identifying with the students, instead of with the staff and. I felt like I *was* a student and shouldn't really be in the office, and that someone was going to tell me off. It was very strange. Just about as I got used to it, it was time to leave.

...sometimes talking to them would drive me gradually round the bend at their insularity

TB: *Silver Screen* made quite an impact: you won the Amazon Bursary, you were shortlisted for the Arthur C Clarke and BSFA Awards... Did you expect that degree of success?

JR: No, not at all. I was just delighted that it got into print, and that would have been enough for me. I was completely surprised when it got shortlisted for the Clarke. Writing the second one did get harder, partly because of that. I started to get very nervous and feel that now the challenge was really on. *Silver Screen* got a very good reception, and many people said many delightful things about it; and I started to feel that perhaps I could only disappoint from now on!

TB: There's a review on the web which likens *Mappa Mundi*, your new novel, to *The X Files*. 'The shadow cast by Chris Carter's monster hit is impossible to ignore in *Mappa Mundi*; dangerous technology; shadowy government / military conspiracies; a maverick FBI agent not afraid to bend the rules (and whose relationship with his sister is an integral plot point); a cute and extremely intelligent female scientist with red hair; you get the picture!' How do you feel about that?

JR: I used to really like *The X Files*. When the first couple of series came out, they seemed to be really interesting and I enjoyed watching them. It's only in later series that I've started to detest it. I was expecting people to mention things like that, because as soon as you start employing any character from the FBI who does anything remotely to do with futurology or mysterious stuff, it's going to get compared to David Duchovny's character in the show. There's nothing you can do about that. I have to say it didn't occur to me about the sister thing until I read it in that review – or the red-haired scientist, or the connection between them.

TB: This reviewer also says that he finds it a very cerebral novel; 'it involves the head more than the heart'. I wondered if what he had a problem with was that you were dealing with complicated motivations, rather than a simplistic set of playground-type emotions driving some special effects, which is unfortunately a bit of a cliché in the genre as a whole. In *Mappa Mundi*, there are the opening 'Legends', each of which deals with a key episode in the life of one of the characters. They don't initially seem to have anything to do with the rest of the plot. It's only gradually that we realise how much effect those incidents have on what happens in the main arc of the novel: how much the incidents have affected those characters' psychological makeup. Do you think that the sf genre tends to steer away from the more complicated emotions in favour of special effects?

JR: Yes, often. I hate to say that, because it seems to be selling science fiction really short. Lots of people have slammed science fiction in the past for exactly that kind of thing. But at the same time you've got people like Iain Banks who manages to do both: he writes complex and deep psychological stories with all of the – 'bang, wallop, crash' stuff at the same time. I always find it difficult to talk about science fiction as a genre in that generalistic sense, because it does so many things so well, but not necessarily all at the same time. I think it might be possible, but excessively difficult, to pull off all its stunts at once. Therefore, you have to pick and choose to some degree. You have to say to yourself, 'Well, I'm going to write a thoughtful sort of book examining these ideas, so there isn't going to be a lot of running around, car chasing, alien killing.' On the other hand, if you want a rip-roaring adventure where the action never stops, it's a bit tricky to work in the really subtle psychological effects. I'm not saying it's undoable, but it is hard, and many of the appealing features of science fiction are its much more obvious dramas and techno-feats.

TB: Your first book, *Silver Screen*, is in the first person. That's something you do see quite often in writers who want to balance the action and the more emotional side – the more cerebral side, perhaps – of it. In *Mappa Mundi* you write in the third person,

which doesn't give the same immediacy or special knowledge of the character's emotional life.

JR: In *Mappa Mundi* most of the emotional stuff that's going on is an undercurrent of some kind. That's precisely because the whole book is an examination of motivation, and whether or not you really *do* have any insight into what you're doing, or if you are, in fact, driven by all kinds of things which you hadn't realised have affected you as deeply as they have, in the past. It's all about free will, freedom of choice and that kind of thing. All the characters in it are driven, not only by the things that they think they want, but also all the things that they don't really understand that they want. I felt it was a very emotional book, because the only reason that people do anything in it is because they have such strong feelings – whether they're rational, whether they're conscious, or not. To me it just felt like this big, dark soup of strange stuff going on: to read a review saying, 'it's just cerebral, nobody feels anything' is a bit... disappointing. Perhaps that's partly the book's fault: in some ways it sets out to be a thriller in its style. If it was that kind of book, you would expect it to have more thrilleresque qualities – much more obvious emotional motivation and character interaction – than it does.

TB: It seems a less British book than *Silver Screen*. Despite some scenes set in space in your earlier novel, and in America in *Mappa Mundi*, to a British reader it's the action set in England which is clearly in a real place. Do you think of yourself as a particularly British, or English, writer? Do you think it's important to get locations right?

JR: I think it *is* important to get your locations right. I like to be precise about them where I can be, and I try to write about places that I know, so hopefully they'll feel authentic. The American places in *Mappa Mundi* are all places that I've been to. I'd have to wait until I found somebody else who'd actually been there to find out if they feel authentic.

TB: *Mappa Mundi* appeared just after the terrorist attacks on September 11th. It features a hijack, which may have been rather too timely for some people. There's an apposite phrase about the effects of Mappaware, which is effectively a kind of mental programming. 'Guskov said that it was possible for a person to remain essentially themselves whilst shifting the core of their identities, to a sufficient extent that an Afghani Muslim could experience himself as a part of the United States diaspora, loyal to the flag, espousing democracy, even tolerating libertarians on the same street because of the Stars and Stripes flying overhead.' Would you like to rewrite that, with hindsight?

JR: No! I stand by it. A lot of the book is to do with the development of this mind control technology. Its primary developers are the Americans – and the American government in particular – who are doing it in response to a perceived bioterrorist threat coming out of Asia/the East: it's not specified exactly where. They have medical nanotechnology working quite well, and they've realised that by fiddling around with your synapses they can do certain things to you. The system they're trying to develop is one which alters the emotional response you have to particular ideas. It doesn't try to change your thoughts – it's just about changing your attitude, in a very broad-scale sort of way. Part of the reason I wrote it was because I was feeling quite resentful at that stage about the American cultural overspill that the media was creating, not just in the West but also migrating into the rest of the world. Partly the McDonalds and the Disneyfication, but also all the myths and beliefs they're exporting in their films. Their response to a lot of films – especially *Independence Day* – is quite different from audiences elsewhere. Many of my relatives are Americans, and many of them are very patriotic. I even found sometimes talking to them would drive me gradually round the bend at their insularity. It's almost a cliché of the age to say that about Americans. Part of my reason for having them develop this technology was the natural result of running their ideology right out to its limit line. The final conclusion that the US makes, in the book, about other people is that we must preserve them and not do horrible cultural-territorial things to them. They can all still be themselves, except they'll like us. And we won't need to bomb them. The whole beauty of this idea was, there would be no more war. There would be no more bombing, because everybody would get along at least enough that you wouldn't have this kind of violent uprising of the people. Do you really think people would be offended by the hijack scene? People will still be hijacking planes as long as there are planes!

TB: Perhaps America has taken it more personally than another nation would have, because they never thought it could happen to them. Americans are now programmed – in the old-fashioned sense of the word – to think of hijacking in the context of September 11th and the Twin Towers.

JR: We *are* programmed to do things. If someone had come up to me in the street two days later and asked what I think I'd have probably said something off the TV or the papers, because I didn't really know what to think.

TB: You studied psychology, didn't you?

JR: A bit. I studied philosophy and linguistics. I was hoping to convert to studying Artificial Intelligence, which you can study at Bristol University. Philosophy and linguistics go together quite well in AI, because you study natural language design – and structured thinking, to whatever degree you can study that.

TB: Can you tell us about how you evolved the AI in *Silver Screen*?

JR: I just extrapolated it from what was already going on in that area. They were thinking at the time that the only way you could possibly get an AI was to have it design itself to some degree. It would have to start off mimicking human complexity because that's the only model of intelligence we've got. One of the main problems with developing AI at the moment is that the machines themselves don't have sensory input from the outside world, and they don't have mobility, and they don't have limbs. They're utterly incapable of gathering their own information, apart from what we give them, which is not environmentally rich when you're developing intelligence. There's no stimulation, no opportunity for them to exercise any kind of decision of any meaningful value. You'd have to equip the AI with inputs that you didn't have to feed. Once you've got something like that, even though it's modelled on a human intelligence, ultimately it's going to be smart enough to realise it isn't human. A lot of human beings' behavioural development is to do with their hormonal structure, among other things, and unless you mimic that there's no reason to think that the machine would be anything like a human consciousness, if it ever evolved. But it would probably have to behave like one, otherwise we wouldn't be able to interact with it.

TB: In *Mappa Mundi*, on the other hand, you've gone for quite a different area of future technology: it's basically mind programming, isn't it?

JR: It's been featured a lot over the years, done by various means. I was trying to approach it in a scientific kind of way, to see if it would be possible to affect people in the way you've often dreamed of affecting them, by saying 'Buy Brand X soap powder' or 'Believe this political theory'. By the time I'd thought it through, I could see it was going to be far too complicated. No one's ever going to have the time to get into every individual head and see how it all works, and then start to make changes. I had to think of a much more brutal way of mind-controlling people that was simpler and more horrible but potentially much more effective. It's the whole brainwashing technique just taken to an extreme by being done electronically, instead of having to persuade people through reams and reams of information bombardment.

TB: Wireless brainwashing. You could have done it via mobile phones...

JR: I didn't know about mobile phones. I thought they might be obsolete technology by this stage. I have these little handheld 'do everything' gadgets, Pads, but a lot of people probably won't have those, because they're still very much a First World item. If you're going for global domination you need something that's globally available.

TB: When is this set? It's 2015, 2016?

JR: Yes, ten or fifteen years' time.

TB: It's interesting that you set the novel so near to us in time. Writing near-future science fiction must be difficult – you have to think so hard about what's going to last and what isn't. *Bold as Love*, Gwyneth Jones's new novel, is already outdated because she talks about putting a Railtrack spur out, and Railtrack are, of course, no more. Famously, in the film *2001*, there's the Pan Am shuttle. How do you decide? What makes you think something is going to last?

JR: I decided I wasn't going to think too hard about that kind of thing. I tried to avoid mentioning anything that seemed like it was a transient technology to me. Things like Walkmans – do they change into Walksticks?

TB: You've written two very science-oriented science fiction novels. Some, at least, of your short stories are fantasy. Have you ever thought about writing a fantasy novel?

JR: Yes, I used to write fantasy novels when I was unpublished. That might give you a hint as to why I stopped doing it! They were pretty horrendous, actually. I wouldn't rule it out: it's just that I'd have to be a lot better at it than I used to be. I'm still waiting for the day when I come up with the idea that I think is worth doing. I don't really care about the money. I don't! I'd only write fantasy if I thought it was going to be any good and if I thought it was going to be interesting to me, and the same goes for an sf book. And if I never had another good idea I wouldn't bother carrying on. It might not interest anybody else, but if something interests me I'll write about it.

Audience: You've written some short stories.

JR: I have, yes, and some of them are OK... I find it really hard to write them. I don't find them satisfying. It's quite rare for me to read a short story that I like. I'd rather read a novel.

Audience: You've said that you don't really like writing short stories. When I started reading* Mappa Mundi *it just seemed like a series of short stories.

JR: I suppose they are short stories, but I didn't think of them that way. To me they're components. I didn't think they'd be stand-alone stories. I like short stories to do more than what those first-person narratives do. I like them to go somewhere, to have a definite beginning and end and development.

TB: Back to the mind programming. If that technology was available, would you do it? Would you go and disseminate the substance that changes peoples' minds?

JR: It's an enormous hubris to think that you can solve the world's problems by having this blanket niceness that would appear in everybody's personality.

TB: And that's why you picked the Americans to initiate it?

JR: It would be enormously tempting, almost impossibly tempting, not to try to do something in the current situation to improve the outcome. But no, I probably wouldn't do it. I don't think I could possibly do anything to make things any better. What would you do if you had one thing to do to try to make the world better, to improve people? What could you possibly do to them? Whatever small change you made to them, it could have enormous effects. But I don't suppose, in terms of net happiness, it would up the percentage. It may change things, but it wouldn't make them necessarily better.

TB: I was interested in your article for the website *The Alien Online* about, amongst other things, transcendence. That sense of there being something else, something different was present in both your novels, both for human and for AI. In *Silver Screen*, you seem to have transcendence as a potential, at least, for an artificial intelligence as much as for a human being. It's an atheist's epiphany.

JR: I've always been fascinated by altered states of consciousness as an aspect of human living. I've tried to approach it personally through yoga, but also through books and learning. For ages I just couldn't get out of anybody – even people who seemed, or claimed, to be regularly experiencing it – what they were actually talking about. What is this experience of the 'higher' state of consciousness? Do I know more things? Will I get strange powers like telepathy and clairvoyance? They all talk in very vague and difficult-to-interpret terms, and a lot of the time I felt that it was an 'emperor's new clothes' situation, because there's no way to share the experience or even to communicate with somebody exactly what your experience of the profound or the divine or the higher is. There isn't a language for it. You try to put it into language and it doesn't really make any sense. It's so open to interpretation, especially in terms of neuroscience, different sorts of brain events and the actual experience of the event, and the chemical or the electrical activity of the event. All the time I was trying to figure out whether I thought the world was just a material place in which we have totally chemical brains, or whether there really was something other going on. It was a very hard decision but eventually I came down on the atomic structure side of it. You may have an experience of becoming one with the divine. Just because it's an atomic event happening to you doesn't mean that your experience is wrong, or that you are wrong, or that there is no divine. If you think you turned into a wolf and ran over the steppes, and met with magical beings, you probably didn't: but that doesn't mean that your *experience* of being a wolf and running over the steppe and meeting magical beings is a meaningless load of old tosh! There's a piece of me that's a completely godless atheist, but another piece of me longs for mystery and the divine and the intercession of greater things for us, because god knows we are not doing such a great job of it on our own. I have this big struggle all the time, in all of the books: I'm trying to portray people as, not transcending so much as becoming greater things. Sometimes it's too much for them – a sublimation too far.

TB: But it's sublimation through science, rather than through religion or the supernatural.

JR: Through all my contact with people who have spent a lifetime in devout practice, I've found that there is something different about them: but I don't believe it's an otherworldly, supernatural something. I think they definitely have evolved as human beings to a different state, which you might choose to call higher or not, and they are operating on slightly different levels, but I don't think

there's anything bizarre or X-Filey about that.

TB: It seems to me that your major characters all get somewhere completely unexpected! Your female protagonists are strong and effective, but also very human, with lots of very real self-doubt. Does any of that – or even the choice of female characters – come from being a female author? And would you work with a male protagonist rather than a range of viewpoints from both sexes? What about writing from the first person as a male character?

JR: I couldn't say at the moment whether I'd write a first-person man. I think it'd be enormously difficult, because I do think that male experience is significantly different from mine. I hesitate to say that I'm typical of all women, because I don't think I am, but nobody's really typical. Most of us are in the middle of that bell curve. But there's a huge range of different experiences depending on your physical gender. I probably would try it, but how convincing it would be would depend on the men who read it. Having read science fiction over the years, women have often been secondary characters. I did make a conscious decision to try and redress the balance, but I didn't want to do it by writing science fiction about feminist issues.

TB: Is that because you don't think of yourself as a feminist or just that it's not an especially interesting area for you?

JR: It's because I've never liked any of the fiction I've read which was specifically feminist-issue based – not that I've read that much of it. *The Left Hand of Darkness* was interesting on lots of levels, but it wasn't very gender-specific, or I didn't find it was. When you're trying to put a political ideology into a science fiction book as a reality, or as an idealised reality – it could be just that I happened to have picked the bad writers – but it feels so artificial and so unlikely, and the emotions that came out of that sort of writing seem hostile and angry. It's not a helpful attitude, not an attractive one. I don't want to feel all these negative feelings they make me feel, not only about myself, but also about feminism. I honestly think that if this is what feminism's all about then I *don't* want anything to do with it, because it's absolutely repellent in human terms. It's dishonest and I hate it. That really put me off. Yes, I am a feminist, but in my definition of that.

TB: Is your idea of a happy ending less likely to be girl and boy walking off into the sunset than girl walking off in an altered state of consciousness?

JR: I could do girl and boy walking off into the sunset if it was justified by anything that had gone before it! Happy endings... Both my books have positive endings, to some degree. They're quite complicated endings, rather than happy resolutions in terms of putting everything neatly together

TB: You don't necessarily buy into the stereotypical romantic ending.

JR: Absolutely not! In fact I don't like that ending, on its bald facts, because I think it's the same old trash you're always sold. As a girl, I felt that my expectations were all to be moulded around it and everything else was secondary. If you didn't have that you wouldn't be happy in a certain special way. You'd always be missing out and be somehow lesser and defective. Which isn't to say I haven't had my own happy ending, but I resented it being peddled so hard! I'd rather have been sold dreams of being someone with a clue in my own right rather than an accessory in some other hero's story.

Audience: You're writing just far enough in the future that the rest of your career will span the times you're writing about. How embarrassed do you think you might end up being? For instance, in* Mappa Mundi*, you're writing about an America which is a lot more authoritarian than it is now.

JR: It could just be me getting it wrong! I won't ever be embarrassed by getting things wrong: I find that amusing. I'm sure things will turn out completely differently anyway. I'd hate to be some kind of oracle.

***Audience: Which authors inspired you? You mentioned* The Left Hand of Darkness...**

JR: Ursula le Guin, yes, to some degree. I found Earthsea, as a story, emotionally more rounded and thoroughly developed than the actual science fiction books. Iain Banks – I like the way that he can combine many complicated things and still have lots of fun action and derring-do going on. Recently I've started to try and read a bit more broadly. I liked *House of Leaves* – 'liked' is probably the wrong word, I *admired House of Leaves*. A very interesting but very disturbing book. I'm still not quite sure what I think about it! I'm trying to branch out a bit more. There's so many writers that it's hard to say. I read books, and I'm very into them for the time that I'm reading them. A short while later they go right out of my head like a sieve, and I retain all kinds of strange things about them which often aren't there in the text when I go back and reread them. China Miéville was quite an influence, just recently, with *Perdido Street Station*. That had energy and verve and I thought it was a refreshing change.

TB: Presumably that would have been an influence over your third book?

JR: The working title is *Natural History*, which nobody likes but me. I'm trying to write a story about when human beings have engineered themselves to live in outer space or on the surfaces of gas giants. The most limiting factor of the whole space travel thing is having to go out there in a tin box and support yourself with some very vulnerable systems that take enormous energy and effort to maintain. You're not going anywhere like that, really. The best thing to do would be to try to change yourself. It's in a future where genetic engineering's been tremendously successful, and all Earth-based DNA is basically up for grabs, and so are the cybernetics and nanoware industries. People are becoming conglomerates of biological and engineered processes. They come across some aliens. I'm having real trouble with the aliens, because the more I try and write about them the more I realise they're humans in suits. I don't like that, because I think aliens are nothing like that. I'm going to have to remove them, I think, and do something else.

TB: Who do you think does a good alien?

JR: Lots of people do good aliens, as in entertaining aliens with lots of funny appendages and habits and physiological niceties and so on. I really like James White's books, because of the alien classification system. All the aliens you come across in the hospital are just hilariously entertaining and wonderfully inventive. Banksie does good aliens. But the 'people in suits' brigade – their aliens are all wonderfully comprehensible and they communicate beautifully... *Contact* aliens are a bit like monsters from the id, taking on a form that everyone will understand, so you don't really get any insight into them anyway. I suppose that in terms of 'real' aliens, I preferred that, because it's a bit more plausible than thinking you could actually understand anything about them whatsoever. But then you also get the *South Park* response to stories like *Contact*... all that and you find out the aliens are her father! It sucks.

TB: What do you think will happen first? Artificial intelligence that can think like a human, or an artificial way to change what humans think? *Silver Screen* or *Mappa Mundi*?

JR: I just read an article by Stephen Hawking in the paper. In this article he says 'both': he's saying that the machines will reach a level of complexity where they might overtake us and become smart. His response to that is to say that we must make connections between them and our brains so they make us smarter, and don't threaten our supremacy. I thought that was quite a strange conclusion! Smart machines first, I think...

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The Alien Online website can be found at www.thealienonline.com. *Justina's own website is* www.lula.co.uk. *Justina has been a regular contributor to* Focus, *and wrote a Bookspotting piece on Philip Pullman way back in 1997* (V191) *as well as interviewing Geoff Ryman in 1999* (V203) *— Eds.*

First Impressions

Book Reviews edited by Steve Jeffery

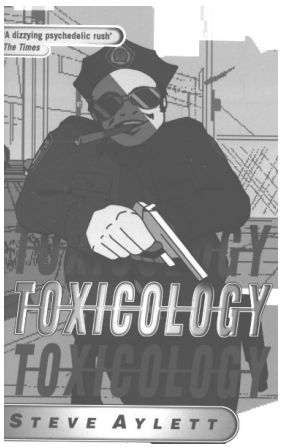
All novels marked: 🕮 are eligible for the 2001 BSFA Award for Best Novel.
All collections and anthologies marked: ✎ contain stories that are eligible for the 2001 BSFA Award for Best Short Fiction.

Steve Aylett – *Toxicology* 🕮

Gollancz, London, 2001, 131pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-07110-9

Reviewed by Tanya Brown

Toxicology bears the stamp, in quality and quantity, of impatience: a first collection of Aylett's short work, it includes pieces that might have been omitted if publication had been delayed for a few years. The anthology first appeared in the United States in 1999. It consisted of unpublished work as well as pieces (to call them 'stories' would be limiting, if not inaccurate) that had appeared in miscellaneous anthologies and publications since 1994. This expanded UK edition includes six additional pieces: some have been published in the last couple of years, while others are new. The additions are identifiable by their British spelling, if nothing else, since the earlier works retain the Americanised variants of words.



The diversity of the publications which have featured Aylett's short fiction gives an idea of his surreally eclectic material. Here are slipstream stories from themed anthologies like *Disco 2000* and the *NEL Book of Internet Short Stories*: postmodern horror and satire from the independent magazine sector (*Gargoyle*, *Carpe Noctem*): topical rants from *The Idler:* and several pieces, like the Wodehouse pastiches 'Dread Honour' and 'Ballroom', which appear in *Toxicology* for the first time.

Aylett is best-known for his futuristic 'Beerlight' thrillers (Beerlight, as far as anyone can tell, being a State of America as much as a state of mind) and his contemporary crime fiction. This anthology reveals a broader spectrum of mode and inspiration, though there are common threads of satire, surrealism and social commentary. In particular, Aylett's fictions are often concerned with the failures of law – whether metaphorically ('What is the law but a cloven hoof embedded in a fallen child's belly?') or literally, as in the anti-CJB tale 'Repeater', dating from 1995. There are several tales of Beerlight, including a couple featuring non-detective Taffy Atom, star of last year's novel *Atom*: crime noir, metamorphosed, is still a staple of Aylett's fictions.

Aylett's style, while not notably original, is distinctively his own: an extravagant melange of surreal imagery, pulp cliché, philosophical hypotheses and crazed ramblings. Many of the

pieces collected here are more situation than story, and sacrifice plot, development and closure on the metallised black altar of style. (Some consider this a bad thing, I'm told). In the best of them, there's the precision of a stripped-down machine: even the worst are churning masses of eminently quotable aphorisms and images that stick in the head. Not to be taken in large quantities, as this may lead to inversion of the skull

Stephen Baxter – *Origin* 🕮

Voyager, London, 2001, 455, £16.99 ISBN 0-00-225770-X

Reviewed by Chris Hill

Reid Malenfant is flying an aeroplane over Africa with his wife, Emma Stoney, when the moon overhead is suddenly replaced by a larger, red one. The aircraft is destroyed and they eject, but Emma is transported to the new moon. As Reid tries to persuade NASA to put together a rescue mission, Emma finds that the replacement moon is inhabited by groups of hominids from various times and various alternative Earths.

Origin is the third in Baxter's trilogy of alternative histories that examine possible answers to the Fermi Paradox – "if they existed, they would be here" – in other words, why are there no signs of the alien races that ought to exist? In *Space* we are unique and alone, while *Time* posits that there have been galaxy-wide extinction events. *Origin* gives another possible answer (which I will not spoil), but that does not really appear to be Baxter's primary interest here. The main focus is the various types of hominids that inhabit the Red Moon. I found myself strongly reminded of William Golding's *The Inheritors* (which concerns itself with the conflict between Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon from the Neanderthals' point of view). Baxter does a pretty good job of differentiating between the various hominids and their interactions with Emma and, later, Reid. Unfortunately, the story that surrounds the characters is a fairly standard wilderness adventure – one of my favourite genres, but that's a reflection of my taste rather than any problem with the competency of execution.

I still have the same problems with Malenfant and the people who surround him as I had with the earlier novels. He is an extremely driven, not to say obsessive, man in all his manifestations and obsessive people are not easy to like. (I also found it strange that Emma refers to him throughout as 'Malenfant' rather than 'Reid', even though they have been married for many years - unless it's intended as a comment on the problems in their marriage?) Baxter's treatment of character has improved enormously since his early stories, but he has still not succeeded in creating many people I would want to spend much time with.

Origin also lacks some of the scientific rigour of the earlier volumes in the series and the alien technology is not terribly well explained.

Reservations aside, *Origin* is worth reading and people who have read *Space* and *Time* will certainly want it. But I do feel it is the weakest of the trilogy.

Margaret Wander Bonanno – *Preternatural Too: Gyre*

Tor, New York, 2001, 320pp, pbk, $14.85 ISBN 0-312-87541-X

Reviewed by Andrew M Butler

In *Preternatural* the forty-something housewife Karen Guerreri wrote a science fiction novel about a race of intergalactic jellyfish and, rather like the Mandarin of Taoist fable, could no longer tell whether she was a housewife inventing alien jellyfish or a housewife invented by alien jellyfish. Following the lack of success of this novel (although in some dimensions it was successful enough to spawn a movie version), she sits down to write a sequel, involving more jellyfish, and time travel to (alternate versions of) the Roman/Celtic Europe c. 50BCE, the period of Richard the Lionheart and the last years of the Second World War. At points she's again unclear as to whether she is hallucinating, that she's inventing these characters, that these are different time lines or whether she is these characters.

The author having trouble with his or her novel is nothing new, of course. Remember Kurt Vonnegut in *Breakfast of Champions* (1973) trying to set his characters free, or perhaps more relevantly here given the chaotic structure, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), with Vonnegut's cameos. Or Tom Robbins's battles with his typewriter or celebrations of reaching particular chapters, or Robert Sheckley's failure to plot convincingly to get a vital spare part to his hero in *Options* (1975). The dates are significant here; Bonanno is writing postmodernism-lite, twenty-five years after the fact.

We can perhaps smile with indulgence at the account of her visit to an science fiction convention, although Guerreri/Bonanno insists on calling it s/f, which sounds more like an event for enthusiasts of sex and shopping novels. How did this get past the editors at Tor – or were they seeking revenge for Guerreri's pot shots at editors as a species? Her comment, however, that the more interesting the location for a convention is, the less programming is necessary, rings far too many bells from recent years.

Somewhere along the line Bonanno is investigating mother/daughter relationships, alongside the nature of fiction, but it just all gets lost in the mix of different time frames and realities. Bonanno can't quite keep all the threads tied up, can't quite write well enough to allow us to forgive and can't refrain from the consistently annoying use of the phrase "Gentle Reader".

Molly Brown – *Bad Timing and Other Stories* 🕮

Big Engine, Abingdon, 2001, 267pp, £8.99 ISBN 1-903468-06-X

Reviewed by Penny Hill

This collection of short stories from Molly Brown is long overdue. At last, a chance to re-read all your favourite stories and discover some of those you may have missed.

I have to admit, I had never read the award-winning 'Bad Timing' before and was delighted to repair the omission. Here is a bittersweet tale of true love and time travel which poignantly shows the most likely outcome of such a scenario. If it should be made into a film, I do hope they keep the ending but I'm not sure Hollywood is ready for this.

There is a very wide range of stories in this collection and yet Molly's voice can be heard in each of them. If you were lucky enough to catch her readings at Eastercon, you know exactly what the ship in 'Doing Things Differently' should sound like.

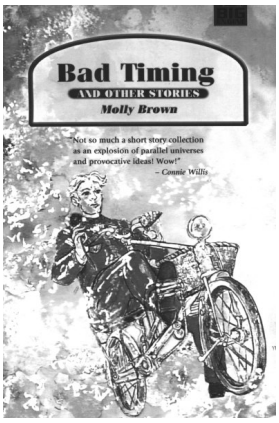
As well as the dry humour and pointed wit of tales such as 'Choosing the Incubus', Molly also writes seriously and evocatively, as in the mood piece 'The Final Rushlight'. This short tale is deftly and elegantly told.

A favourite theme is that of women struggling against men's

constricting expectations, whether violently in 'A Sense of Focus' or more light-heartedly in the splendid 'Women on the Brink of a Cataclysm'. This breakneck travel through parallel universes by a heroine who comes to realise how selfish and unsympathetic she is, is just one of the many highlights of this collection.

Several of the stories frequently have a very dark edge to them; I had to put down 'Star' when I realised where it was heading and read something mindless and fluffy instead until I could finish the story in daylight.

As a whole, these stories cross genres and defy simple classification. Elements of horror and humour permeate cop-buddy stories; fantastical or science-fictional elements are always there to serve a purpose – they are never just window-dressing. This sense of the mystical and strange collides beautifully with the real world in 'The Vengeance of Grandmother Wu'.



The characters are real people, not heroic, usually with unpleasant aspects and yet we are fascinated by them and their partial successes. While I was disappointed, for example, that Angel did not get the fairy-tale ending she was hoping for in 'Angel's Day', I was still pleased she got something positive out of her encounter with Brian.

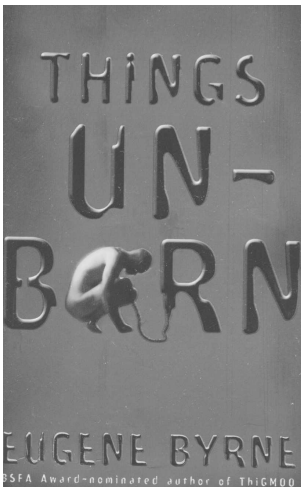
Every story in this collection has merit and many are outstanding. Because of the great variety, this is one author whose collection you can happily read in one sitting. The only downside is that it isn't twice as long.

Eugene Byrne – *Things Unborn* 🕮

Earthlight, London, 2001, 420pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-7434-0911-6

Reviewed by Scott T. Merrifield

One genre of fiction I cannot come to terms with is 'historical' fiction. The wondrous generic mistake of 'historical' fiction is quite often, although not always, given to serious historical misinterpretation. One of my problems with such fiction is the frequent sidelining of historical 'accuracy' for the sake of the story line. Anyone with historical leanings should find this ideology disturbing, and it becomes increasingly worrying when one discovers that historical fiction is currently one of the best-selling genres of fiction. Unquestionably, we owe our historical forebears the moral conviction of accuracy.



So, you may be asking yourselves, what relevance is a monologue of the whys and wherefores of historical fiction got to do with the fiction of ideas? The relevance comes in the guise of an extraordinary novel called *Things Unborn*, one of the most innovative and imaginative pieces of literature I have come across in recent years. *Things UnBorn* is a jocular slap in the overly serious face of 'historical' fiction and its inaccuracies, and from our very own BSFA Award-nominee Eugene Byrne (for his previous novel *ThiGMOO*).

The premise of the novel runs as follows; in the Atom War of 1962 three-quarters of the British population was destroyed. The dead, however, have returned from the grave to alter the course of British history. Here comes the fun part; the fundamentalist Nationalists want to instate the Duke of Monmouth on the British throne, whilst the Coalition of All Creeds, led by Lawrence of Arabia, try to put a stop to such goings on. Will totalitarianism be the discourse of a future Britain or will democracy win through?

Overall the novel works superbly well on many different levels. Byrne touches on sensitive subjects such as nationalism, patriotism (both with completely different sets of ideologies), identity and religious differentiation. *Things Unborn* is well, and humanely, written with crisp, fast-paced dialogue and splendid characterisation. Byrne nods his head to Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* whilst incorporating a playful, though somewhat more sophisticated, humour that would be of interest to the Terry Pratchett and Robert Rankin fan. Whilst I hesitate to use the word profound, Byrne's novel does make the reader think and realise that despite all our differences as human beings we are just that, human.

Orson Scott Card – *The Folk of the Fringe*

Tor Orb, New York, 2001 (1989), 272pp, $12.95 ISBN 0-312-87663-7

Reviewed by Andrew A. Adams

Orson Scott Card is a Mormon. I'm not saying this is a good or a bad thing, but it's impossible not to realise this when you read *The Folk of the Fringe*. This collection of five short stories (well, up to novella length in at least one case) is unashamedly about Mormons. Not all the main characters are Mormon, the Mormons aren't all good, and not all the good people are Mormons. Nevertheless, this book is as much about the Mormon people. It's also about Americans (in the broadest sense of those who live on the American continents) and about the human condition.

As a Brit, I have no preconceptions about the Mormons as a sect. Your mileage may well differ if you are American and I certainly think an American (and particularly a US) viewpoint on this book will differ substantially from that of an outsider such as myself.

We start with 'West', the tale of a loner, an outcast-by-choice from a dying society (the US after a limited nuclear exchange). For reasons unknown even to his conscious mind he takes pity on a bunch of travellers certain to die without his aid and advice. Eventually he tells them his dark, even horrific, secret. This story is *not* for the faint-hearted. The secret as revealed is very disturbing, and the fact that Card attributes (in his extensive Author's Notes) the main part of this secret to actual news reports makes it even more so.

We follow on with 'Salvage' which centres around a man, Deaver Teague, saved as a four-year-old by the travellers in 'West'. Deaver is not, and likely never will be, a Mormon. 'Salvage' is about what this means for someone living in a primarily Mormon culture.

'The Fringe' is the tale of a teacher, a man weak in body but with mind, spirit and courage to more than make up for it, plus the kindly help of a group of travelling players.

These same players and Deaver Teague collide in 'Pageant Wagon' and we leave Teague's story with him possibly having found the family he's been looking for all these years.

Finally we come to 'America', the story of the man who would become the governor of the new Mormon State in which most of the other stories takes place.

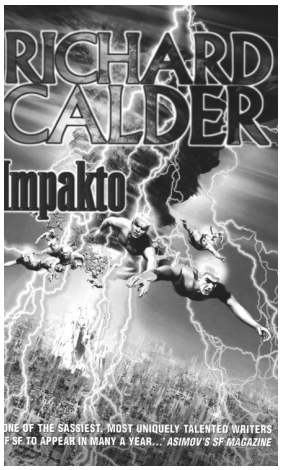
A haunting collection of tales, none more so than 'West'. Excellent writing and heart-rending emotional turmoil. A look into the heart of Mormons, Americans and humans. Well worth the read, though avoid the first story if you're faint of heart (or stomach).

Richard Calder – *Impakto* 🕮

Earthlight, London, 2001, 442pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-7434-0895-0

Reviewed by Stuart Carter

Raul Riviera is returning by aeroplane to his home in the Philippines when the man next to him reveals that he not only survived his own abortion (the technical term for which is an 'impakto'), but that he also harbours demons and most of his body is mechanical. This man then proceeds to possess everyone on board the plane and crash it into the mountains, but not before transforming himself into a sickly, protective cocoon for Riviera.



Riviera, the only survivor of the crash, is contacted upon awakening by the inhabitants of the other-dimensional demon city of Ur. One of them, the beautiful artificer Maximillia, grafts a 'bionic' claw in place of his right hand and enhances his body in various other, deadly ways so that he can cross over to Ur. There he must aid other revolutionary demons in killing the ancient King and Queen. This so that the revolutionaries can *then* defend the city against a newly-created, retroactively evangelical and genuinely Old Testament God – who is set to convert everyone, everywhere, to His way (Catholicism, apparently), by launching an invasion force towards the new Heaven in a gigantic spaceship (the design of which owes no small debt to those of the Golden Age of sf) that has been buried in the royal palace of Ur since time immemorial.

The first few chapters of this story first appeared as a short story in *Interzone* in December 1999. Reading *Impakto* is a little like reading William Hope-Hodgson, H P Lovecraft or even William Blake, so relentlessly, crazily, just-possibly-brilliant can it seem. Like all of Calder's previous work the language is as thick and sometimes impenetrable as the densest, most dangerous jungle (with a *very* good dictionary serving as the sharp machete), and he never ever uses a single, one-syllable word when an entire page of twisted, tangled verbiage can do the job.

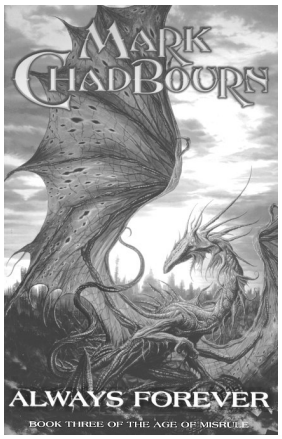
The problem is that the plot, a roller coaster of potentially Milton-esque proportions, doesn't really warrant or benefit from such semantic lianas. It's (as my own inadequate synopsis shows) a long mad ramble through some potentially very interesting territory, but the potential is unfortunately stifled by the over-proliferation of similes and a surfeit of archaic terms. This style worked splendidly in previous works like *Malignos*, precisely because they were set in a milieu that was beautifully evoked through the decadent and excessive language. *Impakto*, however, is done no service by this over-elaboration, and the eccentric plot and any deeper meaning is lost, sadly, somewhere amidst the corpulent folds of the language.

Mark Chadbourn – *Always Forever* 🕮

Gollancz, London, 2001, 452pp, £10.99, ISBN 0-575-07254-7

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

Always Forever is the final volume of Chadbourn's Age of Misrule trilogy, following *World's End* and *Darkest Hour*. The premise of the books is that the ancient Celtic gods have returned to this world, magic is replacing technology, and the normal systems of society are breaking down. In the first two volumes Chadbourn tells of how five people, known as the Brothers and Sisters of Dragons, come together and realise that they are destined to save their world. They attempt to gain the co-operation of the Tuatha Dé Danann against the evil Formorii and their god Balor. This third volume recounts the culmination of their struggle.



When I reviewed the second volume, I commented on how it became almost a guided tour of the sacred sites of Britain, as Chadbourn's characters visit each one in turn to make discoveries or to encounter their enemies. To some extent the same is true of this volume, but there's more variety here, notably a long sequence which takes place in the Otherworld, and then the final convergence on London where they have to face Balor.

This final confrontation draws the various plot threads together in a satisfying way. The complexities and mysteries of the earlier part of the story are accounted for, and there's a powerful twist towards the end which I wouldn't reveal for worlds. I also like the way that there's a cost to victory, and even though evil is banished the world will never be the same again. It's possible that something new and valuable will be forged.

What impresses me most about Chadbourn's writing is how his central group of characters are ordinary and believable; their heroic qualities and their growing powers don't wipe out their humanity. While they carry out heroic roles, they are allowed to feel fear, disgust and uncertainty, and Chadbourn is not afraid to show their sensitivity towards each other.

My only reservations are to do with the style. It's a pity that Chadbourn, who has something to say, and a powerful visual imagination, can so often slip into imprecise language. Time and again I was jerked out of his narrative by awkward and repetitive phrasing, dangling participles, pronouns that don't refer back to the right antecedent, and structures that are just plain wrong. This might not bother some readers – it's the public examiner in me! – but I found it irritating, particularly in a book of this potential quality. More rigorous editing would have made all the difference.

However, you'd be missing a lot if you decided on these grounds not to read *Always Forever*. Those who have read the first two parts won't need me to tell them that. If you haven't, then start with *World's End*; although this book begins with a summary to bring new readers up to speed, it can't do justice to the complexity of the earlier volumes.

John Christopher – *Bad Dream*

Published in *Spectrum SF* issues 4, 5 & 6)Spectrum Publishing, Glasgow, 2001, 160pp, £3.99 (per issue) ISSN 1468-3903

Reviewed by Penny Hill

This should have been quite a coup for *Spectrum SF* – the first publication of a new novel by a well-known name like John Christopher – but I can't help feeling that they were short-changed.

Bad Dream is not a good novel. I suspect that what John Christopher really wanted to write was a 'Germans win the Second World War' story but chickened out of that and instead disguised it as a future history of the downfall of Britain within a strong Europe. This gives him the opportunity to rant against the Maastricht Treaty every few pages and complain about the use of metric rather than imperial measurements.

It seems to be a Europe made up of Germans and more Germans, all fulfilling classic stereotypes. Tellingly, while this while this extends to several mentions of the Holocaust, it doesn't extend to the description of a German family Christmas – an important scene early in the story. The family, though conservative and rich, definitely don't do anything as traditionally German and sentimental as opening their presents on Weihnachtsabend. This does make me feel the author is only interested in depicting one side of the stereotype.

The political commentary seems naïve to me; Europe is seen to be destroying Britain but all contact with the Commonwealth has been broken off for somewhat nebulous trade reasons and the American way of life offers no salvation. It is unclear whether the author sees any solution to the dystopia he has conceived.

The characters are almost universally dull and flat; Michael may be our viewpoint character, supposedly a typical Englishman, but there is no real feeling of his strengths and weaknesses. His actions and choices don't spring from any real attitudes and although we are given reasons for his extreme change in attitude, it feels plot-driven rather than a genuine choice. His half-sister Hildy's incestuous seduction attempt is just unpleasant. The whole treatment of Michael's black American girlfriend Lucy is tokenistic and patronising. Her mouthpiece comments, whether about the black experience or inter-white racism, strike me as naïve.

Hidden away in the background is a potentially interesting story about partial and total immersion virtual reality and the "Bad Dream" of the title. Sadly, although this is the ostensible plot, it is never concentrated on and the one chance we get to experience this world is rushed and underdeveloped.

John Christopher is best known for his excellent children's fiction. This adult work with its dull recounting of sex and politics shows that he should really stick to what he does best.

Brenda W. Clough – *Doors of Death and Life*

Tor, New York, 2000, 268pp, $13.95 ISBN 0-312-87550-9

Reviewed by John Newsinger

This is a book of quite astonishing mediocrity. And yet, according to the blurb, the *San Francisco Chronicle* rated it one of the best sf novels of the year. One cannot help feeling that at least a proportion of what passes for science fiction in the States is coming from an alternative reality where critical standards and tastes are radically different. It is not so much that Brenda Clough is a bad writer, in fact she is quite competent – but that what she has to say is just crass.

The story focuses on two men, Edwin Barbarossa and Rob Lewis, two average contemporary Americans, one a scientist, the other a carpenter, who in a previous volume succeeded in acquiring the magical powers possessed by the epic hero Gilgamesh (inevitably known as Gil!). Edwin has acquired immortality and Rob the power of mind control. The meat of the book is the way that this affects their lives and relationships.

Now the essential premise of the novel is pretty infantile, although one can imagine a number of writers handling it in a suitably comic mode. What we have here, though, is a third rate romance crossed with a third rate thriller and taking itself seriously. Rob's mind control powers cause problems with his wife (has he been manipulating her sexually?), while Edwin's invulnerability attracts the attention of the authorities and of a suitably megalomaniacal multi-millionaire. All of this left this reader completely uninvolved and wondering who exactly would enjoy this sort of stuff. What is even more frightening is the likelihood that Edwin and Rob are doomed to have further inconsequential adventures. Avoid them.

Charles de Lint – *Into The Green*

Tor Orb, New York, 2001, 249pp, $14.95 ISBN 0-765-30022-2

Reviewed by Graham Andrews

When somebody presents me with yet another cod-Celtic potboiler, I feel tempted to thrash the importunate blackguard with my shillelagh – which is kept above the mantelpiece for just such a purpose. After reading the first few paragraphs of *Into the Green*, however, I asked this nice Canadian general to put my weapon of choice temporarily beyond use.

Charles de Lint does more than just 're-tell' or 're-imagine' Celtic mythology from a quick skim through something like Sinéad De Valera's *Fairy Tales of Ireland*. Whoever wrote this *enconium* from *The Philadelphia Enquirer* got it spot-on: "...The Sidhe are beguiling, terrifying folk and their Other World a realm from which no mortal returns unchanged. De Lint knows that, regardless of what names he uses."

I read and enjoyed de Lint's fix-up novel *The Fair at Emain Macha* about ten years ago, but none of his subsequent works. It's been my loss. *Into the Green* (first published in Tor hardcover, 1993) is another fix-up job, with more of the joins showing. The early portion appeared, greatly altered, as short stories in Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Sword and Sorceress* anthology series from DAW books. Angharad, the redhaired nomadic witch-harper heroine, is well-represented by cover artist John Howe.

The lioness's share of *Into the Green* shows how the 'Summerborn' Angharad contends with Aaron Corser, a corrupt big-city businessman who plies his trade in power-packed fingerbones:

> The fingerbones of the Summerborn were supposed to store their witcheries, bringing those who wore them a piece of a Summerborn's soul – the part that gave witches their luck and longevity. All one truly needed was one bone, from one finger, but when the wearing of such bones was in fashion, men and women took to wearing bracelets and necklaces . . . made from the fingers of many witches. The more one had, the greater the luck. The longer the life... Unfortunately, Angharad knew the old tales to be true. (p.100)

De Lint can be poetic without letting himself get carried away

by the exuberance of his own verbosity. Re Herend'n, Angharad's elderly Da: "Something passed across his features the way the grass in a field trembles like a wave when the wind touches it. It was there one moment, gone the next – a sadness, a touch of pride, a momentary fear" (p.15).

For music lovers and/or filkers, there is an Appendix offering tunes for small harp and other melody instruments, chosen from Angharad's wide repertoire. And was de Lint, I wonder, inspired to compose 'Flight of the Heron' by reading D.K. Broster's classic historical novel of the same title? I'd really like to know.

Graham Edwards – *Stone and Sun* 🕮

Voyager, London, 2001, 464pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-00-651072-8

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

The adventures of Jonah Lightfoot and Annie West lurch unsteadily to a conclusion in this, the third and – thankfully – final volume of The Stone Trilogy. Readers of the previous two volumes will recall how the eruption of the volcano Krakatoa propelled Jonah and Annie through a 'threshold' into the world of Stone, at first sight a vertical wall created to store the memories of all time in memory rods that can be 'manipulated,' by 'adepts', and subsequently revealed to be a cone-shape.

In *Stone and Sun*, Jonah and Annie must undertake a perilous journey up the face of Stone, through different worlds and times, to Sunlight Pass where they must once again face and fight the evil dragon Archan, aided by a variety of characters who vie in their ability to irritate the reader.

Stone is certainly a confusing world: in the space of two paragraphs the reader is told that its ocean "was very different to the Earthly seas over which Jonah had once voyaged," yet also "not so very different from the Pacific, the greatest sea on the world of his birth." The confusion is hardly dissipated by the considerable number of explanations – some of them flashbacks, some of them put in the mouths of conveniently just-met characters, of what has gone before and what Jonah has to do in the future in order to defeat the dragon. At other times, Annie goes into "dreamin' dreams" and returns with vital information, and on the few occasions when there is no-one to provide him with an instant explanation, Jonah simply jumps to the right conclusion.

The book is a curious mixture of whimsy and gore, and not even innumerable twists and turns of plot – as ever, revealed in conversation – can compensate for an unconvincing scenario and unbelievable characters. Towards the end of the book, Archan wonders, "How can it have turned on something as trivial as a name?" Well, quite. In the end, the disparate elements of this novel just do not hang together.

Warren Ellis (writer), Bryan Hitch & Paul Neary, Michael Ryan & Luke Rizzo, Chris Sprouse & Kevin Nowlan (artists) – *Stormwatch: Final Orbit*

Titan Books, London, 2001, £7.99 ISBN 1-84023-381-8

Reviewed by Stuart Carter

This is the big one, the legendary series where British comics writer extraordinaire Warren Ellis savagely killed off the superhero team he had single-handedly revitalised just (we later discovered) to clear the way for the introduction of his new, stunning *Authority* series.

Stormwatch are the UN's superhero crisis intervention team, based on board the Skywatch platform, a large space station in Earth orbit. The team had been used to battling traditional supervillains, but Ellis's time as a writer more often saw them playing a war of nerves against clandestine American government projects to develop superhuman armies, or reluctantly foiling dastardly schemes to use super-technologies to make the Earth a utopia.

Stormwatch: Final Orbit finally sees the Stormwatch team completely out of their depth when Skywatch is infested with Aliens (as seen in *Alien*, *Aliens, Alien*^{3} et al). Another 'super-group', the WildC.A.T.S., teleport up to Skywatch to see what has happened, but they're caught in the same sticky web as Stormwatch and have to try and fight their way off the station.

The shock value of seeing some fairly well established superheroes *really, actually die* aside, *Final Orbit* is a pretty disappointing read. It's a slim volume compared to previous collections, the artwork is nothing special, and even Ellis's normally tight scripting can't raise the necessary tension to make this the genuinely moving swansong it could have been. Telling the *Stormwatch* story through the (unfamiliar to me) WildC.A.T.S. team is a mildly interesting exercise, but the death of the Stormwatch team could have been better told from their own point of view. Doing it through unknown characters seemed a mistaken exercise in narrative restraint.

I got the impression that Ellis had exhausted *Stormwatch* and just wanted it out of the way so that he could move on. The sequences at the end of *Final Orbit* that are by far the best parts of the book (added for this collection, I assume, because they're drawn by Bryan Hitch who would later draw *The Authority*) read like 'housekeeping' epilogues, tidying things up for the continuation of the wider story in *The Authority*.

If you've read and enjoyed the earlier *Stormwatch*es and the later *Authority*s then you'll probably want to read *Final Orbit* for closure's sake; if you haven't then this won't appeal to you at all, and nor, sadly, does it showcase Ellis's undoubted talents sufficiently to garner him deserved new readers.

David Gerrold – *Bouncing Off The Moon*

Tor, New York, 2001, 319pp, $22.95 ISBN 0-312-87841-9

Reviewed by Kathy Taylor

Bouncing Off The Moon is the sequel to *Jumping Off The Planet*. It isn't necessary to read that book first; *Moon* fills in the information well enough. However, if you plan to read both, do read them in order; some of the events and revelations in the sequel would alter your perceptions of the first book.

Towards the end of the previous novel, Charles ('Chigger') Dingillian had divorced his parents and, with his younger brother Bobby, been given in guardianship to their older brother Douglas. At the start of *Bouncing Off The Moon* the Dingillian brothers are aboard a giant transport cable, the Beanstalk, heading towards an embarkation station. From this point they expect to be transferred to the Moon, and once there accept an out-of-system colony bid. It's not that simple, of course. Behind them the Earth is falling into social, political and economic chaos, and competing corporations pursue them, desperate to obtain something stored on the memory bars inside Bobby's toy monkey. The brothers flee and try to

cross the Moon's surface with a con man called Alexei.

The plot of *Bouncing Off The Moon* is a first-rate adventure story. It is fast paced and with frequent twists and turns it never fails to maintain interest. The characterisation of the major protagonists is superb. The novel is written from the viewpoint of thirteen-year-old Charles Dingillian and he thinks like a thirteen-year-old. With the possible exception of Bobby (and I don't know any eight-year-olds well enough to judge), the characters think, talk and act within a consistent and credible framework of wants, needs and confusions. These aren't superheroes, they are confused kids trying to survive and hold what's left of their family together. They aren't sure whom to trust and they make mistakes, but they, and subsidiary characters such as Alexei, are very real.

This novel is also notable for being science fiction; it's not a fantasy story or a romance in a science fiction coating – it's true sf. Gerrold makes an excellent job in persistently considering the ramifications and effects of the Moon's environment, from the low gravity to the economic structure, and the end piece is a wonderfully constructed argument on the nature of sentience and free will. It is also a coming of age story for both Charles and Douglas and as such is comparable to Robert Heinlein's classic *Podakayne of Mars*.

Bouncing Off The Moon is an excellent young adult novel that I can strongly recommend to not-so-young adults as well.

David Howe with Len Maynard & Mick Sims (eds.) – *F20 two* 🕮

Enigmatic Press/BFS Publications, Reading, 2001, pb, illustrated, signed and numbered in a limited edition of 100,103pp £7.99 ISBN 0-9524153-9-9

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

This is the second of an annual series of limited edition story collections produced by Enigmatic Press and BFS Publications for the British Fantasy Society. The theme for this issue is the Seven Deadly Sins and the contributors include Freda Warrington, Juliet McKenna, Storm Constantine, Louise Cooper, Jane Welch, Justina Robson and Suzanne Barbieri. And if that doesn't tempt you to indulge in this short but rich feast of fantasy, then it's worth pointing out that three out of four of the original stories from the first collection were selected by editors Datlow and Windling for Honourable Mentions in last year's *Best Fantasy and Horror*. This year could be even better. All seven stories here are original, and several are outstanding. Two authors make their short story debuts here: Juliet McKenna's 'The Tormalin Necklace' (Greed) is based in the world of her fantasy novels [the third of which, *The Gambler's Fortune*, is reviewed elsewhere in this issue], while Jane Welch's 'Heat of the Moment' (Anger) is her first short story published in English.

The mood ranges from humour, in Louise Cooper's 'An Oversight at the Department of Supplications' – a 'for want of a nail' story in which the overthrow of the old gods is due to a combination of bureaucratic ineptitude and sloth – to horror, and the style from fantasy to near sf.

Storm Constantine's 'Joy in Desire' is an atmospheric piece in which a mousy spinster (like a grown up version of *Ab Fab*'s Saffy), whose free-spirit bohemian mother may have also been the village witch, receives a vision and a gift that transforms her. Justina Robson's 'The Seventh Series' is a real headspinner, a collision of *The Matrix* with *Tomb Raider* with the paranoid overtones of Theodore Rozack's *Flicker*, leaving both the protagonist and this reader left wondering what is real at the end. Definitely one of the standout stories of this collection. But the real tour de force is Suzanne Barbieri's 'Its Secret Diary', a chilling inversion of the theme of gluttony made even more horrific by being cast in a twisted parody of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, as its anorexic protagonist systematically starves herself into the image of the creature inside her (caught in a nightmarish accompanying illustration by Bob Covington). An impressive collection, highly recommended (and limited to only 100 copies, so hurry). And if at least one of these stories doesn't make more than an Honourable Mention in next year's *Year's Best Fantasy and Horror*, I'll want to know why.

Available from the publishers at 3 Tamworth Close, Reading, RG6 4EQ, UK

Fred Hoyle and John Elliot – *A For Andromeda*

Souvenir Press, London, 2001 (originally 1962), 174pp, £7.99 ISBN 0-285-63588-3

Reviewed by Robert W. Hayler

Reissues of classic sf novels appear to be doing brisk business at the moment. At the time of writing Gollancz's SF Masterworks series comprises over 40 books and has been joined by a sister series for fantasy, as well as their nostalgia-inducing yellow-jacketed Collectors' Edition series. More, I am assured, are on their way.

Mainly these reissued books are class acts that I am very glad to see back on the shelves. For instance, Dick's *Martian Time Slip* has been at least a little tricky to get hold of in this country since NEL's classic reissue series of the mid-1970s. Unfortunately though, the reappearance of the odd title has prompted the heretical thought: why bother with this one?

Enter Souvenir Press and their reissue of *A For Andromeda* by Hoyle and Elliot. The plot is a simple B-movie affair. Britain, the 1960s. A new and powerful radio telescope picks up a message, apparently from the Andromeda galaxy. Decoded, this turns out to be a set of instructions on how to make a supercomputer and the code that will make it work. This is done and the computer, showing a suspicious intellect, attempts to find out about its environment. With some help from willing scientists, it constructs an approximation of a human being to do its communicating. The politicians are blinded by the power that this thing can provide but luckily one scientist realises its true intentions...

This book is a decent enough page-turner. I read it in one sitting and didn't resent the time I spent on it. However, nothing much in it recommends it for reprinting. None of the characters are particularly engaging or likeable. The cold war political intrigue is as clumsy and comically dated as the sexual politics. The computer technology has so dated as to be barely comprehensible and the biology seems similarly back-of-an-envelope.

Not fair, you might think, to judge this book against 'modern' standards but you would be wrong. With its science fatally undermined the book has nothing left to offer at all. Nothing is as tiresome as carefully worked out 'realistic' extrapolation thirty years on. Consider instead John Wyndham's books from around the same time or even ten years earlier. They are beautifully written, excitingly imaginative and interesting social documents of a different time. *A For Andromeda* is none of these things. Your eight quid could be much better spent.

David Hughes – *The Greatest Sci-Fi Movies Never Made*

Titan Books, London, 2001, 255pp, £18.99 ISBN 1-84023-325-7

Reviewed by Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc

You may notice that there's something not quite right about the title of this book. Ah yes, the preferred term is "films", not "movies" – when will people learn? But joking apart, *The Greatest Sci-Fi Movies Never Made* is exactly what it says on the cover and tells the sorry tales of potentially great cinema experiences dissolving into Hollywood purgatory. Here the process is handily distilled and collated into manageable chapters on each of the unfortunate victims of studio paranoia.

The scenarios are all too similar – problematic scripts becoming unfilmable after a myriad of expensive rewrites, spiralling budgets and interminable legal wrangles – but all are eminently readable even if you have little interest in, say, the trials and tribble-ations (sorry!) of the Star Trek franchise. Despite being a book that cries out to be 'dipped into' (and there was serious temptation on our part to go straight to the wonderfully rancorous *Superman Lives* debacle), this makes a surprisingly good straight read, which if anything demands more information on the projects. It's also a damn fine concept in a market place already flooded with 'greatest hits' tomes covering similar ground. So we get to read about the versions of *Dune* that didn't get made (particularly the Jodorowsky version – now that would have been something), Terry Gilliam's aborted *Watchman* film, Cameron's *Spiderman*, *The Tourist*, the nightmares of the *Alien* sequels (including Gibson's *Alien*^{3} and the proposed *Alien vs Predator* amalgam), Oliver Stone's Burton-baiting *Planet of the Apes* and Lynch's unrealised *Ronnie Rocket* project. There's even the tragedy of *The Fantastic Four*, a film which did get made but was then shelved, much to the chagrin of those who worked on the project.

All good stuff then, and with a nice selection of production paintings in the middle too but, as is to be expected, there are some omissions. Understandably, given the availability of research material, the book is skewed heavily in favour of Hollywood productions and also sets its sights on more recent non-films. The result of this means that Dick's screenplay for *Ubik* isn't mentioned and surely the most intriguing non-film, Eisenstein's version of *The War of the Worlds,* is also absent. Given the book's enthusiasm for Ridley Scott (point: making *Blade Runner* and *Alien* does not excuse 18 years of duff films) it's surprising not to see *Tristan and Isolde* present. John Carpenter's *Firestarter*? Nope. Regardless, this is still highly recommended and, despite its subject matter, never becomes too depressing. It does leave you wondering how on earth any films at all make it to the multiplexes though!

Kate Jacoby – *Rebel's Cage* 🕮

Gollancz, London, 2001, 392pp, £10.99 ISBN 0-575-06887-6

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

Reading *Rebel's Cage*, I was reminded of the structure of a classical five-act tragedy. Act One is exposition, Act Two development; Act Three provides a major climax and a change in the basic situation. So in this, the fourth book of the Elita sequence, Jacoby provides a restructuring and an exploration of what the changes mean, before the resolution of what will be the fifth and final book.

The sequence as a whole is set in the country of Lusara, which is under the rule of a usurping king, Selar, and, in this book, of his son Kendrick. Robert Douglas, Duke of Haddon, dreams of freeing his country, but his task is not straightforward, for Robert is a sorcerer, and in Lusara sorcery is punishable by death. Further, Robert is locked into a prophecy with two other people, Samdon Nash, who is himself a sorcerer and the embodiment of evil, and Jennifer Ross, a woman whom Robert dares not allow himself to love.

The complexities and moral ambiguities of Robert's situation make for an interesting plot. It's still not clear whether the prophecy means what Robert thinks it means, or whether to succeed he needs to fulfil it or circumvent it.

The characters are strongly drawn, particularly the central triangle of Robert, Nash and Jenn. I like the way that few of them are wholly black or white. Robert's friends and allies disagree with him, misunderstand, or become estranged, while some of his enemies have redeeming features and impulses towards good. Robert and Jenn, while united in their determination to destroy the evil Nash, make mistakes and fail towards each other.

The length of the series as a whole means that Jacoby can go into detail in the creation of her fantasy world. The settings are vivid and realistic. The social structure and customs, and the different political groups are also developed well and readers learn more about them as the sequence continues. This is more than the sketchy mediaeval world of much genre fantasy.

However, to come back to the analogy with the five-act tragedy, *Rebel's Cage* is very much a bridging book. It explores the consequences of what has gone before, and prepares for what is to come after. To use another metaphor, it's a twisty road through mountains rather than an ascent to the peak. This isn't a book to try to read on its own, and it's not the place to start. I enjoyed it as part of an unfolding story, and I'm looking forward to the final volume. I'd recommend anyone who hasn't already done so to start with Book One.

Gwyneth Jones – *Bold as Love* 🕮

Gollancz, London, 2001, 308pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-7031-5

Reviewed by Tanya Brown

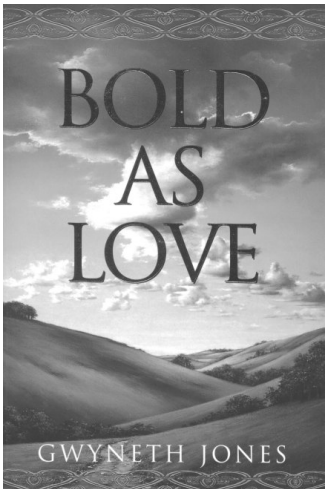
Imagine a near-future England gently ravaged by flood, GM disasters and economic decline. The Home Secretary announces an initiative to get the kids involved in society (not to mention politics) by creating a 'counter-cultural thinktank' of the brighter stars of the indie rock scene. Maybe promoting politics as the new rock'n'roll will rouse England's youth from post-millennial apathy and rejuvenate England just as the act of Dissolution – splitting the UK back into its component nations – comes into force. The rock stars will probably be too busy taking drugs and having sex to achieve anything significant, but they do seem to have influence...

Fiorinda, brattishly independent teenaged daughter of a famous rock star, signs up for the think-tank by mistake while following someone who looks like her father. Skull-masked Aoxomoxoa (Sage to his friends) joins up to keep his friend Fio company. And Axl Preston, the political face of rock'n'roll even before this initiative, could hardly be excluded from such a gathering. To the surprise of many, though, it's not Ax whose political agenda provokes a bloody coup one night in December.

Fiorinda, Sage and Ax find themselves unnervingly close to

the new centre of power. The England they live in is becoming stranger daily: by the end of this, the first of a series of novels, it's transformed to an almost medieval state.

That central triumvirate has evoked comparisons with the legend of Arthur: but this is no simple recounting, or recasting, of the archetypal British myth. It's a very English romance, though devoid of warm beer, cricket matches and old ladies cycling to church. The romance is not limited to a traditional love story, whether heterosexual or otherwise. *Bold as Love* is as much a love letter to the festival counterculture as it's an examination of the relationship between any two individuals.



Jones's future England is deftly drawn, with minutiae that are more convincing than any infodump in portraying the demographic and social changes between Now and Then. The climate's growing cooler, not warmer: the Royal Family have fled the country: *Wonderwall* is still a classic rock anthem.

We see the transformations wreaked upon the post-Dissolution remnants of the United Kingdom through the mildly distorting lens of Fiorinda's alienation. 'This is not my world' is her refrain, but she could easily be a new Britannia, or an English Marianne, for a newly-independent, forcibly isolated England. Sage and Ax, charismatic but not entirely reliable heroes, struggle to hold things together through a sequence of revelations and catastrophes that emphasises the immutable frailty, cruelty and fallibility of humankind within this altered England.

Jones portrays these interesting times with an unfailing, occasionally grim attention to psychological and social detail. *Bold as Love* is not the frivolous romp that its subject matter – the Rock'n'Roll Reich – might suggest. That doesn't mean, though, that the bold new world painted here is unremittingly bleak. Welsh technology is quietly evolving solutions to problems that haven't yet begun to bite. The music scene is healthier than ever (and Gwyneth Jones resists the temptation to describe future gigs in tedious detail).

Whether or not you buy into the politics of the revolution – *Bold as Love* could be read as a Party Political Broadcast on behalf of the counterculture – the focus of the novel is personal rather than political. Sage, Ax and Fiorinda are likeable, flawed individuals who strike sparks off one another as the tangled relationships between them evolve and mutate. There's an exuberance about these three, even in their darkest moments, that is appealingly infectious. I'm looking forward immensely to encountering them again in the next volume, *Castles Made of Sand*.

Graham Joyce – *Smoking Poppy* 🕮

Gollancz, London, 2001, 227pp, £12.99 ISBN 0-575-07229-6

Reviewed by Andrew Seaman

Graham Joyce's previous novels have delivered a powerful sense of atmosphere and convincing psychological examinations of troubled protagonists in extraordinary circumstances, increasingly tending to occupy the kind of slipstream literary territory inhabited by authors like Jonathan Carroll. With *Smoking Poppy* he has excelled himself, producing a novel that ought to be a contender for major awards and should, if there's any justice in the fickle world of publishing, bring him to the attention of a wider non-genre audience.

When Charlotte (Charlie), the Oxford-educated daughter of Midlands electrician Danny Innes, disappears whilst trekking in the Far East he undertakes a physically and spiritually perilous trip to Thailand in search of her in the company of his Christian evangelist son, Phil, and laddish mate Mick. From the urban hell of Chiang Mai and its prison their journey leads them into a lushly described contemporary heart of darkness in the disputed territories between Thailand, Laos and Myanmar and a reunion stranger and more fraught with danger than any that they could have imagined.

Although obviously an extended study of father/daughter relationships the novel also explores the wider theme of gender relations. Its central theme of the fractured ties between Danny and Charlie – the story of an intelligent but uneducated man trying to come to terms with physical and emotional separation from an estranged but intensely loved daughter – is artfully developed. However, Joyce also makes much of the often-uneasy process of male bonding between Danny, Phil and Mick, and their emotionally inarticulate attempts to come to terms both with their predicament and the clash of very different personalities. Joyce portrays the sense of emotional and intellectual distance that Danny feels exists between himself and Charlie with heartbreaking clarity, while his deep friendship with the apparently loutish, but also unexpectedly sensitive, Mick is equally finely drawn.

It is also a story about addiction. Not just the obvious chemical addictions of opium and alcohol, but the competing, but equally seductive, appeals of the sensual world and religious faith, and how perceptions and preconceptions can snare our minds just as easily as any drug. Danny's agnosticism, Phil's unswerving faith and Mick's surprising spiritual development are all sensitively handled, as are the beliefs of the natives they encounter on their travels. In their quest to find Charlie, the journey the characters undertake is also a spiritual, rather than merely physical one, moving towards a moving reconciliation with each other and their own personal natures.

Ultimately, in its exploration of the disquieting borderland where consensus reality shades into the apparently supernatural, *Smoking Poppy* is a compelling and deeply unsettling work that refuses to offer the reader or its characters easy answers to the personal and more universal dilemmas it explores. Not quite a mainstream novel of character, nor a conventional tale of horror, it is quite simply a beautifully written and powerful work of fiction.

Donald Kingsbury – *Psychohistorical Crisis*

Tor Books, New York, 2001, 511pp, $27.95 ISBN 0-312-86102-8

Reviewed by David Langford

The back-story of *Psychohistorical Crisis* seems oddly familiar. Long ago the unnamed Founder used 'psychohistory' mathematics to predict the Galactic Empire's collapse into a 30,000-year interregnum of anarchy. Working from the central Imperial world Splendid Wisdom, he tried to save the future by establishing a colony of technocrats on remote Faraway: the Overt Arm of the Plan, nucleus for a greater Second Empire. When events were derailed by an unpredictable hazard – the warlord Cloun-the-Stubborn, armed with techniques of emotional control – the Covert Arm took action...

Yes, Kingsbury's novel is a sequel to Isaac Asimov's original Foundation trilogy, but unauthorised by the Asimov estate. Hence the above subtle changes to Hari Seldon, Trantor, Terminus, the Foundation, the Mule (that "clownish" conqueror) and the Second Foundation.

Being unauthorised provides freedom to discard all the dreadful tat which Asimov later added to his rough-hewn, jerkily told but memorable trilogy. *Crisis* has no links to the robot series, beyond the joke appearance of a non-sentient robot called Danny-Boy whose many undocumented skills include 'detective'. Thus, no millennial conspiracies of telepathic robots overseeing events. Just as Asimov first imagined it, psychohistory had to be invented and operated without outside tinkering. Good.

Kingsbury goes further, and rationalises all those mutant mental powers. With the unfair advantage of half a century's hindsight, his solution is ingeniously Asimovian. An established Galactic Empire prop, the dread psychic probe, is already a wireless mind-machine interface... needing only slight extrapolation to account for Cloun/Mule-style emotional control.

Many centuries later, this leads to the mindlinked computer familiar or 'fam' used to expand human intelligence and memory throughout the Second Empire – which is ruled as expected by fanatically secretive masters of prediction, here called the Pscholars. *Psychohistorical Crisis* begins with unfortunate Eron Osa being punished for unstated high crimes by the destruction of his fam and thus much of his memory and mind. We flash back twenty years...

What follows is both a story – wide-ranging, full of engaging characters – and a gradually assembled argument against the stated principles of psychohistory. For one thing, doesn't control of the future by a self-perpetuating elite tend towards the deadening stasis of safe choices which Asimov himself considered and rejected in *The End of Eternity*?

Real-world systems contain instabilities. Despite the Pscholars' absolute rule, there are still enclaves of rebel mathematicians hoping to compute alternative futures. Would-be conspirators are allured by the notion of a short life and a merry one. Promising young Eron is manipulated in hope that one day he'll become a sleeper among the Pscholars. Nothing works quite as intended, but Eron's erratic education, including a wonderfully silly visit to the planet-wide heritage industry of Earth, steers him towards the Kingsbury argument that psychohistory's ultimate defence is also its worst flaw.

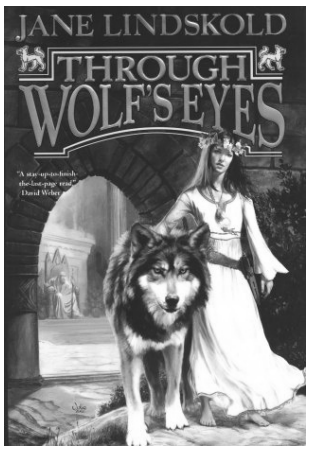
Meanwhile we tangle with history, archaeology, the theory of weights and measures, galactic astrology – adapted as the conspirators' stalking-horse – and, in lectures by the Founder himself, information theory. *Psychohistorical Crisis* wears its erudition lightly, though, and entertains throughout. Arguably it's the best Foundation (sorry, Overt Arm) novel likely to be written this side of Star's End.

Jane Lindskold – *Through Wolf's Eyes*

Tor, New York, 2001, 594pp, $27.95 ISBN 0-312-87427-8

Reviewed by Fiona Grove

This book tells of the search for Prince Barden, estranged son of King Tedric of Hawk Haven, who left his father's kingdom more than ten years before the opening of the tale. Norvin Norwood, Earl Kestrel, thinks to gain a political upper hand in the kingdom by finding the lost Prince and returning him, or his heir, to Hawk Haven, following the deaths of all the other direct line heirs. Naturally nothing is this simple, and the only trace of the Prince and his party is a burnt-out ruin, some years old. However the Earl and his party are being watched by a couple of Wolves, one four-legged and another with only two.



Firekeeper is a wolf. She was born human, but following the deaths of all the other members of her party during her early childhood, was adopted into a pack of Royal Wolves. Here she grows up and lives for many years with the pack, developing wolf skills, but also being taught to use fire, hence her name.

When the wolf pack realise that Earl Kestrel and his party are in the area looking for survivors of the ill-fated Prince's party it is decreed that Firekeeper should make herself known to them and learn human ways, as this was a promise made long ago. Somewhat reluctantly, Firekeeper and Blind Seer, her wolf companion, accompanied by a Royal Falcon called Elation, set off to intercept the party.

Derian Carter, one of Earl Kestrel's companions, helps Firekeeper to acclimatise to the ways of people as they travel back first to the ancestral home of the Kestrels and then to the castle of King Tedric. At the same time, Earl Kestrel has decided that Firekeeper is really Blysse Eagle, daughter of Prince Barden, and therefore heir to the throne.

Firekeeper/Blysse makes some friends and, of course, enemies as they meet other members of the royal household, and then becomes a confidant of the ageing king, who is trying to assess who will be his heir.

This is a well written book, but has a few flaws. Firekeeper, the wolf and the falcon can communicate with each other through speech, but how is never shown. No one else can understand the animals. There is also a tantalising sentence part-way through the book, which bears little relevance to anything else, which implies that a higher authority has control of the girl's destiny, but it is not mentioned elsewhere. The plot is interesting and leaves the reader wondering if there will be a sequel, as there are many loose ends that haven't been tied off.

Diana Marcellas – *Mother Ocean, Daughter Sea*

Tor, New York, 2001, 416pp, $27.95 ISBN 0-312-87484-7

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

Mother Ocean, Daughter Sea is a first novel that shows its author to be a writer of considerable talent. It is set in a fantasy world where, long ago, the Allemanii, a fierce, seafaring race, came to the lands of the peace-loving shari'a, and settled there. Fearing the power of the shari'a witches, the Allemanii slaughtered every shari'a they could find, and any person now suspected of being a witch is put to death.

As far as she is aware, Brierly Mefell is the last surviving shari'a witch, for her witch-sense that allows her to 'hear' others' thoughts has never brought her into contact with another woman who shares her gifts. Alone in the world since the death of her mother, who repressed her own witch-powers,

Brierly has been drawn to live in an isolated cave on the seashore. Here, over the centuries, shari'a witches have lived in hiding, leaving their writings, journals of their lives and their craft, to be discovered by whoever comes after them to live in the cave. When she is not "Called" to use her powers of healing to help the folk of the surrounding villages, Brierly spends her time searching through these other witches' journals, trying to understand and learn more about her powers, and hoping that one day she will find another witch with whom she can share what knowledge she has.

Brierly's lonely existence comes to an end when she saves the lives of the wife and child of Melfallan, Earl of Yarvannet, and she is accused of being a witch. Although Brierly has many advocates amongst the folk she has healed, and Melfallan himself believes that her powers of healing cannot be evil, the laws against the shari'a force him to take her for trial at the court of his overlord, Duke Tejar. It soon becomes apparent that the accusations against Brierly are part of a much wider political power struggle that could cost Melfallan his Earldom and his life.

The richly-textured world of this compelling yet subtle fantasy is very well realised, although the introduction of 'machines' towards the end of the book, into what has been a low-tech milieu, does jar. However, this is a minor criticism of a thoroughly enjoyable novel, and I will be looking out for the next volume in the series.

Paul McAuley – *Whole Wide World* 🕮

Voyager, London, 2001, 388pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-00-225903-6

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

WWW (the titular acronym is deliberately ambiguous) is set a couple of handful of years in the future, in the aftermath of a terrorist 'Info War' attack that effectively wiped the UK's electronic communications and financial systems. Britain is a place of near-universal surveillance, a camera on every corner, and of a new repressive morality under the new Decency Code legislation. The still-lucrative porn sites have moved overseas to the untouchable data havens of places such as Cuba.

A detective inspector (in a neat touch in a novel dominated by complete personal surveillance, I don't think we ever learn his full name: he is variously addressed throughout by a variety of nicknames: Dixon, Minimum, Soapbox – for his job, height or political views), sidelined to a backwater technology division, is called to a crime scene. A young girl has been taped to a plastic chair and bled to death, her murder apparently broadcast live across the web before all the computers in her room were comprehensively trashed. The crime has the m.o. of small time porn merchant and convicted sexual stalker Barry Deane, but what is the motive? Dixon's involvement, his adoption of the case as a personal crusade, and his gradual discovery that the girl, an art student called Sophie Booth, may have stumbled on something that could undermine the whole surveillance system, brings him in to professional and private conflict with the official investigation team in Scotland Yard.

Despite its near future setting, *Whole Wide World* is only marginally sf and more in the mould of a crossover techno-thriller. That said, it is scattered with sf references. The AI network that controls the CCTV surveillance system, ADESS, is referred to more than once in Wellsian terms as "an intelligence vast, cold and unsympathetic". There is a nice reference to a "framed poster of all six Star Wars movies". And does the electronic owl, Archimedes, that Dixon's ex-girlfriend Julie has left with him echo the Tyrell Corporation's artificial owl in *Blade Runner*? Maybe. There's a sense that *World Wide Web* is something of a transitional novel, that McAuley is testing the water of the probably far more lucrative techno-thriller market, while not quite cutting the ties to his sf past. And that move also seems to be echoed inside the novel itself, as it moves from the oppressive claustrophobia of London to an almost cinematic resolution in the data havens of Havana. Whether it fully works or not on both counts, I'm still not sure.

Juliet E. McKenna – *The Warrior's Bond* 🕮

Orbit, London, 2001, 520pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-84149-065-2

Reviewed by Andrew A. Adams

This is The Fourth Tale of Einarinn, following on from *The Thief's Gamble*, *The Swordsman's Oath* and *The Gambler's Fortune*. I was highly impressed with the first two and although McKenna's reach extended past her grasp for the third I have still been looking forward to this book.

Having focussed on Livak in *The Gambler's Fortune* we return to her other (better?) half, Ryshad, and find out what he does for the same summer period. McKenna departs from the first three, all about the struggle against the invading Eliettim, and this one concentrates on the political struggle within the Tormalin Empire, carrying on from the situation left at the end of *The Swordsman's Oath*. Temar has been awakened from a centuries-long sleep and has a number of tasks to perform: recovering the artefacts containing the minds of his fellow colonists, consolidating the precarious position of the colony within politics of the Empire and sorting out his own personal feelings about his temporal misplacement.

Ryshad is assigned to Temar by his own liege lord, the Sieur D'Olbriot, but increasingly finds his new status as Chosen Man of D'Olbriot at odds with both his desire to help Temar achieve his aims and with his independent frame of mind.

About a third of the chapters are written from Ryshad's first-person point of view. The rest are in the third-person, occasionally including chapters where Ryshad joins the action partway through. I think this might have been a mistake as it is sometimes distracting. However, it allows an intimacy with Ryshad that might be lacking in a pure third-person narrative, so may be a worthwhile trade off.

The focus on the politics of Tormalin is a welcome change of pace and allows McKenna to add yet more layers to the already complex world she has created in this series. She avoids the mistake of featuring primarily evil and/or morally ambiguous characters in *The Gambler's Fortune* by showing the action featuring Ryshad and Temar as primaries and the 'bad guys' as players in their drama. These other players always have suitable motives and actions for their characters and are never the evil-for-evil's-sake that mars too many fantasies.

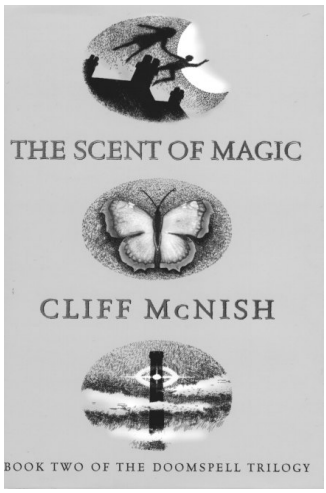
All in all, another fine novel, well worth searching out to continue an already excellent series. I'm expecting a wonderful finale in book five, due next year no doubt.

Cliff McNish – *The Scent of Magic* 🕮

Orion, London, 2001, 215 pages, £7.99 ISBN 1-85881-843-5

Reviewed by N.M. Browne

This second book in the Doomspell trilogy is certainly an antidote to the J K Rowling view of witches. Here they are terrifying creatures invading earth in pursuit of Rachel, her brother Eric and their companion Morpeth, to exact revenge for Rachel's victory over the witch, Dragwena, in the previous book and to lure their wizard enemy Larpskendya into a trap.



This is a children's book full of inventive touches: spells seem like sentient things crowding out of Rachel's body, taking over her sleeping self, fighting for her attention. Humans are more like witches than any other species witches have encountered. Witches have their own snakes, coiled round their bodies in an image reminiscent of Philip Pullman. All children have magical power and the witches gather together the strongest, train them through fear to serve them, and make them compete for pre-eminence. Heiki, one of the strongest of the witches' protégés, tries to use Rachel's compassion to trap and kill her but, in magical combat, Rachel gains the upper hand. With the help of the powerful and unique magic of the baby Yemi, she ultimately defeats the witches and rescues the wizard, Larpeskendya, from their clutches. This touches on big issues, loyalty and compassion and the power of fear and ambition to destroy both. The ending of this volume is both surprising and odd, leaving plenty of scope for the final volume to be equally imaginative.

McNish is a good writer but in spite of its many strengths, its great ideas, evocative descriptions and page-turning pace, I was disappointed with this novel. I wanted it to offer more: more about the children's relationships and more about how they feel. This could have been a longer, deeper book without losing any of its pace and narrative power. I also wanted to know more about the mechanism of magic: what are its limits; is anything impossible?

It is problematic to write about really powerful magic because once into the superhuman sphere the writer is making up the rules as he goes along and it can seem like cheating unless the reader understands the magic's *modus operandi*. In this case the author gets away with it, just, but I'm not sure I understood the logic of the denouement, where rage, not magic, somehow becomes a destructive force.

This is a good book; but it could have been great.

Michael Moorcock – *Gloriana, or, The Unfulfill'd Queen*

Gollancz, London, 2001, Fantasy Masterworks 22, 368pp ISBN 0-575-07359-4

Reviewed by Kathy Taylor

Moorcock's *Gloriana* was originally published in 1978, and this new edition is significantly revised and has a beautiful cover showing a detail from *Sappho* by Gustav Moreau. The two major classical influences on the work are Spencer's *The Faerie Queene*, credited in the author's note, and the Gormenghast trilogy by Mervyn Peake, to whose memory the novel is dedicated.

Gloriana rules Albion in a Golden Age embodying the spirit of her nature. Foreign affairs are held in a delicate balance by her Chancellor Montfallcon, who plays off suitors for the Queen against each other. This age of peace and prosperity threatens to come to an end when Quire, formerly one of Montfallcon's agents, takes employ with Gloriana's enemies.

Stylistically Moorcock borrows heavily from Peake and Spencer. The early and middle sections with their sumptuous descriptions of the palace, its costumed inhabitants and Gloriana's prescribed and ritual-led day strongly evoke the mood and language of Peake's Gormenghast novels, while the frequent masques echo the style and poetry of Spencer.

Despite Moorcock's claim that this is not "an Elizabethan Fantasia", Gloriana clearly represents the popular view of Elizabeth – from her auburn hair and ornate clothing, her unmarried state, her privateer captains bringing home treasure, to the composition of her cabinet. However, one of the enjoyable things about the novel is thinking about the less obvious analogies; for example I wondered if Quire was a version of Marlowe. There are, though, clear differences between Gloriana and Elizabeth, not the least of which are Gloriana's nine bastard daughters, and the acknowledged range of her sexual experimentation. In this, unfortunately, Gloriana appears too much an adolescent male fantasy than a real character. The "Unfulfill'd Queen", despite having an extremely wide range of sexual experiences on a nightly basis, has never experienced orgasm. I'm unsure if the long list and frequent references given are designed to shock, excite, or – to give Moorcock the benefit of the doubt – to show the Queen's desperation, but it fails on all three counts. The sexual encounters are fortunately not graphically depicted but even so the inclusion of children and animals makes mockery of the claims that Gloriana represents all that is best and moral in her realm, and does nothing to arouse this reader's empathy for the character.

Which brings me to the main problem with the novel. Few of the characters ever become more than ciphers, so I didn't care whether they were hurt or happy, lived or died, or if their schemes succeeded or failed. The exception is Quire, whose hurt pride at Montfallcon's lack of appreciation is believable, and on whose schemes most of the slow-moving plot turns. However, the slow pace and lack of empathetic characters give little incentive to turn the page. Despite the epic evocative descriptions the book ultimately becomes a little tedious.

There are points of interest in the book, but mostly they are academic ones: looking at historical analogies, spotting the connections to *The Fairie Queene* or the Gormenghast series. Despite these and the quality of the prose, the novel can only be half recommended to the general fantasy reader.

Spider Robinson – *The Free Lunch*

Tor, New York, 2001, 254 pp, $22.95 ISBN 0-312-86524-4

Reviewed by Kathy Taylor

The Free Lunch is a stand-alone 'young adult' adventure, the story being told from the viewpoint of Mike, a young teenage boy. Mike works out a way to go 'under', to live behind the scenes in Dreamworld, a near-future theme park. Dreamworld is an interesting creation, a sort of Disney taken to the nth degree where thanks to sub-sonics it's very difficult not to be very happy

all the time, and where the happiness is wholesome and innocent. Once 'under' in Dreamworld, Mike meets Annie, a long-term resident, and together they defend Dreamworld against its ruthless competitor and an unknown threat.

With the exception of two scenes the book is as wholesome as the Dreamworld it describes, which makes a real change. The worst scene stands to make the point of how terrible one of the enemies is, when Mike is captured and tortured. The second is sad, rather than gruesome, and deals with the reason Mike went under in the first place. It adds an unexpected touch to an unpleasant reality where sometimes the best you can say is "It was awful but at least it's over".

The problem with describing a book as wholesome is that people equate this to being dull. *The Free Lunch* is not dull. The opening section when Mike is trying to get 'under' at Dreamworld is well paced, with sufficient gadgets and humour to mislead me into thinking I was going to get a young Stainless Steel Rat book. Mike is not a young DeGriz – having far too many morals – but the humour and gadgets continue to interlace with the adventure and provide an entertaining read.

Justina Robson – *Mappa Mundi* 🕮

Macmillan, London, 2001, 465pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-33-75438-7

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

Justina Robson's eagerly awaited second novel, after her Clarke Award shortlisted debut *Silver Screen*, arrives with what might be regarded as impressive prescience or unfortunate timing. Your heart must sink when you turn on the TV on September 11th, and realise you have recently delivered a novel to your publishers in which the heroine hijacks a US airliner en route to DC to New York, or includes a line like "what if we all jumped off the top of the CN Tower, would we really die after eighteen hundred feet of acceleration into the hardtop...?"

Well, that blows the US market...

One hopes not. *Mappa Mundi* is an excellent, thought-provoking novel that fully confirms Robson's status as one of the bright new stars of British sf. It raises complex questions of who we are, and how we can even know who we are if a technology exists that can change our minds and our sense of ourselves without us even knowing.

Psychology researcher Natalie Armstrong holds the key to that technology. Her particular expertise is the neural programming system, MappaWare, which acts on the experimental nanotech interface to the central nervous system, known as NervePath. Her work brings her to the attention of FBI Special Sciences agent Jude Westhorpe, who is investigating a bizarre outbreak of psychosis on a Native American reservation from which his sister barely escaped with her life. While Natalie's work on Mappaware is intended to provide a cure for previously untreatable neurological ailments, Jude suspects uncontrolled secret tests are being carried out for more sinister military and political applications.

Mappaware's first official clinical trial, though, goes horribly wrong. It is carried out on Bobby X, a patient whose visual cortex can no longer recognise living things, and refuses to process the information, rendering people and animals as horrifying amorphous furry blobs. Initially he seems cured, but then, hours later, Bobby starts spouting nonsense and *glows*, not just his brain but his entire body co-opted as an ever-accelerating processing machine. And then he literally starts to disappear. In his panicked state, his ghostly body collides with and passes through that of Natalie, activating the prototype version of the unlicensed SelfWare program she has been experimenting with on herself.

Back in the US, Jude starts to uncover an uneasy alliance between various government departments and a former Russian mafia boss, now involved in smuggling clandestine technology, looking how MappaWare can be used for the eradication of given belief systems and their replacement by more 'desirable' ones. Natalie suddenly becomes one of the hottest properties on the planet, both as a promise and a liability.

At this point it gets even more complicated and there are still several unexpected plot shifts along the way. This is cracking stuff, a helter-skelter of speculative science and transcendent sf and some deep and uncomfortable philosophical and moral questions that you'd expect from Bear or Egan or McAuley, and Robson carries it off extraordinarily well, and fleshes it out with well-realised, very complex individual characters. And a particularly revolting cat.

Gus Smith – *Feather & Bone* 🕮

Big Engine, Abingdon, 2001, 307pp, £8.99 ISBN 1-903468-03-5

Reviewed by L.J. Hurst

No wonder the Northumbrian Constabulary are over-stretched: not only do they have every Novocastrian out of his shirt and out of his brain in the Bigg Market every weekend, but, as Chaz Brenchley, Stephen Laws and now Gus Smith have made plain, once you are out of the city and into the hills you are face to face with forces more powerful than Man Utd and darker than a Newcastle strip. Alison Rigg, an inspector from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Foods, knows none of this when she leaves her 'friend' Stella in London and heads for the wilds to investigate an outbreak of a new variant BSE.

Children such as Isabel, who is mute with everyone except the animals, who can only look on as her brutal mother beats her brother while her dumb animal of a father does nothing, are more at home with the world. PC Philip Dobson can lose himself in the Northumbrian pipes, but still returns to the responsibilities his inspector puts on him, but the local MAFF inspector, Colin Fenwick, is a lost cause – trembling when he has to appear before Ms Rigg and then breaking down and going native.

Unfortunately for the native fauna and flora – plant, animal and human – there are native spirits, too. One of them has a name – the Duergar; nothing but malevolence yearning to destroy everything living and willing to take on any form to do it.

Gus Smith has seen everything high on the hills: spirits that have broken men, spirits that have sent men hurling themselves over cliffs and cars off roads, and, worse, the madness that has entered cattle and seems to be bound in them by the bureaucracy of the ministry and its agents in the field, and is now entering men. As all of these are responsible for human deaths it is difficult to know which is the worst.

There are some unpleasant people along the way as well – but the newspaperman comes to a sticky end which perhaps allows readers to enjoy what is otherwise a near tragedy. *Feather & Bone* ends with a perfunctory closure, and a dubious solace to know that a murdered child's spirit lives on in a bird – but for those readers who want their Dark Fantasy to include both financial and spiritual misery, here it is.

Sally Spedding – *Wringland* 🕮

Macmillan, London, 2001, 547pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-333-90566-0

Reviewed by Chris Hill

Abbie Parker, after starting a job as a housing plot sales negotiator, is haunted by the apparition of a women hanged for murder in the 1860s. With the help of her army boyfriend and a local hotel owner she attempts to get to the bottom of the situation.

This is a first novel by an award-winning poet and short-story writer. I can only assume that her forte lies in those other forms, because this novel does not work at all.

To start with, the supernatural elements are made blatantly apparent far too early in the book, effectively wrecking any build up of suspense. Indeed, both the heroine and her boyfriend accept the supernatural far too easily for late-twentieth-century people.

Frankly, Abbie herself is pushy, arrogant and not terribly likeable, and her boyfriend is worse. To be honest, it is with him that I have the worst problem. He is a drunkard (there are some vague excuses attached regarding something that happened to him on a posting, but it is not made entirely clear what), homophobic and violent. At various times, his response to people disagreeing with him is to shout and swear at them and he is then upset because he doesn't get any co-operation! Maybe it's my wishy-washy liberal leanings but I find it hard to accept someone as the hero when he habitually uses the word 'cunt' to describe people he doesn't like.

Another problem is that the novel could have been concluded at any of several points in the last couple of hundred pages and the actual ending thus feels arbitrary.

The themes of persecution of women in the nineteenth century and child abuse in the twentieth are worthy topics for examination, but the novel doesn't engage with them in any realistic way. For example, when a girl is rescued from attempted murder and Abbie finds evidence that she has been sexually abused, possibly by her father, the police do not investigate but promptly hand her back to her parents!

Overall, *Wringland* is deeply unsatisfactory and I cannot recommend it.

Norman Spinrad –*The Void Captain's Tale*

Tor Orb, New York, 2001, 22pp, $3.95 ISBN 0-312-86825-1

Reviewed by K.V. Bailey

Reappearing after fourteen years, this first-person retrospect, told by the Captain of the starship *Dragon Zephyr,* with its complement of sybaritic "Honored Passengers", has lost nothing of its distinctive fascination. A reviewer need not avoid spoilers, because plot and denouement are succinctly stated as the tale begins. The novel's fascination lies in the unfolding of what Captain Genro would come to consider a karmic destiny embracing himself and Dominique, the ship's Pilot. Its distinctiveness stems partly from how ftl travel is accomplished in the Second Starfaring Age, partly from how a mannered style, involving a constant sprinkling of polyglot phrase and idiom, portrays this eclectic, far-future "floating cultura". The distinctive mode of ftl travel is by sequential Jumps, three/four light years at a time, each Jump consummated as the Captain on the bridge ritualistically presses the button and an amniotically cocooned (always female) Pilot, experiencing the ecstasy of psycho-electronically induced orgasm, becomes for a nanosecond psychically "coextensive with the space-time hologram that is the total eternal universe". In that "durationless augenblick" the ship is relocated. And Spinrad does this in sufficient detail to earn his suspension of disbelief.

Expeditious journeying! The only trouble is that Dominique, hating the post-Jump return to what Spinrad terms quotidian life, and believing it possible, in what is called the Blind Jump, to escape through death into the eternal ecstasy of the "Great and Only" that exists beyond or behind the Void, sets out to woo the Captain to fiddle the Jump electronics to ultimately to enable this. Her success leaves the ship, unless a volunteer Pilot will emerge, forever stranded.

Brief plot summaries are prone to make the imaginatively ambitious appear chimerical, but I can assure readers that if they voyage on the *Dragon Zephyr,* sharing the viewpoints and experiences of crew and Honored Passengers, it will all seen real enough. From the coloured social whirl and salon-gossip of the Grand Palais, and the bio-diversity of the Vivarium, though to Dominique, and eventually also to the satori-seeking Captain, the ship's life is no more than shadow-play. The quasi-metaphysical dimension prevails increasingly as the tale's climax is enacted and operatic and legendary analogues propose themselves. The Captain and Pilot essay a *liebestod;* the Captain's potential fate echoes *Der Flegende Hollander*, while the *Dragon Zephyr* is itself a Ship of Fools coasting an unfathomable cosmos. Get on board.

Christopher Stasheff – *A Wizard in a Feud*

Tor, New York, 2001, 206pp, $22.95 ISBN 0-312-86674-7

Reviewed by Jon Wallace

This is the latest in a long line of books in Christopher Stasheff's The Rogue Wizard series. According to the back cover, "...renegade psychic wizard Magnus D'Armand travels the stars fighting injustice and oppression... sowing the seeds of freedom and revolution throughout the galaxy." Well, there you go. The guy on the front looks a bit like a cross between Indiana Jones and Ash (of *Evil Dead* fame), if that's anything to go by.

But I mustn't get snide.

This is a potboiler of a book. In a lot of ways, it reminds me of those sf books that I used to buy in Woolworth's when I was a lad. I'd find them in a dump bin near the door. They would all have yellow or pink edges to the pages and a sawcut through the edges so that everyone would know they'd been remaindered. The wordy plots nearly always had a chiselled hero who said a lot but didn't actually do anything except wander from one end of a mystical land to the other, and then turn out to be an alien observer or something. Well, this is a bit like that, only more honest. The hero actually arrives in a spaceship, so you know he's from off-world, but he does wander about, talking a lot without actually doing anything.

Am I being a bit hard on this novel? No, I don't think so. In the 30 years since I bought those Woolies books the world has supposedly moved on. I expect more of a book than Celtic Hillbillies (honest!) and a hero that comes across like Slippery Jim diGriz, but is supposed to be serious. This book is an uneasy mix. The world is a 'lost colony', the resident aliens are elves and fairies, the magic is psychic powers, etc. All rather unsatisfying, I'm afraid. OK, I did keep turning the pages, but only to find out whether anything exciting was going to happen.

So, what then? If you've read and enjoyed the other (pauses to count the titles) 8 books in the Rogue Wizard series, 11 books in

the Warlock series, 4 books in the Warlock's Heirs, 8 books in the Rhyming Wizard, the 2 Star Stone books and the 3 Starship Troopers books (how come I haven't come across this author before?), then I suppose you'll like this. I haven't and didn't.

Jules Verne – *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*

(translated by William Butcher, illustrated by Grahame Baker, with an introduction by Michael Crichton) The Folio Society, London, 2001, 230pp, slipcased hardback, £19.95 (to BSFA members)

Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

It has been decades since I last read *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*; in fact, I am not at all sure that I *have* read it. Although I read a number of Jules Verne books as a child, what I remember of this particular one is a series of visual images which suggests that what I read was a comic-book version. In any case, as both Michael Crichton and William Butcher, the translator of this volume, point out, the English-speaking world has rarely been given adequate translations of Verne. It is almost certainly fair to say that for most of us, brought up on abridgements, retellings, and (if we get that far) the vague sense that Verne is a founding father of sf, we feel that we ought to respect him, but (unlike, perhaps Wells) we are never tempted to revisit him. Which is a shame, because few of us have experienced the real Verne.

So, the story narrated by Axel, nephew of Professor Lidenbrock, and their journey down the crater of the Snaefels volcano in Iceland to the centre of the earth is perfectly familiar. Knowing what I now know about nineteenth century 'hollow earth' theories and Verne's romantic didacticism (and sometimes cavalier attitude to the facts he so encyclopaedically amasses), I'm certainly less prone to dismiss the far-fetched nature of the story than I was at nine. This is one of Verne's 'Extraordinary Journeys' a mode devised, perhaps, to celebrate the theoretical and technological rush into the future of his time (*Journey to the Centre of the Earth* was published in 1864, five years after the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* and a year after the first underground railway in London.) With the geographical and political map of the world increasingly filled in, fictional voyages of discovery became more speculative. Re-reading this novel, it's the speculative and satiric elements which become more notable.

There's no doubt that this is a comic novel, with fine interplay between the bombastic, obsessive Lidenbrock and the constantly apprehensive Axel, (the third character, the guide Hans, is 'characterised' by taciturnity: he rarely says more than three words at a time, and then in Icelandic). But there's joy in the search after knowledge, the amassing of facts. "Science, my boy, is composed of errors, but errors that it is right to make, for they lead step by step towards the truth." That's a sentence which says much about Verne's optimistic view of science. The story itself – three men go down a hole and come up again – is so much better than its synopsis. Full of wonder, speculation and wit both dry and exuberant, it is, like so much nineteenth century sf, best read as an alternate history, a 'what if the world was actually constructed so?' rather than serious speculation (if it ever was). But it's a joy to read.

The Folio Press produce expensive, designed editions. The illustrations are atmospheric, although I find them overblown. The double-page spread of the famous battle between plesiosaurus and ichthyosaurus in the underground sea is wildly out of proportion (Axel, even in the midst of his agitation, is careful to note the measurements of the beasts) and even cartoon-like. Michael Crichton's introduction is worth reading as, in part, an interesting justification of the use of two-dimensional characters and minute factual detail in the fantastic novel. We can see, perhaps, in which strand of sf the Vernean tradition still lives.

[Editor's note: Readers of *Vector* are offered the opportunity to purchase this slipcased illustrated edition without obligation to join The Folio Society. Available from the publishers at 44 Eagle Street, London WC1R 4FS (Tel: 020 7400 4200, email: neilt@foliosoc.co.uk) at £19.95, plus £3.50 p&p in the UK.]

Gene Wolfe – *There Are Doors*

Tor Orb, New York , 2001 (1988), 313pp, $14.95 ISBN 0-312-87230-5

Reviewed by Mark Greener

The course of true love never did run smooth. Electronics salesman William Green falls somewhat obsessively in love with Lara Morgan. But Lara walks out, leaving Green a 'Dear John' letter with a difference. Lara warns Green not to step through the 'doors' that, he soon learns, lead to an alternative reality.

The new reality differs in several subtle ways. Trolley buses still run. Colour televisions don't exist. Fire trucks and buses are the 'wrong' colour. And there is at least one profound difference: males develop fatal immunosuppression after sex. While wandering in this new reality, Green buys a doll that seems to be an accurate model of Lara. He learns that Lara is this reality's 'goddess' living in an area known as Overwood. Green locates Overwood on a map, although the store won't guarantee its accuracy, and he can't find anyone who can take him there. While searching for Lara, who flits tantalisingly in-and-out of his grasp, Green is locked away in a mental hospital, only to escape in the company of a schizophrenic revolutionary...

Appropriately for a book spanning two realities, *Doors* is, itself, on an interface: that between sf and literary fiction. You can choose to read it as it's hyped: a "novel of romantic obsession across the inter-dimensional barrier". As Lara asks: "I want to be loved by a man who doesn't die because he made love to me. Is that so terrible?"

But while that interpretation might help genre sales, it sells *Doors* short. You can also read it as a serious, profound investigation into the nature of reality. It's impossible in a brief review to pull out all the nuances in this subtle and compelling book. But perhaps a couple might give you a flavour.

Firstly, *Doors* examines whether obsession, alcoholism and mental illness highlight the fragility of empiricist constructs of reality. To the psychiatrist R D Laing, schizophrenia represents a rational way of dealing with an irrational world. And you can read Green's alternative reality as a schizophrenic, but rational, way of coping with – or escaping from – the pervasive alienation, economic servitude and social isolation inherent in his modern urban lifestyle.

Secondly, you can read *Doors* as an existentialist statement of the need to recognise and manage life's personal, subjective elements. In places, *Doors* strongly echoes French existentialist philosophy: "I've been an actor in a play all my life... and not known my lines. The only difference is that I know it now." Sartre, in *Nausea*, examined how we use the power of imagination to 'create' ideal worlds that contrast with the 'real' world. In many ways, *Doors* offers a sf 'take' on the same theme.

Wolfe uses metaphors familiar to myth and fantasy – maps, doors and 'sacred areas' – as elements in Green's personal, internal, existentialist journey towards self-determination, self-awareness and freedom. Nevertheless – and while it shares

themes with books by Gaiman, Dick, Priest and Vonnegut – *There Are Doors* offers a unique interpretation on the nature of reality and the way we construct our worldviews.

Gene Wolfe's books usually allow multiple interpretations. But *There Are Doors* is more ambiguous than most. You're never entirely sure that William Green is the protagonist's name. You're never entirely sure whether the alternative relativity exists or whether it's an alcoholic delusion or a schizophrenic hallucination. Men's death after sex doesn't profoundly alter the social order, which augments the uncertainty. And Green even seems to enter a protracted clinical remission. You never sure whether the end is optimistic – or profoundly pessimistic. Its strength lies in its ambiguity. *There Are Doors* is a serious, intelligent, thought-provoking book that repays careful reading.

Chelsea Quinn Yarbro – *A Feast in Exile*

Tor, New York, 2001, 496pp, $27.95 ISBN 0-312-87843-5

Reviewed by Jan A. Malique

The last time the Count Saint-Germain and I met was in *Out of the House of Life* and many moons have been howled at since then. In this latest offering Saint-Germain is incarnated as a foreign merchant, Sanat Ji Mani, who lives and trades in 14th century Delhi. His world is rife with feudal wars, court intrigues and numerous mean-spirited souls who aspire to greatness but fail miserably as only the deluded can.

I have to admit the vampire novel is an acquired taste but what is it about this creature that grips our psyche so powerfully? The dweller in the shadows has haunted human imagination for millennia, silent as the flight of the owl through the forest, seductive as the siren song and just as deadly. Saint-Germain is all this, but over a period of three thousand years has had ample opportunity to confront his shadow and begin the alchemical process towards wholeness. His character is intelligently crafted, cultured, sensuous and humane.

A Feast in Exile is set against an immense canvas of colour, smells and sounds. Take a deep breath, half close your eyes and step into it.

Timur-i-Lenkhs's armies are on the move like a huge curtain of ants, sweeping across Asia swallowing up empire after empire. The sultanate of Delhi seems to be the next prize and such bad news travels fast. Fear and suspicion sweep through the city bringing chaos in their wake. An exodus ensues and Sanat Ji Mani and his ward (and lover), Avasa Dani find that they too have to join the mass of people if they are to survive. As an outsider, Saint-Germain has to carefully consider his own fate as well of those he cares for, such is the pattern of his life. Avasa Dani becomes one of his kind but in that transformation realises her own destiny lies elsewhere.

Delhi falls to Timur-i-Lenkh and Sanat is captured whilst Avasa Dani escapes. As Saint-Germain, our hero has borne witness to the rise and fall of empires, made and lost fortunes and suffered great torments in the process of existence over long cycles of time. Exile is a familiar taste to him in every sense of the word.

Sanat has to fall back on his considerable skills to survive severe mental and physical privations. He joins the ragged mass of humans who shadow Timur's army and gets taken under the wing of a young acrobat, Tulsi Kil. A bond soon develops between them, which verges on the edge of love, but there is also deep ambivalence there. She cannot cross that line between mortality and immortality and eventually becomes lost to him. A familiar theme of pain and loss runs through this book and love is seen as bitter sweet and hard-edged.

I am not sure whether I have successfully conveyed the essence of this book. Looking out from Saint-Germain's eyes, I see a world in which deceit, treachery and danger lurk round every corner and from behind most eyes, his sorrow at the ease with which loyalty can be bought by sparkling jewels and gold, and at his own part in this necessary game of survival. As an immortal, outside of time but doomed to swim in its tides, he is unbearably lonely but knows emotional coercion is a weapon which cannot be used to hold on to love. This is a dark, melancholic tale. Enjoy.

THESE ARE SOME OF THE OTHER BOOKS WE HAVE SEEN RECENTLY. A MENTION HERE DOES NOT NECESSARILY PRECLUDE A FULL REVIEW IN A LATER ISSUE OF *VECTOR*.

Tom Arden – *Empress of the Endless Dream* 🕮

Gollancz, 2001, 448pp, £17.99 ISBN 0-575-06374-2

Tom Arden – *Sisterhood of the Blue Storm*

Gollancz, 2001, 698pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-330-0

Empress of the Endless Dream, the concluding Fifth Book of Oroken, is released in hardback at the same time as the mass market edition of the preceding volume. Prince Jemany continues his quest for the long lost crystals of Oroken. In *Sisterhood*, the quest takes him and his companions to the island of Xaro, on which ten boys are about to undergo the Manhood Rite, in search of the blue jewel of the sea goddess Javander. But Javander's once-loyal priestesses have turned from her, breaking the psychic web and forming the evil and destructive Sisterhood of the Blue Storm. In *Empress*, Jemany returns at last to his kingdom to stage the final battle with the anti-god Toth-Vexrah in an ice-bound city ravaged by terrorism, murder and the threat of war. Although the synopses suggests a protracted 'McGuffin' (plot coupon) hunt over five volumes, Arden's series comes with praise from *Interzone*, *Locus* and *SFX*.

Piers Anthony – *Swell Foop*

TOR Books, 2001, 300pp, $24.95 ISBN 0-312-86906-1

The 25th Xanth novel. Someone or something has kidnapped the Demon Earth, and if he isn't found Earth's gravitational field, and that of the magical realm of Xanth, will unravel. The only way to stop this is if six adventurers can find and wield the mysterious object called the Swell Foop in a cosmic battle.

Ben Bova – *The Precipice*

Tor Books, 2001, 349pp, $25.95 ISBN 0-312-84876-5

First volume of The Asteroid Wars, of corporate shennanigans and spacefaring derring-do as Dan Randolph, owner of a near

bankrupt space launch company is persuaded by entrepreneur Martin Humphries that the route to salvation, both of his fortunes and of an Earth on the brink of environmental collapse, lies in mining the mineral-rich asteroids. The debatable premise and stock characterisation is saved, according to reviewer (of the UK Hodder & Stoughton hardback in V217) Mark Greener, by Bova's skill as a storyteller and his obvious enthusiasm, making pulp skiffy of *The Precipice* "unpretentious, undemanding – and unputdownable".

Arthur C. Clarke – *The Collected Stories*

Gollancz, 2001 (©2000), 966pp, £9.99 ISBN 1-85798-323-8

This massive collection, first published in hardcover by both Gollancz in the UK and Tor in the US, was the subject of Paul Kincaid's feature review, 'Elegy', in *Vector* 217. As Paul says, the scale and scope of Clarke's career is amply illustrated by the date and place of publication of the earliest and latest stories, 'Travel by Wire' (1937, *Amateur Science Fiction Stories*) and 'Improving the Neighbourhood' (1999, *Nature*). Between those two lie Clarke's most prolific and successful period, from the mid 1940s to the mid 1960s, in which he returned again and again to themes examining and questioning the future of humanity on Earth ('The Forgotten Enemy', 'Transience') and beyond (exemplified by the ending of *2001*), and often mirrored in a smaller and more human scale as protagonists, in stories such as 'Maelstrom II', 'Transit of Earth' and 'Death and the Senator' come to terms with their own mortality.

Philip K. Dick – *Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said*

Gollancz, SF Masterworks 46, 2001(1974), 204pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-341-6

Flow My Tears... (the title adapted from a poem by John Dowland) is the eighth PKD novel in Gollancz's SF Masterworks series and won its author a John W. Campbell Memorial Award after a fallow period following *Ubik* (1969) and the relatively minor *Our Friends From Frolix 8* (1970).

Popular TV host Jason Taverner is attacked with an alien life-form by a former girlfriend and wakes up in a hotel room to a world where he is not only unknown, but no longer exists. In a world where everyone is monitored, this brings him to the attention of policeman Felix Buckman, who discovers Jason is also a 'six', a product of genetic experimentation to produce a handful of unusually bright and beautiful people. Dickian paranoia and reality mind games are well to the fore again.

David Gemmell – *Drenai Tales: Volume 1*

Orbit, 2001, 759pp, £20.00 ISBN 1-84149-131-4

An omnibus hardback edition which combines the three novels *Legend* (1986), *King Beyond the Gate* (1985) and *Waylander* (1986). An earlier, somewhat different omnibus edition was published under the title *Drenai Tales* by the Random House imprint Legend in 1991, with a different introduction, a different ordering to the stories, and the inclusion of an extra 15,000 word novella 'Druss the Legend' (1991), omitted from this current volume.

Simon R. Green – *Shadows Fall*

Gollancz, 2001 (1994), 506pp, ISBN 0-575-05711-5

"You won't find Shadows Fall on any map, but it will be there for you if you need it badly enough. It's a place where all stories find their ending, all quests are concluded and every lost soul finds its way home at last. Strange people and stranger creatures walk the sprawling streets and there are doors that take you anywhere, to lands that no longer exist and worlds that someday might."

Simon R Green is the author of the 'Hawk and Fisher' stories (recently re-released and expanded with *Beyond the Blue Moon* (reviewed by Colin Bird in *Vector* 216).

Laurell K. Hamilton – *Obsidian Butterfly*

Orbit, 2001, 596pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-84149-132-2

The ninth of Hamilton's popular 'Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter' series, which also contains a short teaser for the tenth book, *Narcissus in Chains*.

Ray Hammond – *Emergence* 🕮

Pan, 2002, 579pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-33390493-1

In 2015 the world's richest man is the charismatic corporate leader Thomas Richmond Tye III. Outside government jurisdiction and, some think, dangerously out of control, the activities of the Tye Corporation are viewed with increasing nervousness by the World Bank and the United Nations International Security Agency when Tye announces he has the technology to control the world's weather.

Ray Hammond is a business and technology writer and futurologist, and former Science Editor of the *Daily Mail*. *Emergence* is his debut novel.

Harry Harrison – *The Stainless Steel Rat Joins the Circus*

Gollancz, 2001, 269pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-85798-724-1

Slippery Jim (Bolivar) diGriz, the Stainless Steel Rat, is back again and conning his way, amidst much double and triple crossing and the usual quickfire repartee, into the banking scam to end all banking scams. First reviewed by Jon Wallace in *Vector* 211

Elizabeth Haydon – *Prophecy*

Gollancz, 2001, 558pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-991-0

Elizabeth Haydon – *Rhapsody*

Gollancz, 2001 (1999), 609pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-575-07279-2

Rhapsody is a former prostitute and a Namer, a singer of great talent and handy with a sharp blade. She and her companions Achmed, an enigmatic, black-clad assassin, and Grunthor, a powerful but kind-hearted Firbolg warrior, must escape from the demon Tsoltan (from whose thrall Rhapsody has released Achmed) and into the World Tree on a centuries-long prophesied quest to save their world from endless darkness. *Rhapsody* was first reviewed by Avril Brown in V215

Valery Leith – *The Way of the Rose* 🕮

Gollancz, 2001, 415pp, £9.99 ISBN 1-85798-549-4

Valery Leith – *The Riddled Night*

Gollancz, 2001, 517pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-324-6

The Second Book of Everien, *The Riddled Night*, by fantasy writer Leith (a pseudonym of sf writer Tricia Sullivan) is released in mass market edition to coincide with the publication of *The Way of the Rose* as a trade paperback original. A complicated plot and cast, switching between a number of viewpoints, and absence of any 'what has gone before' exposition, probably makes it advisable, as Kathy Taylor pointed out (in a review in V217), to start this series at the beginning with *Company of Glass*. The Pharician warlord Tash, struggling to maintain a precarious position as self-styled ruler of Everian against rebel opposition from the clans, now finds his new kingdom thrown into chaos by a timeserpent – whose wake, as it tunnels through earth and time, releases monsters from the depth of the past and disconcerting breakdowns in the fabric of time.

Ken Macleod – *Cosmonaut Keep*

Orbit, 2001, 385pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-84149-067-9

Ken Macleod – *Dark Light*

Orbit, 2001, 292pp, £16.99 ISBN 1-84149-069-5

Books 1 and 2 of Macleod's new Engines of Light trilogy. *Cosmonaut Keep* (first reviewed by Andrew Seaman in V218) follows a typical Macleod split-timeline plot line. In one, set in a Soviet-dominated late-twenty-first century Europe whose cosmonauts, out in the asteroid belt, report a First Contact with aliens, Scottish hacker Matt Cairns finds himself in possession of

strand, planet-bound human colonists on Mingulay co-exist with the reptilian saurs, watching the arrivals and departures of starships piloted by the squid-like 'kraken'. Gregor Cairns is drawn into the colony's Great Work, the project to rediscover the lost secret of navigation that will take a human ship to the stars. In *Dark Light*, it is revealed, intelligence is comparatively rare – on planetary surfaces. But elsewhere it is ubiquitous, in the Oort clouds around star systems, and in the magma beneath planetary crusts. And there are profound disagreements amongst these powerful alien intelligences about what to do if surface races like humans achieve the goal of star travel.

Fletcher Pratt – *The Well of the Unicorn*

Gollancz, Fantasy Masterworks 23, 2001, 338pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-575-07267-9

First published in 1948 under the pseudonym 'George U. Fletcher', and in 1967 under his own name, *The Well of the Unicorn* is a heroic fantasy set in a world borrowed, according to *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, from Dunsany's 1911 play *King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior*. Dispossessed from the family farm, young Airar Alvarson is charged by an enchanter to deliver a secret message to a band of conspirators and becomes embroiled in a plot against the ruling military caste, and as he moves from adolescence to adulthood he rises to the position of rebel leader.

Jan Siegel – *The Dragon Charmer*

Voyager, 2001, 346pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-00-651281-X

The sequel to Siegel's (a pseudonym of writer Amanda Hemingway) YA fantasy *Prospero's Children*, *The Dragon Charmer* (first reviewed by Steve Jeffery in *Vector* 215) is set a number of years later. Fern is now in her twenties, living in London and trying to forget the events that happened when she crossed through the Gate opened by the witch, Alimond, into the Last Days of Atlantis. But the past won't leave her behind, and the power of her magical Gift, unused and repressed, calls to others who have their own designs on its power. There are some wonderfully realised images here, particularly the World Tree beneath which Fern becomes trapped by the witch-sisters Morgus and Sysselore, and the sequel develops further the characters of Fern and her brother Will (who took a background role through much of the first volume). I had supposed, in earlier reviews of the two books, that Siegel was a new writer, and praised such an "assured debut". In fact, as Hemingway, her first (sf) novel, *Pzyche*, was published in 1982.

Brian Stableford – *The Fountains of Youth*

TOR Books, 2001, 352pp, $15.95 ISBN 0-312-87534-7

The third of Stableford's excellent 'Emortality' sequence (still, shamefully, without a British publisher), *Fountains* (first reviewed by Steve Jeffery in *Vector* 213) is an expansion of the 1995 novella 'Mortimer Gray's History of Death' and quite possibly the best sf novel Stableford has yet written. *Fountains of Youth* is partly a five centuries long autobiography of Mortimer Gray, one of the first of the true 'emortals', with an open-ended lifespan (barring accident or violence) before him, partly a centuries long unrequited love story, and partly a bravura display of scholarship and speculation (in the guise of a precis of Gray's obsessive multi-volume lifework of everything known, imagined or theorised about humanity's now-defeated enemy, Death).

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Reviewers Key: AAA – Andrew A. Adams, AMB – Andrew M Butler, ASa – Andy Sawyer, ASe – Andrew Seaman, CB – Cherith Baldry, CH – Chris Hill, DL – David Langford, FG – Fiona Grove, GA – Graham Andrews, JAM – Jan A. Malique, JN – John Newsinger, JW – Jon Wallace, KT – Kathy Taylor, KVB – K.V. Bailey, LB – Lynne Bispham, LJH – L.J. Hurst, MG – Mark Greener, NMB – N.M. Browne, OLB – Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc, P – Particle, PH – Penny Hill, RWH – Robert W. Hayler, SC – Stuart Carter, SJ – Steve Jeffery, STM – Scott T. Merrifield, and TB – Tanya Brown.