

The Critical Journal of the BSFA

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THE CRITICAL JOURNAL OF THE BSFA

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Composite photo of Saturn and Phoebe. Images courtesy: ESA/NASA/JPL/Space Science Institute

EDITORIAL TEAM

• Production and General Editing: Tony Cullen – 16

Weaver's Way, Camden, London NW1 0XE
Email: gummitch@gmail.com

• Features, Editorial and Letters: Andrew M. Butler – c/o Department of Media and Arts, Canterbury Christ Church University College, North Holmes Road, Canterbury CT1 1QU Email: ambutler@enterprise.net

• Book Reviews: Paul N. Billinger – 1 Long Row Close, Everdon, Daventry NN11 3BE Email: paul@everdon.enterprise-plc.com

• Associate Editor: Tanya Brown – Flat 8, Century House, Armoury Road, London SE8 4LH Email: amaranth@amaranth.aviators.net

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BSFA OFFICIALS

- **CHAIR(S): Elizabeth and Paul N. Billinger** – 1 Long Row Close, Everdon, Daventry NN11 3BE
Email: billinger@enterprise.net
- **MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY: Estelle Roberts** – 97 Sharp Street, Newland Avenue, Hull, HU5 2AE
Email: Estelle@lythande.freeserve.co.uk
- **TREASURER: Martin Potts** – 61 Ivy Croft Road, Warton, Nr Tamworth B79 0JJ Email: mtpotts@zoom.co.uk
- **PUBLICATIONS MANAGER: Kathy Taylor** –
Email: kathy.taylor@blueyonder.co.uk
- **ORBITERS: Carol Ann Kerry-Green** – 278 Victoria Avenue, Hull, HU5 3DZ
Email: metaphor@metaphor.karoo.co.uk
- **AWARDS: Claire Brailey** –
Email: awards@amaranth.aviators.net
- **PUBLICITY/PROMOTIONS:**
Email: billinger@enterprise.net
- **LONDON MEETING COORDINATOR: Farah Mendlesohn** – 22 Addington Road, Reading, RG1 5PT
- **WEBMISTRESS: Tanya Brown** – Flat 8, Century House, Armoury Road, London, SE8 4LH
Email: bsfaweb@amaranth.aviators.net

BSFA MEMBERSHIP

UK Residents: £21 or £14 (unwaged) per year. Please enquire, or see the BSFA web page for overseas rates.

RENEWALS AND NEW MEMBERS – Estelle Roberts – 97

Sharp Street, Newland Avenue, Hull, HU5 2AE

Email: Estelle@lythande.freeserve.co.uk

USA Enquiries – Cy Chauvin, 14248 Willow Street, Detroit, MI 48213 USA

PRINTED BY

PDC COPYPRINT (Guildford), Middle Unit, 77-83 Walnut Tree Close, Guildford, Surrey GU1 4UH

OTHER BSFA PUBLICATIONS

Focus: Simon Morden – 13 Egremont Drive, Sherriff Hill, Gateshead, NE9 5SE Email focus.editor@cableinet.co.uk

MATRIX

Commissioning Editor: Tom Hunter –

Email: matrix_editors@yahoo.co.uk

News & Features Editor: Claire Weaver –

Email: matrix_editors@yahoo.co.uk

Production Editor: Martin McGrath – 91 Bentley Drive,

Harlow, Essex CM17 9QT

Email: martinmcgrath@ntlworld.com

BSFA WEB

BSFA Web page:

<http://www.bsfa.co.uk>

Editorial

The View from the Blue Moon

Looking at my Lemony Snicket calendar – yes, OK, I know – I noticed that last Saturday was a blue moon. Remembering the phrase, "Once in a blue moon", I wondered precisely what a blue moon is. Apparently, it's a second full moon within the same month. As the lunar cycle is round about twenty-eight days, and months are twenty-eight to thirty-one days, these can clearly happen, but not often – it must be a full moon fairly close to the start of a month, followed by one pretty close to the end.

So then, you learn something new every day.

But how rare is that then? Pretty rare I would have thought, but then my brother pointed out that there are roughly thirteen lunar cycles in a year, and only twelve months. One of those months has to have a second full moon.

Once in a blue moon is once a year.

Not so rare then – no more so than a birthday.

And come to think of it, the moon was distinctly red, a harvest moon. All in all, not a useful phrase.

Once in a transit of Venus, on the other hand, is twice every 120-odd years, in that one happens, eight years pass, then it happens again, then you have to wait another 120 years. This is pretty rare – a twice (once?) in a lifetime deal. The transit occurs when Venus passes across the disc of the Sun, an eclipse which happens so rarely because of the differing incline of orbits of the Earth and Venus. It's kind of surprising that it either misses entirely or moves neatly across the sun, but presumably transits take different times, and my head hurts if I get too scientific.

So, we had one of these transits recently, and whereas with the total eclipse a few years back I actually headed away from totality, this time I would be in the zone. Adam Hart-Davis, that James Burke for the twenty-first century, gave clear instructions: don't look at it directly unless you have the special glasses, but instead use a pinhole in a piece of card, or a pair of binoculars or a telescope to shine through. Easy enough, I thought. I can do that. I have cardboard. I have pins. I have bins. It looks easy enough.

What should have struck me was that we were shown footage of Hart-Davis projecting a transit very clearly onto a piece of card several days before the event. Given we've established the

previous transit could not have happened in his lifetime, and assuming that he didn't have access to a time machine – although I presume that if anyone could build a time machine from household object, Hart-Davis could – then the footage was rigged. Faked. A camera trick. CGI. They had a very small Andy Serkis and painted over him. Or something. Reality wasn't so easy.

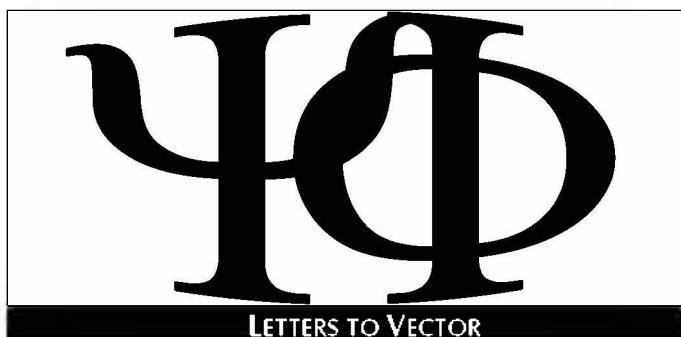
The pinhole was a washout – too much light pollution from the sun to get a clear disc. The binoculars – well, which way up should they be? And again light pollution. Eventually I managed to get them lined up correctly, projecting a somewhat oblate circle onto the piece of paper (when that wasn't blowing away) which clearly had a spot on it in the place I expected Venus to be. Good enough for me. Or maybe it was an ant. I went back inside to try and watch the tv coverage, but reception is lousy at the best of times. Ah well, in eight years.

Except that I read that it'll happen at night so we won't see it. That's odd, I thought, Venus is more visible at night. You'd have thought the transit would be clearer.

The whole point of this exercise, scientifically speaking, is that by timing the transit from several positions on the Earth you can triangulate the distance from the Earth to the Sun. Or possibly the Earth to Venus. All you need to do is make sure that your watches are synchronised and accurate, that you know where you are, and that everyone agrees that Venus is touching the edge of the Sun at the same time. Presumably you also have to compare results. When they did this in the 1770s they discovered Australia, which suggests they were looking in the wrong direction (and actually it was the east coast they discovered, the Dutch having found and been satisfied with the west coast back in 1606. And it must have been a relief for the Aboriginals to be discovered after all those years).

As far as I know Adam Hart-Davis didn't discover Australia this time, but no one seemed to quite agree on when the start and stop times of the transit were. They tried to assure us that the Sun was still the same distance away, which is just as well, because it looks hot and you wouldn't want it to fall into your back garden whilst you were playing with binoculars and a sheet of paper. It's a health and safety nightmare.

Andrew M Butler Canterbury, Summer 2004



A few issues back, in V233, Brian Aldiss helped kick off the New Wave commemoration with a short article containing the line "Norwegians and Americans came over to join in the fun". L.J. Hurst queried this detail in a letter printed in V235, asking, "is Brian Aldiss mis-remembering the nationality of Jannick Storm?". We went to Brian Aldiss for a response, which we received just after V236 went to press:

From Brian W. Aldiss, via email

Les Hurst is mistaken. The Norwegians I was referring to, who came

over to join in the New Wave excitement, were Jon Bing and Tor Age Bringsvaerd. They went back to Oslo and put on a very successful play, *Little Lost Rocket Ship* (I translate) in the Norwegian equivalent of the Old Vic. Tor Age eventually went to live in Spain. Jon still lives in Oslo and is a distinguished lawyer.

Of course I did not get the nationality of Jannick Storm confused. He's the guy to whom *Billion Year Spree* is dedicated. I used to stay with Jannick in Copenhagen and we're still in touch. Les Hurst doesn't imagine Copenhagen is in Norway, does he, by any chance?!

Meanwhile, in V235, David Langford had the sheer effrontery to note our misprint of www.wildsidepress.com in V235, and provided a URL for a Langford bibliography. The saga continues...

From David Langford, via email

Regarding my nitpicking of URL typos, the BSFA has the last laugh! Although my mention of a bibliography on my site at www.ansible.demon.co.uk was reproduced with flawless accuracy, these pages ceased to exist in late July. Everything is now at [ansible.co.uk](http://www.ansible.co.uk) ...

They don't call it "the Curse of Vector" for nothing. Actually, they don't call it "the Curse of Vector"... Perhaps they should.

Of course the edge of any potential smugness is taken off by the fact that we once more misspelt www.wildsidepress.com in a review in V236. We'll get it right just as they change their URL. Okay, gang: write out, one hundred times, www.wildsidepress.com. Yes, Billinger, I know you want to go out and play, but we're all going to stay here until we get it right....

Letters to Vector should be sent to Andrew M. Butler, Dept of Media, Canterbury Christ Church University College, Canterbury, CT1 1QU or emailed to ambutler@enterprise.net and marked 'For publication'. We reserve the right to edit or shorten letters.

SOME AUTHORS SEEM TO HIT THE GROUND RUNNING: IN 2004 KAREN TRAVISS WILL HAVE PUBLISHED THREE NOVELS. VECTOR SPOKE TO HER ABOUT CLARION, COMPLEX CHARACTERS AND COMMERCE

Bending the World

an Interview with Karen Traviss by Andrew M. Butler

Andrew M. Butler: What draws you to writing sf, fantasy and horror?

Karen Traviss: Well, I don't do horror *per se* and I rarely do fantasy. But I can tell you exactly what started me on sf as a kid: it was a single event. I was about five and I saw the title sequence of *A For Andromeda* on TV, which was steam-operated in those days, of course. I asked my mother what Andromeda was and she said it was some stars that were so far away that the light took years to reach us. Now, however simply expressed, that's one hell of an answer for a small child to consider. I was completely mesmerized by the idea and I got to wondering what else was out there. In fact, that epiphany is actually in the acknowledgements for *City of Pearl*. My mum read the page and said, "I don't bloody well remember saying that". Well, maybe you had to be there. Makes you wonder how many lives we change with a single comment and don't actually realise that we've done so.

I read a lot of Golden Age sf as a kid, and I wrote for my own amusement. As an adult, what appeals to me about writing sf – because I've read very little of it in recent years – is that it offers such a huge canvas to work upon. Just look at the range of sub-genres within it, the age range it appeals to, the stylistic variety. For me, it's specifically the capacity it gives you to ask hard questions and bend worlds to answer them – or not answer them, as the case may be.

I want to explore what people do when they have to live with the choices technology and science gives them, and how they handle relations with creatures that aren't the same as them. One of the themes that most occupies me is the dividing line between the "us" that we treat with respect and can empathise with, and "them" – the external bin into which we dump those who we can crap on and get away with it. That can be a gender line, a race line, a species line, a class line, whatever. Wherever it's drawn – consciously or not – it's the tipping point at which even apparently nice, decent people say somewhere in their mind, "It's okay to do this because they're not like us".

The line I look at most is the one between humans and other animals, because I think it's the most neglected one, and possibly the most relevant for an sf writer. If we can't treat non-human animals with some degree of respect, how are we going to deal with aliens? Readers and critics have said that *City of Pearl* made them feel uncomfortable in places because it made them think about a universal order that they took for granted: I had one e-mail from a reader in the USA saying it had changed the way he looked at animals, and that was very rewarding. I don't tell people what they should think. I just invite them to look in the places they don't normally go, and what they see is up to them. It's just reportage, really.

I get a lot of ribbing about fantasy, because the little bit of the

F-word that I actually have done has all been in *Realms of Fantasy*, and that's a bit too public for me to deny it, and I have a short in the next Year's Best Fantasy and Horror. So okay, I do a bit of fantasy now and then. I was old and I needed the money. But no dragons or elves, okay? It's not that I don't respect fantasy, especially high fantasy. It sells three times the volume that sf does. It's just that I'm not writing it. Yet. Note that I never use the word never. If the market moved that way for me, I'd be in there with mages and talking swords and the whole shebang. But still no bloody dragons. Terry Pratchett is the only person who should be allowed to write about dragons.

AMB: I suppose what I'm thinking of as horror and fantasy, the stuff from *Realms of Fantasy* and *On-Spec*, has a sense of quirkiness rather than gross-out or more bloody dragons. Are you tempted to write comedy?

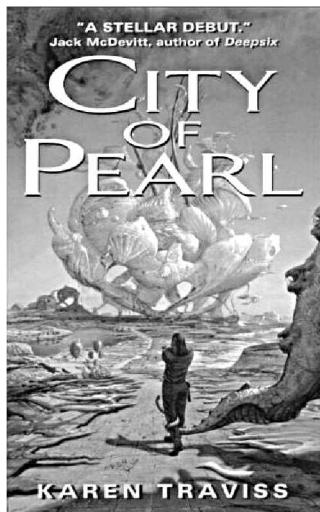
KT: Yes, I do write humour, and I bury a bit of grim reality in the humour and a few laughs in the grim stuff. I don't think you can separate them; if you consider what mechanism laughter is, they're one in the same. Having spent a lot of my life around the armed forces and the emergency services, I see this edge between horror and hysterical humour all the time. Even in truly awful combat situations, people end up finding some things very funny. And then there's the police and firefighter jokes syndrome. Outsiders are appalled by the black humour, but they need it, believe me – it's a safety valve. Good taste prevents me giving good examples, because when you remove the joke from its context – mitigating personal trauma – it can look pretty sick.

AMB: Which writers have influenced you?

KT: It's hard to say, because the writers who people compare me to aren't those I've read.

But I can tell you which writers or books I would save from a burning building. The book I want to be buried with is *Bill The Galactic Hero* by Harry Harrison. I read it first when I was thirteen. I've re-read it every year since (and bought many copies) and it just gets better each time. I'm still finding stuff in it that I didn't spot or understand before. I was on a panel with Harry at TorCon last year and I was almost beside myself with excitement. I did the fannish thing and got him to re-sign my first edition of *BTGH* (which he had signed for its original owner long ago) and he was utterly charming about it. You think I'm OTT about the book? "The robomule had packing glanders." If that isn't the best line ever laid down on paper, I don't know what is. Clever, clever, funny, sad stuff. It's not that its style influenced me as a writer, although it did encourage me to write sf; but it showed me that you need the contrast between humour and tragedy – the chiaroscuro, as Sean Stewart calls it – to create a truly vivid story.

Damn, I even use phrases like "keep your wug shut," and "two s's for officers only".



AMB: How did you get into journalism? Are you a full-time fiction writer now?

KT: I did other things first, including being an advertising copywriter, and then I went back to college and did the one year NCTJ journalism diploma, which at the time pretty well guaranteed you a job from a sponsoring newspaper. I've always been prepared to make career changes and go back and learn new skills. I wanted to be a journalist from age six, but I got diverted for a year or so before I did it.

By the time your interview is published, I will be a full-time fiction writer. So, fast-forwarding a few weeks: yes, I'm a full-time fiction writer. I cut the day job to part-time and it was still too much to enable me to meet my book commitments and do impulsive things like sleep. My employer was unwilling to let me reduce my hours further, and I'd had enough of living in Dilbert World, so I jacked it in. That was on the business plan too – pay off the mortgage and quit the day job. So far, I'm on target.

AMB: Has your journalism career helped your fiction writing?

KT: Every time I see colleagues suffering over the nuts-and-bolts side of writing, I realise how great it is to be a hack. That makes me sound like Father Dougal, but it's true – "Sure, Ted, and it's great to be a hack, so it is". Journalism gives you everything you need to survive: impenetrably thick skin, inexhaustible persistence, deadline discipline, clean copy habits, contact-making skills and more background material than you could ever dream of. Rejection bounces off hacks – you'd never survive day one in a newsroom if you felt your story was sacred. Your copy or footage is torn apart, mixed with other people's stuff, and spat out the other end, and then it's gone and you get on with the next job if you're not already three jobs down the line. You meet the deadlines or you don't work: you write fast or you get eaten by an editor. And you know it's just business, nothing personal. So if you don't have to work at surviving the emotionally painful procedural bits of writing, then you can devote all your energy to the story.

Editors know by now that I do what it says on the tin. They don't have to worry about hurting my feelings and they can move deadlines around without my having the vapours. And the copyeditor has an easier time too. Hacks are low-maintenance writers by and large. We're all loveable and fully house-trained. Honest.

And working as a defence correspondent was a fiction gold mine, as was covering criminal courts for years. I also derived a staggering amount of material from my various PR incarnations. Not one scrap of my working life will go on the cutting-room floor. It's a bottomless coffee pot of ideas and factoids. And metaphors, as you can see.

AMB: You went to Clarion; what do you think such a writing workshop has given you?

KT: An instant career. I was at Clarion East in the summer of 2000 and by summer 2002 I'd sold a novel trilogy and I had stories in Asimov's: I've got three paperback titles out in 2004, my first year in print as a novelist, and a leather-bound first edition from Easton Press. Would I have done that without Clarion? Not a chance, especially living in the UK. I'm not pretending Clarion is an automatic passport, but it lays the kit out on the table for you and if you're prepared to pick it up and use it, it can work spectacularly well.

Clarion gave me two specific things: business contacts and advanced craft. I like to use the carpentry analogy. When I started writing fiction seriously in late 1998, I could hammer in nails and saw wood to length. Then the first workshop I attended – Liz Holliday's One Step Beyond – taught me to make proper mitred corners, do dovetails and saw straight lines with hand tools. Then Clarion taught me to use power tools. The sense of empowerment that it gave me was unbelievable. I hate that word, but it's the only one that describes it. It was that Garfield moment: "Get off, King Kong".

One of the good things about Clarion is that it shoves writing

down your throat for six weeks, and the duration is probably the most critical part of it. You're locked up with writing and you can't run away from it. You'll know at the end of that time if you're cut out to write professionally or not. It saves you dabbling around for years and finding that you're not up for the criticism or the deadlines or the slog. I'm sure other people have had very different experiences and drawn different benefits from it, but in the end all Clarion can do is say, "Here's writing for a living in one megadose. Like it?" All I know is that I planned on going, knew what I wanted to get out of it and was delighted when I found it gave me what I expected and more. I can't understand why the Clarion technique – and by that I mean six intensive weeks – isn't being used widely in other genres. It's a damn shame Clarion East has been under threat, too.

AMB: In case some of our readers are unfamiliar with it, can you describe the Clarion method?

KT: The Clarion method is basically a literary cage-fight. A group of fifteen to twenty writers are locked up for six weeks with a sequence of tutors. You write short fiction until you drop and it's critted in the group: mornings for crits, rest of the day for writing. You have six tutors over a six-week period who are all established pros. You write and write and write and then your class shreds the stories as they roll in, and in my year we did over a hundred (I think). It's the pattern that's used at Milford too, except six weeks of critting and writing is a wholly different experience to a nice civilised week of crits at Milford. I've never known people resort to cannibalism at Milford, however small the portions at breakfast, but it's a close-run thing at some Clarions, apparently. It's intense, good and bad. You make good buddies. Some people make good un-buddies, too. The food isn't as bad as they tell you, either, but the heat and mosquitoes are.

I'd do it again in an instant if they'd run a refresher for pros. It was a blast. It changed my life.

AMB: The stories I have read, and the novel, have been in American markets. Why do you think you've sold overseas before you have in the UK? Have you had to sacrifice anything for a non-British market?

KT: This is going to sound glib, but I went straight to the US market from Clarion. I had a specific plan. I'm not ignoring the UK; it's just that I saw it as predominantly an American market with much bigger readership so that's where I aimed. I never thought of the UK market as being open to me.

Writing for me is business, not art. I love it, but it's still my living and I've got to be pragmatic. I had a five-year business plan when I started writing seriously in 1998 and that was part of it – target the US. Clarion was a fast-track to that market. I made all my contacts there, and that got me my first agent (who sold the *City of Pearl* series) and my intro to a certain short fiction magazine whose editor has been very kind to me. I'm especially indebted to tutors Greg Frost and Sean Stewart.

And yes, you do need a business plan. I'm on my second five-year plan now.

I have never had to change anything to make it palatable for the US market, except spelling of course, nor have I been asked to. All my material and style is unashamedly English and the language I use is often regional English, military and police slang and Portsmouth dialect – and I still haven't been asked to water anything down, not even in the *Star Wars* book I've just completed. There's this myth that Americans suffer from cultural xenophobia, but I've never experienced it either from readers or editors. I find the US market open-minded and welcoming. I think there's no greater proof of that than the fact that Lucasfilm and Del Rey gave me free rein when I wrote *Republic Commando*. I had to work within the canon, and that's both challenging and fun, but I wrote the story I wanted to write, and it's got all the facets that *City of Pearl* and its sequels have.

AMB: I have to be careful what I say, as I've this pile of *Roswell High* novelisations at my elbow which I've just bought, but a large part of me feels that if you've got the ability to write and

sell a story, then set it in your own universe. There's an impressive list of names of people who have written *Star Wars* books, of course, but I wonder if you can say a little more about what you got out of writing a *Star Wars* book?

KT: Oh, ye of little faith. This is going to sound lairy, but it's perfectly possible to do both, and it's a wholly different experience. Any writer who says there's no artistic challenge or merit in writing in someone else's universe – and I've had a few sneers – hasn't actually done it, or – let me be *really* callous – hasn't been asked to do it. It takes a whole new level of discipline to fit the canon and remain true to the flavour of the world you've been invited into while still retaining your own style and approach – which is what they sign you up for in the first place. It's not ghost writing; it's your book. There was a time when I thought it wasn't something I'd want to do, but it turned out that it was right up my street – or one of my streets, anyway. I have many.

I was lucky: the clone commando bit of the SW universe was relatively virgin territory, so *Republic Commando* gave me huge scope and what I wrote became canon in itself. It must be really tough to write existing characters like Luke and Leia and keep them fresh because you have to face thirty years of fan expectation of what they're like, but I've not ventured there yet. That's advanced stuff.

In *Republic Commando*, the plot was mine and the characters were mine, but fitting in with the canon forced me to come up with some ideas and work-rounds that turned out better than if I'd had total free rein. Necessity really is the mother of invention. And it forces you to think about your craft a lot more. There are no oranges in *Star Wars*, because it's a totally constructed universe; so all those analogies about surfaces like orange peel are out. Think about it – that's a lot of words you can't use. By the time you've been denied all your favourite clichés, you're forced to redefine your approach. As with my own universes, I built it on the characters and I got very involved with them. And remember that this was an adult book that also had to be suitable for some very young readers. I had to do that without compromising the darker, adult themes of the story, and that's not easy. I also proved to myself that I could write realistic soldiers' dialogue without Anglo-Saxon expletives, which was a big step forward for me.

Here's my list of reasons for doing tie-ins, in some sort of order. The money; the exposure to a wholly new audience, which is great for sales of your other titles; contact with very committed fans, who have been a sheer delight; a rest from your own universes; the thrill of testing your skills; the flattery of being asked; the opportunity to have a really fresh look at your own writing; and working with an industry worth zillions. I loved every second of it. Lucasfilm/LucasArts were fun to work with. I had this fantastic bloke on call at LucasArts to check my continuity and canon, because I knew zip about *Star Wars* before I got the contract, and he answered my every daft question. He had the patience of a saint and he was available seven days a week. In this case, I was also tying in to a game, and that was brilliant – I can't discuss it until the book's out, but there's some cool crossover that made me very happy. Sad thing that I am...

Critical acclaim is all very well. But I would rather be read by a hundred thousand people who'll enjoy the book as a war story and then perhaps think about some of the more difficult dilemmas it examines (yes, the beyond-the-movies SW world does have a great deal of subtlety and uncomfortable areas) than write something hailed as a masterpiece of arcane literature that's bought by four professors of big words. I'm a jobbing writer, as I have been all my working life: it's how I eat. I've done my

damnedest to make sure that the SW reader gets the same effort and entertainment from me as the ethics professor who just made *City of Pearl* a course book for his class.

Fiction is the entertainment industry, and you owe it to readers to give of your best, regardless of the universe, because they can take their money elsewhere. They're not daft. They can see when you're giving less than 100%.

AMB: Would you write a script for *Star Wars* or any other franchise?

KT: Yes, I'd look at any work I'm offered, and if I can fit it in and it's not one of those rare things that I find offensive (yes, I do have some no-go areas!) then I'm up for it. My agent is ready and waiting...

AMB: Has there been any interest in optioning your fiction for the big or small screen?

KT: It's early days to even think about film options (*City of Pearl* has been out since March) but my agent is now Russ Galen, and he's good on film deals.

AMB: When I heard you speak at TorCon, and indeed within a couple of minutes of meeting you at the International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts in Florida, you announced yourself as being right-wing. Why do you feel the need to do this?

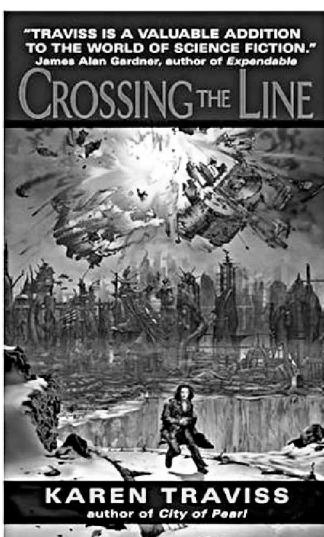
KT: I've been known to introduce myself as the token right-winger when the panel topic is political. It gets a few laughs. But yes, it's true. Everyone else I know in the sf community is an up-front liberal with a small L and it gets lonely out there for ranting old Meldrews like me. The right-wing thing baffles Americans, because their definition of the Right is George Bush. I had people come up to me at TorCon after a panel and say, "You don't sound right-wing." Well, against that sort of yardstick...

Yes, I've been mistaken for a Marxist and an anarchist on several occasions and I can see that some of my economic views are those of the hard Left. I think the divide now is not between right and left but between liberals and

non-liberals. I've spent my entire working life – both in newsrooms and in local government – being scrupulously apolitical, so it does surprise people when they find out what my private views are, because everyone seems to think I agree with them regardless of their beliefs. It's a way of listening that you learn as a journalist; you "go grey", as our chums in the intelligence community say, and blend in. Alas, I can't find a single major political party now that I could line up with (if I ever did) so I vote Green. No journalist can ever take politicians seriously anyway. Working with them really does make you party-apolitical whether you want to be or not. That's not to say I don't like them. I do, and some of them are good friends.

AMB: I suppose there's an assumption in many readers, and especially critics, that the author identifies with or shares the outlook of their main character. I'm sure we can think of writers where this is true and who even manipulate the narrative to prove them right or to discredit those who disagree. So... politicians don't get a smooth ride in *City of Pearl*, there's a suspicion of big business, the scientists won't listen to common sense... How far do you identify with Shan's opinions and actions? She's not the only viewpoint character, of course. How far does playing fair as an author mean you end up ventriloquising ideas you don't support?

KT: No, none of the characters are my viewpoint, and it would be poor fiction (and boring for me to write it) if they were. You have to explore how real people think, and my characters aren't black and white – you can't get much more murkily grey than having two protagonists who are a bent copper and a war criminal. The



fact that readers really like Shan and Aras is quite interesting given what they've done in their pasts. Eddie the journalist is the everyman character because I needed that device in the story, but he does wrestle with his conscience about the nature of truth and objectivity, which in retrospect is almost an internal story about the fiction process in itself. Yes, I do feel strongly that an author should ventriloquise ideas they don't support: that's how you build real characters. It's also how you go to places that are scary and demand a lot of you as a writer. You should never be comfortable with the ideas you examine; you should be able to push yourself into a persona that thinks things you don't, or even things you find repellent, and make them real for the reader. Then they can decide what and who they believe.

I confess that I'm amazed by the number of times I've heard people say, for example, that a certain writer advocates genocide because he had a character who committed it. Look, it's just fiction. Maybe he does, and maybe he doesn't, but in the end he was just telling a story, not advocating a lifestyle. Fiction would be pretty anodyne if we couldn't write from radically diverse perspectives, and if you do that then you're obliged to make a proper job of it: no half measures. You have to show why that world view makes perfect sense for that character. *Babylon 5* did it very well: look at Londo and G'kar. What a double act. I still don't know who was right.

I'm used to writing both sides of an argument without comment and leaving it up to the reader; this is what I mean by reportage, and I think that's really the bedrock of my writing. Now, I think Lindsay Neville is an unsympathetic character, personally, but many readers just love her, because she says what many people think and screws up in believable ways – for her, anyway. Whether they'll still love her in *Crossing The Line* I don't know.

Propaganda has no place in fiction. Readers spot it a mile off, and as an ex-spin doctor, I can say that it's also pretty sloppy to do it so that readers can see the strings. Like I said, all I do is shine a torch into a dark cupboard and say, "Take a look at that. What d'you think?" I've also tried to reflect reality without moralising. Some companies do very bad things. Some scientists fake data and plagiarise their colleagues. Some bad coppers do bad things to even worse people. There are no saints and no demons in real life, just messy mixes of the two.

Speaking of the ventriloquising effect, some people have read "An Open Prison" as my personal statement that I think victim involvement in sentencing is wrong. Boy, are they way off beam. It's just a story about a character who realises revenge can't make her feel better, but can't forgive either. I'm just the reporter. And I don't agree with my protag at all, but it's her story, not mine.

AMB: *City of Pearl* is very complex, with at least three alien races, a future Earth society – in fact, societies – and an Earth colony society. How much more work is the world-building for a novel than a short story? Even something short like your alternative chocolate story feels like it must have a lot of development behind it.

KT: Umm... "Chocolate Kings" was written for a bet at Clarion, when a chum challenged me to get the thorny issue of real chocolate into a story. No development, I'm afraid. It just came straight out in a few hours, and that's the way I write. I hate to repeat myself, but it's a journo habit. You never have the luxury of time.

I think there's a difference in technique between world-building and research. When I see the amount of world-building people do for their novels, I have to admit that I seem to do very little. But – and here's that journalist in me again – I have a brain like flypaper. I suck in apparently useless facts without noticing and recycle them involuntarily all the time. So I feel as if I do no

world-building at all, but what happens is that I get an idea – usually when something makes me flaming mad – and then this mass of apparently randomly collected data floods up to flesh it out. I didn't know I was doing this at first. Then I realised that even the Latin and Greek names I'd picked – at random, I thought – for the warships in *City of Pearl* had thematic resonance with the story. I was checking to make sure the names didn't have unfortunate connotations (one of those things you learn the hard way in public relations) and found the myths they related to were there in the plot. All I can assume is that those myths came up in my Latin and Greek classes long ago and I absorbed them and forgot them. I used to be a terminal planner when it came to fiction but once I knew my subconscious could provide that material, I let it have a free rein. One day, the fact that a mouse contains thirty calories is going to be pivotal in a story. I can feel it coming.

I think a lot of the complexity and feeling of immersion that looks like conventional world-building in my fiction is in fact the characters. My fiction is wholly character-driven. I spend a lot of time on them, far more than I do on the plot, which sorts itself out in the same way that the world-building does. I know where the story starts and ends, I write the opening scene and the end scene, and then I go back and put in a few plot pivot pegs and then fill in the gaps. The characters tell me where to head.

Research is another thing entirely. I'm not at the Benford end of hard sf, but I do my research, and that's another hack habit. Okay, I'm probably borderline Asperger's to start with, but chasing facts is the thrill of the chase for a journalist. While it's probably overkill, I have this horror of having someone come up to me at a con and tell me that fact X isn't so, and what am I going to do about it? So when I do nuclear weapons, I ask boffins at Los Alamos to check the copy. When I do orbital re-entry, I ask someone who's worked on the space shuttle. As my first news editor told me – when in doubt, leave it out, or check twice with people who really know the subject.

I only have one way of working and that's to churn. A short is a day's work and a novel takes me between eight and twelve weeks. I don't know any other way to do it: either a story flies straight away or it doesn't, in which case I drop it and move on. I do four thousand or five thousand words a day but I can do ten thousand if everything is in place and I don't stop to check stuff and re-plot.

And I always have a notebook with me, 24/7. I keep one by the bed because I have insights, plot solutions and off-the-wall ideas just before I fall asleep. And I wake up several times a night with ideas and lines too. I also collect speech patterns. I paused for a few moments by a construction site the other day just to pick up the banter between the workmen, which was delightful stuff. Dialogue matters to me. I hear my characters: I don't see them. I see the environment around them and the action they're involved in, but not what they look like.

AMB: There are several points when a human is punished by another race for offending their ethics – obviously one of the scientists in *City of Pearl*, there's also someone handed over in one of the short stories who ends up doing some kind of community service as I recall. For that matter there's the body suit electronic tagging in "An Open Prison". Would you say the golden rule, of treating others as you would be treated, is something you've ended up exploring, without offering simplistic answers?

KT: Yes, and it's about realising the consequences of what you're doing. We're all too often unconnected to the consequences of what we do and the way we live, from the dangerous insularity of driving in a cocoon of a car to where our waste goes.



It's also about exploring the really intense emotions that we have. Revenge: will it really make you feel better? Personally, I'd go for it with a pickaxe, but some of my characters do and find it doesn't help. Does intent and motive matter? That's a big theme in all the wess'har wars books, because the wess'har don't care what you think or say, only what you do. "I didn't mean to hurt you," cuts no ice with a wess'har, and that has its own dodgy logic loops. We live in a society where pleas in mitigation make a difference to how we feel about the perpetrator. No, I don't offer simplistic answers, because there aren't any. The best you can do is let the reader have a think about what the answer might be for them, and – more importantly – that it might be different for someone else.

AMB: It seems to get harder and harder to draw the line between human and non-human. How far would you extend rights – and how far should they be dependent on corresponding responsibilities? There's an anti-vivisection thread running through *City of Pearl* and a distaste for gene sequences as economic commodities which could be translated into a suspicion of, say, some of the GM crop corporations.

KT: The fictional philosopher Targassat in *City of Pearl* sums it up as 'those who can make the most choices must accept the most responsibilities'. I don't think rights for non-human animals can be dependent on responsibilities, because we've put other species in a position where we pretty well control what happens to them, either by direct action, as in food animals, or indirectly, by impacting the environment of wild species. This is like hanging a monkey for being a spy. (Sorry, Hartlepool, but you did do it, didn't you?) This idea is in a short of mine, "Suitable for the Orient", where the army officer Da Silva says you can either punish the native species as people, in which case you have to treat them like people in other areas, or you have to accept they're animals and they can't be guilty of breaking human laws and codes. "Death, Taxes and Mackerel", which was actually a humour piece, looks at this too: the dolphin argues that he's sentient and wins his case to be released, but then he has to work for a living and pay his taxes.

Personally, I think the idea of exchanging responsibilities for the right not to suffer is bogus sophistry. With animals, it's our responsibility not to harm them because we're supposed to be smart enough to find ways to avoid it.

AMB: There's been much talk of a boom in British sf at the moment, although arguably its moment has passed. Do you feel part of it?

KT: No, definitely not. I don't feel I fit in the UK sf scene at all, but I'm not sure why. Maybe it's because I'm a woman writing traditional hard sf (well, that's how the US classes me) and that's not something you see much in the bookstores here. (Not that I think there's such a thing as women's sf – I don't think gender makes a blind bit of difference and most readers don't give a stuff what you are.) I just looked along the bookstore shelves when I first did my market research and realised all the women writing in my preferred area were first published in the US, not the UK. You follow the money.

The best way I can describe it is that I feel like an ex-pat working in North America. Despite the in-yer-face English nature of my fiction, some readers don't realise I'm English anyway.

AMB: What are the remaining novels in the *City of Pearl* sequence? What's next on the five year plan after those?

KT: *Crossing The Line* is out on October 26 (same day as *Republic Commando: Hard Contact*) and I'm just finishing the third book in the trilogy, *The World Before*. Needless to say, I have quite a few more wess'har wars books on the drawing board, and some standalones, one of which is (gasp) a fantasy, but a Traviss sort of fantasy, which means it's a political parable and there ain't no dragons or unicorns in it, no sirree. I don't know yet if I'll be going straight into the next run of the wess'har wars or fitting in a standalone: that's up to HarperCollins, and of course the sales of the first trilogy. And there could well be more media tie-ins...

AMB: I'll look forward to them. Even the tie-ins... Thank you very much indeed.

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Karen Traviss's website is www.karentraviss.com and her books may be ordered via the Amazon link on the BSFA website — Eds.

AS PART OF THE CONTINUING EXAMINATION OF THE BRITISH NEW WAVE, HERE'S A PIECE ON ONE OF THE KEY SHORT STORIES OF THE PERIOD

Lines and Circles: A Look at Pamela Zoline's 'The Heat Death of the Universe'

by Andrew M. Butler

There is a moment in one of Spalding Gray's monologues¹ when he offers an image for understanding entropy and thermodynamics. Imagine a deck of cards – fifty-two cards plus talus, overjokers and deuces wild. A King. The pack is held in the air and they scatter, landing across the room. This took very little effort, just a flick of the wrist and the opening of the hand. But to return the pack to its pristine, regimented order would take a great deal of work, of tracking the cards down, gathering them together, turning them the right way up where necessary, and sorting them into the correct combination. This can be taken as a metaphor for the way the universe works, of the process of it running down, with more energy being required to maintain order and less to allow disorder to develop. Sooner or later there will be no more usable energy in the universe: we will reach the heat death of the universe.

Entropy is the measure of energy unavailable to do work within a system, work here being defined as the movement of mass through space. Because no mechanism is entirely efficient,

energy is lost through the process of work and less energy is available within the system. Through metaphor this becomes translated into the mechanism of the universe running down, and the emergence of disorder – once we might have said chaos – within the universe. Such a metaphor of entropy appears central to the British New Wave; indeed Colin Greenland even called his book on the subject *The Entropy Exhibition*. Greenland writes that the authors gathered together by Michael Moorcock for *New Worlds* "were occupied with a newer theme: entropy. They saw the degeneration of energy as a fit image for the disintegration of society and the individual consciousness"² Such degeneration can be seen throughout the work of writers such as Brian Aldiss, Michael Moorcock and J.G. Ballard during the 1960s, with varying responses such as mourning, decadent indifference and encouragement. Entropy cannot be fought, or defeated. At best it can be held at bay.

M. John Harrison, a writer associated with *New Worlds* in his early career, said in an interview that the metaphor of entropy:

"had been developed and delivered by maybe fifteen of us across ten or twelve years. To be frank, I'm not entirely sure we understood what entropy was in a scientific sense, anyway. Running down is only half of entropy. There's a whole lot more to it than the simple looking around and saying, 'Well, all these things are broken – we must be in an entropic situation'. I was kind of bored with it".³

But back in 1967, *New Worlds* published a short story which embraced the concept of entropy and ideas surrounding thermodynamics, in order to narrate a day in the life of its central character, an allegedly happy but actually very distressed housewife named Sarah Boyle, who is trying to maintain order and prepare a birthday party for one of her children. Pamela Zolime's 'The Heat Death of the Universe' appeared in *New Worlds* 173 (July 1967) and has been reprinted a number of times but, as Elizabeth Hewitt has noted "she has been ignored by the critics in recent years".⁴ One of the few women to be involved in the British New Wave – Greenland notes Carol Emshwiller, Eleanor Amason, Gwyneth Cravens and Joanna Russ as other contributors to *New Worlds*, along with occasional editor Hilary Bailey⁵ – Zolime's output in science fiction has been slim to date. Her collection, *Busy About the Tree of Life and Other Stories* (1987), pulls together five stories between 'Heat Death...' and "Instructions for Exiting this Building in Case of Fire" (1985, from the anthology *Despatches from the Frontiers of the Female Mind*), as well as the previously unpublished title story. In addition, she edited two issues of *Ronald Reagan: The Magazine of Poetry* (1968) with John Sladek and wrote a children's book, *Annika and the Wolves* (1985). She is also an artist (she did the cover for *Busy About the Tree of Life*, and some artwork for *New Worlds*) and playwright.

The generic status of her collected stories is disputed. In her review of the book, Gwyneth Jones notes, "The publisher's blurb places Zolime's collection firmly outside the genre, and perhaps rightly, even though each of the stories either reconsiders a classic sf theme or else is straightforwardly set in the future";⁶ although it does in fact allow 'Heat Death...' to be a classic science fiction story. But 'Heat Death...' has been dismissed by some science fiction readers "as feminist polemic, a bitter personal denunciation of the wife-and-mother trap."⁷ Putting to one side the notion that feminist polemic cannot be science fiction, there is also a sense that the story of 'Heat Death...' – a woman preparing for a party – cannot be science fiction. Science fiction is, after all, about man and his status in the universe. Mark Rose describes it as "An interesting piece of fiction, and one that clearly gains resonance and impact by having been published in a context of science-fiction expectations."⁸ 'Heat Death...' is science fiction when published in *New Worlds*, because it is expected that *New Worlds* would publish science fiction; it might be science fiction in *Busy About the Tree of Life* if you come to the volume expecting science fiction – but a less tuned-in reader has not been fully briefed by the publisher. The reader might be confused by what Colin Greenland labels "the language of the *Ladies' Home Journal*, perhaps",⁹ but such language in a Women's Press paperback should hardly be taken at face value.

In form the story fits in with the experimentation of the New Wave: the multiple viewpoints of Brian Aldiss's *Report on Probability A* (1968, written 1962), the condensed novels which led to J.G. Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970), the collage of Michael Moorcock's Jerry Cornelius books, John Sladek's short stories as forms, and Thomas Disch's flirtation with Oulipo in stories such as *334* (1972). The formal experimentation of the British New Wave is often held to be evidence of science fiction embracing of techniques more associated with the modernists of

the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first three of the twentieth, such as James Joyce, T.S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf. For Fred Pfeil – who admittedly has a problematic conception of the New Wave¹⁰ – it was the moment when the genre "briefly becomes modernist".¹¹ Is science fiction here the country cousin, limping along sixty years after the fashion, in the mainstream's cast-offs? As Roger Luckhurst notes, this is genre history as "a series of hierarchical stages through which, shamefaced, SF must drag itself, belatedly arriving behind the more advanced".¹²

In 'Heat Death...' we have a break with linear narrative, told in a kaleidoscope of styles from the *Ladies' Home Journal* to physics lecture. Are these diverse elements, nearly fifty years after Eliot, fragments shored against Sarah Boyle's ruin? And is the underlying narrative, of the dissatisfied housewife preparing for a party – what a lark! – a throwback to Virginia Woolf's Clarissa Dalloway's preparations for her party?

It might also be worth suggesting that the metaphor of advancement, of progress, is back to front. The British New Wave might be seen as a fall from grace, another decadent step down in a genre which is already bastardising mainstream literature. It was once possible to represent the world, and tell a story, but no longer. Our authors are no longer able to act as authorities, and leave incidents dangling in a morass of uncertainty. Perhaps.

In 'Heat Death...' we have fifty-four numbered sections (fifty-two cards and two jokers?), ranging in length from ten words to a page. The numbering implies some sense of linearity, perhaps even some concept of seniority, but it would probably be possible to read the story in any order, ticking off sections as you... progress. The easiest course is to follow the numerical advancement, as anything else would take more effort, more energy. The sections give a sense at first glance of an attempt to organise, to

tidy up the world and thus fight against entropy, but the very randomness of subject matter, the repetition, the additional numbering of the scientific and encyclopaedic inserts (on entropy, on the heat death of the universe, on light, on Dada [which takes us back to modernism], in love, on Weiner on entropy and on turtles) work against this.

Sarah Boyle's disintegration is connected to her Sisyphian attempt to maintain order in her house:

Cleaning up the kitchen. Sarah Boyle puts the bowls, plates, glasses and silverware into the sink. She scrubs at the stickiness on the yellow-marbled formica table with a blue synthetic sponge, a special blue which we shall see again. There are marks of children's hands in various sizes printed with sugar and grime on all the table's surfaces. The marks catch the light, they appear and disappear according to the position of the observing eye. The floor sweepings include a triangular half of toast spread with grape jelly, bobby pins, a green Band-Aid, flakes, a doll's eye, dust, dog's hair and a button.¹³

The extended listing of her routine – expanded on in other sections – demonstrates the amount of energy it is necessary to expend to maintain order, and thus metaphorically demonstrates entropy at work.

Boyle's attempts to keep order break down in other ways than just the loss of energy; she attempts to label her world:

Sometimes she numbers or letters the things in a room, writing the assigned character on each object. There are 819 separate moveable objects in the living-room, counting books. Sometimes she labels objects with their names, or with false names, thus on her bureau the hair brush is labelled HAIR BRUSH, the cologne, COLOGNE, the hand cream, CAT. She is passionately fond of children's dictionaries, encyclopedias, ABCs and all reference books, transfixed and comforted at their

simulacra of a complete listing and ordering.¹⁴

The futile quest for complete orderliness and clear labelling recalls the Borgesian map as big as the kingdom, the model at 1:1 scale. The invocation of "simulacra" anticipates Jean Baudrillard's notion of the copy without an original, the Disneyfication of the world:

Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is the 'real' country, all of 'real' America, which is Disneyland [...] Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle.¹⁵

Boyle can no longer guarantee the connection of word to image, of signifier to signified, can connect nothing with nothing. She cannot even be certain of her precise number of children – one of the biggest crimes in a patriarchal society.

Of course, appropriately, Disney's theme park is in California, the state where Boyle has ended up, a state which seems to be the apotheosis both of America and Western civilisation. She imagines California infecting the rest of the world:

Sarah Boyle imagines a whole world which has become like California, all topographical imperfections sanded away with the sweet-smelling burr of the plastic surgeon's cosmetic polisher, a world populace dieting, leisured, similar in pink and mauve hair and rhinestone shades. A land Cunt Pink and Avocado Green, brassierised and girdled by monstrous complexities of Super Highways, a California endless and unceasing, embracing and transforming the entire globe, California, California!¹⁶

Boyle also compares Western civilisation to cancer, metastasising across the world, and a few sections there is a description of her mother-in-law's neighbour, whose body is riddled with cancer: "never had a day's illness in her life until the cancer struck, and now she is, apparently, failing with dizzying speed. The doctor says her body's chaos, chaos, cells running wild all over".¹⁷ The entropy strikes at the level of the narrative, the universe, the world, the house, the body, the cell.

However, it might be a mistake to see the story as purely downbeat. After all, in the classic New Wave disaster novels of J.G. Ballard, the endings are not necessarily pessimistic. Walking into the lagoon, into the south, at the end of *The Drowned World* (1962) or *The Drought* (1964), is some kind of psychic fulfilment. The Ballardian New Wave hero conspires with his own fate – perhaps Sarah Boyle does the same in her embracing of orderly disorder.

But the linearity of entropy are, if not balanced with, then set against versions of homeostasis, exchange and constants. Sarah Boyle's surname, the wedding gift of her husband, seems likely to be an allusion to Robert Boyle and Boyle's Law. In this law the relationship between a gas's pressure and volume is constant; as the pressure increases the volume decreases and so forth.

More telling perhaps is the reference to the nitrogen cycle: "On the fluted and flowered white plastic lid of the diaper bin she has written in Blushing Pink Nitetime lipstick a phrase to ward off fume ammoniac despair. 'The nitrogen cycle is the vital round of organic and inorganic exchange on earth. The sweet breath of the Universe.'"¹⁸ To simplify, some nitrogen (or N₂) is extracted from the atmosphere by nitrogen fixing bacteria or Cyanophyta (blue-green algae), leading eventually to the presence of nitrates in the soil. The nitrates are absorbed by plants which build them up into organic compounds; the plants die or are eaten by animals, and the waste in time returns to the soil. Bacteria in the soil can then turn the residue into inorganic nitrogen compounds, some of

which is lost to the atmosphere as N₂. The ammonia which Boyle can smell – presumably from some of the chemicals she uses for cleaning – is thus part of the on-going cycle of life and death.

Circles and cycles dominate Boyle's life: the daily drudge of domesticity, of fighting to regain ground lost to untidiness, even of the monthly cycle of fertility. The annual birthdays which result from conceptions. The various clocks in the house. The image of the snake swallowing its own tail.

Juxtaposed with the nitrogen cycle motto is another reference to a circle: "On the wall by the washing machine are Yin and Yang signs, mandalas". (Pause on the washing machine – would it have been an automatic, complete with a rounded window? Almost certainly it would have had some rotating mechanism or spinner, and the machine goes through a cycle.) The Yin-Yang mandala, a black and white circle shaped like two nested commas, represents the two complementary forces of Taoist thought. Yang is also represented by an unbroken yarrow stick (compare the divination/oracle of the *I Ching*), and stands for white, masculine, active, north, sun and so on, and Yin, the broken stick, stands for black, feminine, passive, south, earth and so on.

Within western thought, the values associated with Yang would be held to be superior, and the Yin values recall perceptions of the Orientals – in part north Africans and the people of Middle East, but by extension the Far East. Whilst Taoist parables appear to valorise these by showing the power of passivity, the paradox is that passivity becomes an active strategy. The secret of happy life is balance between opposing states; in the words of Chuang Tzu:

he who wants to have right without wrong,
Order without disorder,
Does not understand the principles
Of heaven and earth... They are correlative!¹⁹

It fact at the extremes, an impulse turns into its opposite: within that white comma of Yang, there is a small black circle, representing Yin and within that black comma of Yin, there is a small white circle, representing Yang. It might be that Boyle's distress comes from her inability to accept her rôle as an oasis of Yin within the all-embracing Yang of California. (Does her maiden name of Sloss point toward Schloss, the German word for castle, castles being protected spaces often under attack from external forces?)

Boyle is not from California, having grown up in Boston and Toledo, so Zoline has given her a broadly westward trajectory. The landmass of North America is at the west of the Western world, and California is the west coast of western civilisation – the next significant land travelling west being the Far East in our Eurocentric cartography. The western lands are the land of the dead, the necropolis of Cairo is built on the west bank, the west is the opposite of east and the direction of salvation for churches... It is maximum Yang and apparently all conquering.

Until we reach the statistically likely planet and begin to converse with whatever green-faced teleporting denizens thereof – considering only this shrunk and communication-ravaged world – can we any more postulate a separate culture? Viewing the metastasis of Western Culture it seems progressively less likely.²⁰

There may come a time when another culture, another race is encountered, which may counter the west; in 1967, it seemed likely that patriarchal, multinational capitalism would win out, and for just over thirty years this has continued to seem likely, especially with the collapse of the Soviet Bloc. There remains the vast market of China to be assimilated, and the jury is out over the response of some sections of Islamic culture(s)... The (economic) heat death of the universe is not yet reached, history has not yet stopped – or if it had stopped, it is going again.²¹

If Earth is a closed system, then in the long term patriarchal, multinational capitalism will win (but then collapse for lack of new markets) – so the system cannot be allowed to be closed. In parallel to this, entropy will only become total if the universe is a closed system:

The total entropy of any isolated system [...] must either increase (irreversible process) or remain constant (reversible process). The total entropy of the Universe therefore is increasing, tending towards a maximum, corresponding to complete disorder of the particles in it (assuming that it may be regarded as an isolated system).²²

So to avoid her very own heat death, Boyle has to look outside the closed system of the house, must forget her domestic life:

There must be more than this, Sarah Boyle thinks, from time to time. What could one do to justify one's passage? Or less ambitiously, to change, even in the motion of the smallest mote, the course and circulation of the world?²³

She has, presumably, to leave her husband, her children, her home. Or at least be defined by more than just those elements. A radical thought; one anticipating feminist thinking of the late 1960s and the 1970s. Feminist polemic as science fiction? This is how the world would have to be.

As it is, we seem to leave Boyle co-operating in her heat death, co-operating with curves (parabolas) and ovals (not circles):

She begins to break glasses and dishes, she throws cups and cooking pots and jars of food, which shatter and break, and spread over the kitchen. The sand keeps falling, very quietly, in the egg timer. [...] She picks up eggs and throws them into the air. She begins to cry. She opens her mouth. The eggs arch slowly through the kitchen, like a baseball, hit high against the spring sky, seen from far away. They go higher and higher in the stillness, hesitate at the zenith, then begin to fall away slowly, slowly, through the fine clear air.²⁴

In Ballardian logic this would be the embracement of fate, the heading for the end of the line. A victory, in disaster in fact. But perhaps Boyle needs to break away from that path.

Notes

1. *Terrors of Pleasure: The House* (1988). This element does not appear in the book version, *Swimming to Cambodia: The Collected Works of Spalding Gray* (London: Picador, 1986).
2. Colin Greenland. *The Entropy Exhibition: Michael Moorcock and the British 'New Wave' in Science Fiction*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983): 10.
3. Mark Bould. 'Old, Mean and Misanthropic: An Interview with M. John Harrison'. *Vector* 226 (2002): 5.
4. Elizabeth Hewitt. 'Generic Exhaustion and the Heat Death of Science Fiction'. *Science Fiction Studies* 21: 3 (1994): 300.
5. Colin Greenland, 35.
6. Gwyneth Jones. Review of Pamela Zoline, *Busy About the Tree of*

Life. Foundation 43 (1988): 95.

7. Gwyneth Jones, 96.
8. Mark Rose. *Alien Encounters: Anatomy of Science Fiction*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981): 1; quoted in Elizabeth Hewitt, 290.
9. Colin Greenland, 61.
10. For details see Andrew M. Butler. 'Modelling Sf: Fred Pfeil's Embarrassment'. *Foundation* 72 (1998): 81.
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CONTINUING OUR EXAMINATION OF THE NEW WAVE, STEVE SNEYD TAKES A LOOK AT POETRY IN *NEW WORLDS*

Lining the Mind's Inside: The *New Worlds* poetry revolution by Steve Sneyd

When Michael Moorcock, since May/June 1964 editor of *New Worlds*, began using poetry in 1966, he was not the first to include it in a prozine, *Weird Tales*, *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, and many others having used verse, albeit mainly as filler. However, Moorcock's attitude to use of the form was very different, with lasting impact. Indeed, American poet and critic Robert Frazier, writing in the

Encyclopedia of Science Fiction, saw the poetry activity "centred on *New Worlds* and the New-Wave writers in the UK during the late 1960s" as making possible today's widespread presence of genre poetry in magazines and anthologies.

What, then, was so revolutionary about Moorcock's approach? In his own words "*New Worlds* promised ... a readership that would not skip poetry, that would give as much attention to the

poetry as anything else." Far from treating it as filler, "we were prepared to run poetry over as many pages as we were stories."

A second big difference was that most of the poets whose work he used, often, indeed, inviting them to contribute, were from the 'mainstream'. Even where, as with Thomas M. Disch, they were seen by readers as 'sf community' writers, their relationship with the genre tended to the semi-detached.

Just as poetry's standing within *New Worlds* was much higher than its marginal situation in previous sf magazines, and its poets came, in general, from a very different source, so also the work's form diverged markedly from that to be found in earlier sf prozines. Specifically, what appeared in *New Worlds* was almost entirely in forms – free verse, plus some concrete – established in poetry generally since the Modernist upheaval around World War I, but hitherto very rare in sf publications, where rhymed and metred verse, including such 'strict forms' as the sonnet, had continued to dominate almost totally, whether in prozines fanzines, or the occasional verse-using "sf little magazine." By contrast, what little rhymed material appeared in *New Worlds* was, with the rarest of exceptions, pastiche or parody within short stories.

Fourthly, as with form, so with content: just as the prose of Moorcock's *New Worlds* diverged sharply from what was previously familiar to genre readers, instead, in general, sharing hallmark New Wave characteristics, so too the poetry. When examining those differences of content, it is helpful to look at what M. John Harrison said in his article, 'A Literature of Comfort', in *New Worlds* paperback (hereafter abbreviated PBK) issue #1 in 1971: although specifically discussing Ballard's work, it has considerable applicability to much *New Worlds* poetry, as well as bringing out the degree to which, in *New Worlds* prose, a kind of "poemising" occurred, the resulting tendency to convergence with characteristics typical of contemporary modern poetry, i.e. "fragmentation and condensation" that "minimise the waste products of the story and leave the image – the essence of the fiction – to stand by itself", in turn, liable to assist readers in coming to terms with *New Worlds* poetry itself. (He could have also noted in *New Worlds* prose further strategies familiar in modern poetry, including lack of narrative closure, fragmented telling, and unreliable narration.) Much *New Worlds* prose, also, is in part or whole mood fiction akin to prose poetry.

Other Harrison remarks which can be meaningfully applied to the nature and content of much *New Worlds* poetry include "using the twin devices of sexuality and violence to examine and measure relationship with the exterior universe (that relationship which, in fact, constitutes our inner universe)" and "fascination with the surrealist analogy, the expression of an event or series of events through an equation of emotionally-charged objects". Harrison noted, too, how central a feature is "the optimum denizen of the psychiatric hospital neither doctor or patient, but both", adding "Fantasy is not just round the corner. Neither is reality. The one stems from the other, ... as inextricably woven as the lives of patient and doctor in the psychiatric ward." Exploration of such mental hinterlands is the very essence of much *New Worlds* poetry.

Moorcock himself said "We ... wanted it to be essentially speculative ... imagistic, psychological ... poetry that contained some sort of extra idea ... avoiding banal clichés, a robot or something like that, highly familiar to the average reader of science fiction ..." In particular, in poetry as in prose, he welcomed imaginative explorations of inner space, the interior realm of the individual mind which the so-called 'soft sciences' sought to understand, and begin to manipulate.

These, then, were the aims Moorcock had for poetry in *New Worlds*. Now it is time to look at a sufficient selection of the work actually used during the thirteen years involved, between 1966

and 1979, to meaningfully delineate significant themes and characteristics, in the process at least implicitly suggesting answers as to how far his hopes for the medium of poetry, in the context of his magazine, were in fact achieved. A caveat, incidentally, is necessary, as to the choice of poems to discuss, that inevitably this, to some degree at least, subjectively reflects my personal opinions as to those which most interestingly retain impact and ability to challenge.

Before beginning to look at individual poems, it seems sensible, also, to briefly recall what was happening to *New Worlds* itself during the period concerned. Magazine format until #201, in April 1971 (from 1969 edited by various associates, rather than Moorcock himself) was followed by ten issues in original paperback anthology format: PBK #1 in 1971; PBK #2, PBK 3, PBK #4 in 1972 all Moorcock-edited; PBK #6 in 1973 edited by Moorcock and Charles Platt; then, edited by Hilary Bailey, PBK #7 in 1974, PBK #8 and PBK #9 in 1975, PBK #10 in 1976. After a hiatus, *New Worlds* resumed magazine format, from the last Moorcock-edited issue, #212 (1978), to several edited by others including Charles Partington, and Dave Britton of Savoy Books, a final #216 in 1979.

PETER REDGROVE

The first poems Moorcock used were by Peter Redgrove, who died earlier this year. His 'The Case' in *New Worlds* #158 (1966) is epigraphed by a quote from Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf*: "man ... is an experiment and a transition ... perilous bridge between nature and spirit. His innermost nature drives him on to the spirit and to God. His innermost longing draws him back to nature, the mother". The poem itself voices a schizophrenic's inner world, as changing urgencies of his disorder reshapes the exterior phenomena of the garden he seems employed to tend, into manifestations of dead mother and vanished father.

The five-page work reflects his inner turmoil's obsession with death and judgement, its attempts to raise the mother and summon and control the absent father/god figure. Yet it also revels, as luxuriantly as a Douanier Rousseau painting, in the thereness and multiplicity of the natural world, a theme which persists throughout Redgrove's subsequent writings. To the extent, thus, that it expresses a life-long poetic agenda, the piece can also

...Redgrove's frequent self-description as "the scientist of the strange".

be seen as allowing Redgrove, through the mask of persona, to voice his purpose and that of his craft. Indeed, how he sees what the poet should be is encapsulated in the line "A maker of prayers, flowers, hypotheses", recalling the Hesse epigraph's reference to "experiment", and Redgrove's frequent self-description as "the scientist of the strange". Yet, even though we sense the identification of poet with persona, still the latter retains its own individual power to compel. "I will haul you in, father, through the bounds of my senses", it cries. At the last, after the desperate outcry of such lines as "O shame ... to die", and "To hear the peacock 'help!' that means no such thing," nevertheless there comes an all-acceptance – "And to live ... without judging, called 'Father'" having stepped beyond all-seeing into all-being. The poem's quest-like traverse through imagined sensations, inner and outer, has thus achieved closure, the protagonist becoming, and thereby silencing, that which had so tormentingly judged, the presence-in-absence figure of father/god. A kind of peace is born within, to end an extraordinary kind of creation myth, by no means the last such to appear in *New Worlds*.

Redgrove was a thoughtful analyst of his own work, and the newer genre writing generally. In a lengthy letter published in another prozine, *SF Impulse*, in February 1967, Redgrove said "Sf has drawn very much on the information of the physical sciences ... Poetry has drawn on the information of the 'personal' sciences; anthropology, psychiatry, psychology ... There are definite signs

that the two are meeting ... physics seems to say that the ultimate substrata of matter have psychological properties ... things cannot be observed without the condition of the observer coming into it ... physics is more likely to be explained by biology than vice versa ... the outer world of science and observation and the inner world of person and feeling meet in both sf and poetry ... the two halves of the modern mind have begun to unite in both disciplines".

Redgrove's initial interest in psychological states might, incidentally, be traceable to a breakdown during National Service which led to shock treatment, as Peter Porter noted in 'Peter Redgrove – a brief memoir' (in *Poetry Review's Peter Redgrove Special*, 71:2/3, 1981). The poet's own published CV (1995) speaks of "experience of Freudian analysis", training "as a Jungian analyst with the psychologist and anthropologist Dr. John Layard" and that, from 1969, he "practised psychology as a lay analyst".

In *Poetry Review's Peter Redgrove Special*, Porter also remarks in 'The Case' the presence of "one of Redgrove's perennial themes – the manner in which God goes on pilgrimage through our bodies as we live out our lives." Of "the most deep-rooted source of Redgrove's poetry", he mentions, alongside "the web of nature", as in this poem "the psychic overworld of which religion, death, and, above all, sex are providers of co-ordinates". In the same issue, Anne Stevenson's 'A Responsible Joy' focuses the same point in a different way: "poetry as a way to mental freedom ... the responsibility of the poet (which begins, truly, in dreams) is to liberate and heal ... the 'wholing' process ... a loosening of consciousness from the straitjacket of habitual thought."

Interviewed by Neil Roberts, in 'Science of the Subjective' (in *Poetry Review* 77:2, June 1987, Poetry & Science Special), Redgrove, describing poetry as a form of waking dream, albeit under the poet's control as navigator, then made the point, relevant to much *New Worlds* poetry, that "It is what we call our conscious minds which are the constructs. The poem comes from the interface between conscious and unconscious."

In *Poetry Review's Peter Redgrove special*, again, Susan Fromberg Schaeffer's 'Under the Chronoscope', an analysis of Redgrove's collection *The Weddings at Nether Powers*, expands on the point Redgrove had made in his SF *Impulse* letter about the importance of modern theories of physics to understanding, saying how much his work responds to the disorientation of our reality view created by the counter-intuitive theorisation of quantum science: "The unpredictability with which Redgrove accelerates time or slows it down ... ineluctably leads him into surrealistic techniques, which, given the poems' premises, are not surreal, any more than the assertions of modern physics are surreal." Anne Stevenson makes a related point, in analysing the difficulty Redgrove's work could present: whereas he tried "to show that what is (outside time and) archetypal and what is near at hand are inseparable into 'planes' ... we are in the habit ... of thinking in planes not in cycles." To strive against such habituated thinking is characteristically New Wave; that striving helps explain the disorientation, and resulting hostility, felt by many extant sf readers encountering it.

GEORGE MACBETH

The next year, the late George MacBeth's 'The Silver Needle' in #170, one of the most memorable *New Worlds* poems, combined the garishly colourful spectacle of space opera with the mythological bustle of a vast Victorian canvas (he subtitled the poem a "strip cartoon for Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones"), albeit paradoxically confining both to a mind-interior.

There in inner space, a manufactured sentient must confront those who have introduced a new addiction beginning to rival that already sanctified by the prior controllers of this innerverse.

The apparently worthy aim of preventing a situation where the villains "remain always in power over the automata of the will-less", has, clearly, the ironic subtext that deindividualising chemical dominance is the inescapable outcome, whichever 'side' is 'victorious'. At one level at least, then the poem is a parable of rivalry between opposed ways of reshaping a damaged landscape: in effect, conventional stabilising medication versus the outlaw 'mind-expanding' drugs advocated by 1960s gurus as R.D. Laing or Timothy Leary.

The scene is set in prose: "Attila, robot-knight of the psychiatric society," must "unravel a knot in the star-system of inner space ... due to the imperialism of a drug ring, hallucinogenics unlimited", by combating "their cult of primitivism and ritual pity inspired by the virgin queen Madulla ... out of line with the normal sex-worship orientation of the Planet 4 Group(s) ruling clique, the Table Men".

The six-page-plus poem itself is divided into six sections, their characteristic form very short stanzas, predominantly doublets and triplets, made up of short enjambed lines.

In Part One, 'The Call of Attila', the protagonist reports for orders: "swallowed/his testosterones and was out//a fine blaze of Nuremberg / in his gas-suit, at ease/l before the Table-men. A million eggs/on a flat glass disc/reflecting/eyed him (the scent whispered, undulant/from the green orifice/below the glitter)". "Ok, boss; Mein Fuehrer": the "hero" responds, like a California private eye asserting his independence, amid hints of his (or its) personal quest agenda "ready/fryr a new grail/to be wrenched/out of the misery of the pitied."

In Part 2, high-techly equipped for the mission: "man-womb of elaborate alloys/Planet 4 had long since riveted/to his watchbone ... contractible for a/vitamin pill .../or expandable to a space-ship", Attila begins his journey: "Happy ... four-fifths sexual fantasy as it was ... good/to be a robot, alone/and like a man again". Yet there is no real freedom from watchers, in this closed universe: "outside, ... the piercing rays of the Table-men/... like the gray sisters/ever circled".

Next, in Part 3, he surprises celebrants honouring their damaged saviour "a white child without arms/lifted out of the mud//to a blazing Orion". Duty overrides sympathy: "heresy/has got to be hurt", especially its focus, "Medulla" her name the term for the brain's innermost pith), "our Lady/of LSD .../against her right side, the/silver needle shone". With Part 4, Attila, still suffering after-effects of overcoming Medulla sexually, both vestiges of "intuition ... a fierce irritant" and "onset of rigor sexualis mortis", faces a further task: Androyeda, rock-chained like her mythological near-namesake, needs help. In full private eye mode – "Hold tight, sister – he cuts her free, just before, with Part 5, the inevitable monster arrives, "Pervasive as an echo"; despite distractions (Androyeda's "greedy buttocks/... open to man or beast", then "the/circling Furies, the//whole bleak glass/in the Planetarium of nothingness"), victory ensues: "The/thing is dead. Filing its/biological structure//in the back pocket of his/archive-wallet, he lapses ... into a dream", one undercutting apparent triumph. A Medusa-alike "Baleful Head" confronts him, "the thing all needed." Torment proves as recurrent as the eternal cycles of myth: "Attila ... hearing/the space-mind ... keening//... lifting/drawing back the snake-hair)/the silver needle,/that pure beam of endless light ... blazed again/into the desperate circle of the damned".

In another poem, 'The Crab Apple Crisis' (#168), MacBeth applies *reductio ad absurdum* to the bland euphemisms used, then as now, by rulers to conceal horror from the populace, in this case then-Pentagon adviser Herman Kahn's banal-sounding escalating steps to nuclear Armageddon. Applying the same rules, a trivial dispute between suburban neighbours moves via Laurel and Hardy slapstick to tragic devastation. Of the same poet's 'The

Soft World Sequence, 1 the sea 2 the clouds 3 the earth", in *Best SF Stories from New Worlds 3*, (1968) Moorcock remarks these poems were "inspired in part, he [MacBeth] says, by the imagery of Thomas M. Disch's serial ... *Echo Round His Bones* [1967]". The final response to the slow dissolution of everyday life's apparent solidity is a clinging to a traditional British response, apathetic resignation: "Let well alone,/I always say/Take what comes./You can't win them all. Not without being one of them yourself."

D.M. THOMAS

This writer's poetry appearances in *New Worlds* were many including 'The Head Rape', in #180; 'Two Voices' (#182); 'The Hospital of Transplanted Hearts' (#186); 'The Spectrum' (#187); 'Mr Black's Poems of Innocence' (#188); 'Labyrinth' (#189); 'Apocrypha' (#199); 'Computer 70: Dreams & Love Poems' (machines, too, can have mental disorders) (#200); 'Sonoran Poems' (PBK #5) (nine pages - a relationship with a 'noble savage'-like Mexican woman whose intercessionary beliefs, i.e. in kachina spirituality etc., heal a self divided between writing and being); 'Night-Marriage' (PBK #6); and three Freud-triggered pieces in 216. As well as such free verse work, Thomas also contributed concrete poetry (as also did Langdon Jones with 'Flower Gathering' (#192, July 1969) and 'Transplant'.

Of the most notable Thomas *New Worlds* poems, 'The Head Rape', later much-anthologised, then become controversial when interpreted as exculpatory of male intra-relationship violence, (Len Hatfield, more neutrally, commented "powerfully charged ... sexual violence ... brutalization") begins with a prose entry from an apocryphal 'future dictionary': the CHASTITY VEIL "First used in 2800", features "telepathy blocks (usually in the form of jewels ... fixed to the critical points of the skull)". In the narrative poem that follows, five five-line stanzas plus a payoff line, a drunken husband tears off the jewels to force his way into his wife's mind, despite her pleas, learns of her abuse as a child, has "more terrible/revelations of times she'd lifted jewels willingly". They become "two facing mirrors" as "he re-re-felt his lust, being carboned in her brain,/she re-refelt the hysteria/that he re-felt, so he re-re-re-felt". The outcome is darkly uncertain; "Blood and black hairs on the ripped veil". Len Hatfield's further comment as to the poem's reliance on "the myths of sf to emphasise isolation and alienation" links to a single instance a wider reason for the poet's fascination with the genre. Indeed, Hatfield quotes Thomas as saying "since then", [i.e. the publication of *Penguin Modern Poets 11*, in 1968, also including Redgrove's 'The Case']: there Thomas introduced his all sf-themed, poems by saying "Some evolved from myths suggested by science-fiction stories by Ray Bradbury, Arthur C Clarke, Tom Godwin, Damon Knight and James H. Schmitz]" "I have remained interested in the mythic aspects of sf, but have moved away from 'pure' sf into other areas of myth."

Hatfield described 'Mr Black's Poems of Innocence', its title Blake-echoing, as "estranging material ... outward verbal answers ... inner figurative musings" of a schizophrenic undergoing "operant conditioning therapy" (Moorcock noted "a lot of found material ... more than I realised at the time", from interviews with an actual psychiatric patient). As with 'The Case', 'The Silver Needle' etc., in *New Worlds* as for the 1960s counter-culture more generally, like the Romantics long before, madness is seen as opening up new levels of consciousness.

Thomas's six-page 'Night-Marriage' is a violent creation myth, employing Jung-like reversionary archetypes (interestingly, the time-reversal trope also appears, in the lines "Smashing at his days, minutes, years,/He grew younger/Every time he stopped to rest,/The tree that had burdened his back/shrank a little"). A

nameless protagonist invades his own body; "He went into his side, he dug that tunnel" which "unrolled like a surgical glove"; therein he unburies his mother, only to disavow her, then his wife: when "He risked a look back", Orpheus-like, "She was quite dead." Her body, chopped up, regenerates as many women who "tended his every want". Amid a throng of sexual imagery, further creations occur from semen etc.; from their mutual destruction arise two black women, who abandon him to mate with satyrs. He is left alone, his creation having abandoned him: "He shivered at the entrance. It was getting dark./No one had come out yet."

The Freud-influenced poems in #216 (1979) - 'Don Giovanni', 'The Woman to Sigmund Freud', and 'Fathers, Sons and Lovers' later became important elements of Thomas's 1981 Booker Prize-nominee novel *The White Hotel*, (as the Mr Black poems did of another novel, *Swallow*, 1984), a compelling journey by a female psychiatric patient's journey from repression and breakdown to a self-fulfilling wholeness consumed by the Holocaust.

OTHER BRITISH POETS

A variety of other British poets (Americans will be discussed later) appeared in various issues, among them, in #160 (1966) and #186 (1968), the then-iconic counterculture figure, Bill Butler. His 'The First Gorilla on the Moon' is playful: "The gorillas are all inside/quiet/Before the television/Why venture out ... you can't see a foot for the popcorn ... Our gorillonauts/must come out/To eat the popcorn ball."

Another was Robert Calvert, a lyricist (like Moorcock) for pioneer spacerockers Hawkwind, creator of their Space Ritual rock opera. His elegiac 'Ode To A Time Flower' (PBK #5, 1973) epigraphed from Ballard's 'The Garden of Time', is four ten-line stanzas, rhyming ababccadda. Longingly - "Your calyx hides a nectary of time ... you turn/To crystallised pearl in my eyes" - the poet seeks knowledge from the flower's "sacredness" of "How Man is Angel on his way from slime". Yet "wary as Pandora", he fears the consequences: did not "the first man to reach out and stroke/The marijuana leaf condemn/Himself for greed when harvesting/And burning such a golden thing" feeling himself akin to future "stoned explorers of Medusa" who, facing a new planet, "stall ... Before ... the petrific fog."

In PBK #10 (1976), *New Worlds* published Calvert's haunting short poem 'the Naked and Transparent Man Gives Thanks', in strict rime royal form. "Amid entropic dwindle, Blakeian joy persists ... ruins of ages around me, strewn/like wreckage of an unsuccessful Probe/among the craters of a wasted moon,I extend my thanks for this living robe" (earlier lines had hymned "this vermillion tapestry, warp and weft/of the blood-vein's fabric and its pulsing weave") "to the moth-holed globe,/and unravelling, almost threadbare sky/of the failing sun".

Michael Butterworth, in some of whose novels Hawkwind appear as future saviours, has poetry in #178 (1967); Christopher Logue, later to rework the *Iliad* as modern technowarfare epic, in #181 (1968). Others represented include Barry Cole (#176, 1967), Mike Evans (#183, 1968), R Glyn Jones, surrealist Paul Green ('The Time Ship', #199, 1970), and, in #216, John Clute with 'For the 29th Birthday Of A Friend.' Like the Americans discussed later, all were male, to Moorcock's regret.

LIBBY HOUSTON

The sole exception, Libby Houston, had a genre connection via her illustrator husband, the late Mal Dean. *New Worlds* used five of her poems in #190 (1969), 'Out of Manoeuvres', 'Star', 'Alien Pomp', 'The Old Woman and The Sandwiches', and 'At the Sign of The Times'; then three in PBK #8 (1975). Of these, 'Weather

Clock', six stanzas each of four lines, is detached, timeless. A woman observes her world: the windmill whose "sails/throw out beams of light", ambient sky, then purposeless male activity; "the bucket reaches neither parapet/nor (by his ease) water." Her observer's detachment is haughty, superior - "I have compassed his trick./I have not shown myself/and need not speak". 'Ghost Bread' is two four-line stanzas of low-key fear "nothing to taste or touch or smell/but when you die, you will die lacking". Again sinister, 'The Queen Lies Dying' (five stanzas; six, six, seven, four, ten lines) foreshadows palace murder within, "flies tease her bodice", outside "News of the dire event/(which has not yet taken place ...) brings/tears."

POETRY WITHIN STORIES IN NEW WORLDS

As well as alone, poetry appeared within *New Worlds* prose stories. For instance, in Brian Aldiss's Acid Head Wars stories of a youth crusade seeking salvation across a psychedelic-warfare-polluted Europe, much text, thought-streams of drug-addled characters, is near-Joycean prose-poetry, while, in the 'Still Trajectory' episode, two pages are actual verse, a girl schizophrenic's interior dialogue with her absent father.

Poetry is found, too, in Langdon Jones's 'The Eye of The Lens', in #179, 1968, the author explaining in his introduction to *The Eye of the Lens* (collection 1972, 1980) that this replaced "excerpts from Messiaen's own text to ... the Trois Petites Liturgies" he was not allowed to use. Arson in a mental hospital begins this meditation on how, focused by the burning lens of insanity, fire metaphors such universals as creative love and liberating worship. 'The Coming of the Sun' section includes poems and prose poems, the last leading into a visual poem, words located round an octopus-armed sun. 'Soleil de Sang, d'oiseaux' (sixteen lines, three stanzas) anthropomorphises fire as love object-cum-release: "Throw to me the lance of love, my Love/And I can look out through the layers of glass/Make of yourself a cauldron for my heart ... Your golden pillars are singing to me/I am here in a cave in a house behind glass". 'Dead Book Images Spin In My Mind Like Snow', a prose-poem with rhymed third 'paragraph', dashes its line breaks, again glorifies the approaching danger in quasi-religious terms: "Sound waves of glory put my soul to flight- The sun of blood is trembling on the bleeding snow- The colours of your love flux in a brilliant flow- Your core of acquiescence swells in me." Just seven lines, 'Catastrophic Sun, Fill My Valleys' eroticises like a religious mystic - "Sun-fire, my foetus fills me with heat ... Sun ... - my foliage moves under/your hand,/Sun, you are piercing my womb" - while the twelve-liner 'This Is Sun', in turn, embodies this with direct physicality - "Sun is blood/And the bone, gouged and crackling ... Sun is semen/Ejaculated in a spurt of blood". The final 'vispoem' - after further orgasmic and religion-echoing verbal content around the sun illustration: "Аннннн! PRAY//BURST/reach/eros", "veni,veni,creator/spiritus", etc., comes the prosaic payoff - "There were no survivors".

Again, Jones ended his pastiche of music biography in #182 (1968), 'Symphony No 6 in C Minor The Tragic by Ludwig Van Beethoven II', with the lengthy soul journey-cum-dialogue poem by the fictive Totenfreund the supposed symphony set.

In #168, Peter Tate's 'The Thinking Seat', set on a near-future California coast, extracts sea-theme related poems the beachcomber's leader Cogan 'improvises' to control; discovery the verses are plagiarised from the Beats leads to his death. Two other stories in the same issue contain short poems. Poetry is again a plot element in Graham M. Hall's 'The Tennyson Effect': a poet, Paul Windust (a symbolically loaded name), being used, at a secret establishment, to help activate Alpha, an Emotion machine designed for military dominance quotes lines which reflect his own emotional arc. Initially euphoric, as "the first extra-terrestrial versifier" he writes "The sun sipped the Lake of Dreams/and the dust was wine". Such lines, fed, amplified, into the Alpha device, give it "a poet's mind to the power of ten". Gradually the material

he feeds Alpha reflects increasing disillusion: pastiched fragments, a limerick on the perversity of poets, then lines, on the suicide of a hack writer colleague, he describes to himself as "poetry. And damn good journalism". His final quoted lines fuel a devastating act of Alpha-sabotage: "Undepression covers me/I am filled with unelation/I unhope for all save Death/And deathlong satiation". John T. Sladek, in 'The Poets of Millgrove, Iowa', shows hometown joy at their hero's return via four doggerel lines - "He comes back safe, to our greatest delight" etc. - recited just before the Astronaut's expletive-filled harangue shatters their welcome.

In PBK #1 (1971), M. John Harrison's Viriconium story, 'The Lamia and Lord Cromis', has the latter chant "a bleak poem composed in the Great Rust Desert during winter", seven lines, laid out as prose: "metallic perspectives trammel us in the rare earth north ... swarf-eaters ... hardened by our addiction, tasting acids ... Little to dream here, our fantasies are iron and icy echoes of bone ... Rust in our eyes, we who had once soft faces." Later, the Dwarf quotes eight seashantyish lines from "a Rivermouth song of forgotten meaning, The Dead Freight Dirge": "Burn them up and sow them deep./Oh drive them down!"

In PBK #5 (1973), feminists in Emma Tennant's 'The Crack' shard rock lyrics to liberation song: "Our time is come/The River is broken/Tell Laura I love her/Our Oppression is Ended/Blue suede shoes". John Clute's 'The Disinheriting Party' extracts Dyke-Smashers' cult ritual: "eyes ... buttered with Thalassos,/The garment falls, the heart rips,... interstitial sweat with the moon/Spoils Eudid and the moon drips".

In PBK #7 (1974) Eleanor Arnason, in 'The Warlord of Saturn's Moons', has a city-trapped writer sifnally parody country music "Carry me back to Titan,/That's where I want to be/I want to repose/On the methane snows/At the edge of a frozen sea."

Michael Moorcock's Dancers At The End of Time series, too, uses song or verse material - in PBK #9 (1975) in 'Ancient Shadows', mother and child time travellers from the far past hear the deceptive endtime city sing four verses of "Remember, Naloma, remember only the Night!", six lines each, e.g.: "so many that are dead loved thee!/Slain like winged game that falls beneath the hunter's shot./First they rose up, and then with limbs outspread, they drop'd:/Through fiery Day they plung'd, their bodies bright:/Slain'd bloody scarlet in the sun's sweet mourning light" etc., causing the adult visitor to comment: "Queen Sentimentality ruled here, too. The song is her testament." Later, the city repeats, garbled to semi-verse, Maxims of the time-travellers' home society. Then, in PBK #10, in 'Constant Fire', Emmanuel Bloom, the Firedown, arrives to proclaim four boastful lines, rhymed aabb, ending "I am your Doom, your Providence!"; later, in De Volospion's zoo of religious fanatics, he recites poetry to himself, seventeen pastiched Victoriana lines, rhymed aa bb cc etc.: "And I beheld the hours/As maidens, and the days as labouring men,/And the soft nights again/As wearied women to their own souls wed" etc.

Again in PBK #10, William Nabor's alternative Depression-era story, '... As American As ...', includes incestuous Sister Anjou's verses, such as "... Thus we go down with the cotton mill colic./Thus we all suffer, grow ragged and worn./Oh, though I walk in the steps of a demon,I dare that demon be other than me !/I will learn to praise our keeper,/Hoover, an aimless depression for me"; the protagonist's subversive PS to an official "thinkograph" is also in verse, thirteen lines including "... when i've sated my appetites physical,i saliates my appetites, mystical./employed, i's a bureaucrack!/cut loose an anarchist am i!/with a gutteral arts degree".

AMERICAN POETS IN NEW WORLDS

The presence of some American poets in *New Worlds* shows awareness there of the Moorcock approach, even before Judith Merrill's *England Swings SF* Doubleday anthology of 1968 introduced New Wave poetry as well as prose to a wider US readership. However, the American first and most frequently

present in *New Worlds*, Thomas M. [Tom] Disch, lived in Britain when his poetry began appearing with 'The Flight of Daedalus' in #168 in 1966. This centre-justified "fragment of an abandoned poem" of two stanzas, eighteen and four, contrasts "where the stars/are Doppler-red and speed/grows dizzy at the verge of c ... shattering the crystal sphere" with "the dull perspective of the sea" which as it recedes via a general concentricity/of elliptical beads/pendant from the sun" appears to swallow also the cosmic vastnesses "until their utter dissolution" as "all/vanish into the equation" of above and below. Sardonically, the author comments on writing-as-creation: "I create,/as a soldier detonates a mine, or ... poet/leaves the poem behind."

'A Vacation on Earth' followed, then, considerably later in PBK #5, 1973, 'The Assassination of The Mayor', its twenty-two lines another madness-poem, of descent into urban paranoia "dreadful garbage/trucks ... grew louder every day, closer, harder/to deny, until even his dog was dead, Urban Life,/a dalmatian." "To distract himself, He'd ... read some boxes/of breakfast food – everything else was pornographic". But the threat takes on an individual face; "a crewcut/garbageman would smash the neck off/a bottle of California champagne and, laughing/uncertainly, wrap his huge body in flag after flag." Even illusions of escape are fearful: "He kept/dreaming of leaving his job and going to live in a house/surrounded by bulldozers somewhere in the woods./Instead, dammit, he was on fire." In *New Worlds*'s final #216 Disch had the Whitmanesquely-titled 'Song of Myself'; he'd also used verse in a short story, 'The Eternal Invalid', in PBK #10, quoting Get Well card verses, by hypochondriac writer Allibard, which "Within five minutes" caused "... a bowel movement in rhymed couplets!"

Established sf poet David Lunde had a poem in #179, in March 1968, while in PBK #5, 'Walking Backwards', (Disch had heard author Phillip Lopate read this in New York), eight stanzas, five, five, seven, four, four, five, six, four lines, is vivid short-term time reversals, experienced by things. "newspapers to the typewriter keys' chapped lips,/the paper to the tree, crying and holding tight,/the maple syrup shuffling its feet up the bark", then by people: e.g. "The wall-eyed security guard .../returns to where/his eyeballs first began to pull apart"; lovers go "from climax to foreplay", the parachutist is "faltering and stretching his neck/like a turtle, not knowing which way is up." Finally, wistfully, human and non-human time returns conjoin "the beef would get its intestines back/and I ... you/resting my hand one more time/on the horn of your waist//and we would see snow/returning to the empty clouds/like a guilty wife, covering her husband/in ferocious white kisses".

In PBK #7, 1974, Mac King's two poems are road-movieish: 'Wind-Dream' – four stanzas; five, eight, two, four lines – "in a new metallic hot-rod,/sleek and crazy,/burnin' farm country blacktop,/Like match hit gas we went through" – and "The Wreck" – seven stanzas; six, one, two, four, six, two, one – "late at night,/stir crazy/.../with my hot black swollen eyes/burnt by lights and tight-bone fever".

Alfonso Taifoy had three. The Beatish 'Birds of Prey', set under "barrel chested/skies/in Colorado", in six very short line stanzas – two, seventeen, seven, ten, seven, one – evokes "shotgun/blasted/visions/decapitated like angel clouds"/"My Mistress' (six, five, four, four, five) is singer-songwriterish – "somnambulist/she staggers/through the rooms/I have set aside/to pray in", this "High Priestess/of the continent/of my body,/anticipated like the door/she approaches/but does not/enter." 'A Pastoral' (five stanzas; four, eight, ten, one, two), uses perception distortion speculatively to link opening – "Like animated haystacks/moving still air/I jumped from a tree" – and final images – "Haystacks diving in & out of me" – while filmically focusing hardscrabble nostalgia "the after-image/of a pair of lips/puckerred/as the headlights/from our Packard/panned the trees".

In #10, (1976) sf novelist William Jon Watkins's three-stanza

'Untitled', eight, thirteen, and four lines, posits "A lazy outpost war/soldiers ... grow mutations/in the bellies/of dim-witted native girls", then, in a hospital where the sole voice is "a tape in the ceiling", an sfinally-described old man – "liver spots made his face/... a sepia map of Mars./Capillaries popped in his head/like starships landing" – do they connect?

Poet/editor Andrew Joron's long 'The Sonic Flowerfall of Primes', in 1979's #216, is a complexly elegiac experimental saga of which Robert Frazier's contemporary review summary conveys at least one meaning-strand: "futuristic Neanderthals ... bend ear to ... orbiting computerised intelligences anthropomorphised into gods ... yearning to tear them apart for their precious metals". Addicted listeners, the ostensible humans (or post-humans) below interpret as emotional contacts, love-songs, the communication of the "male" of the orbital pair of orbital "golden solons" to its back-up "female" unit: yet contemplate how "From a metal-poor Utopia" (neatly ironic) "We shall dismantle them", once shot down after "missile hangars ... open rusty eyelids". Wishful fantasy? Probably, given the groundlings' psychological dependence on the sounds they overhear, coupled with the likelihood that decayed surface technology, insofar as it still functions, controls them rather than the reverse. Yet what is certain here? That "nightside lit with cities/zapping with bluest energy/Binary citizenries" – distorted memory of when "we were sovereign", illusory wish-projection, or machine realm going indifferently about incomprehensible business? This work – Long Poem winner in the 1980 Rhysling Sf Poetry Awards – whose readers, facing the ultimate unknowability of Joron's far-future witnesses, also sensed the ambiguity inherent in all poetic testimonies, ends the story of poetry in *New Worlds* on an appropriately speculative note. As with other poems discussed here, it bears out critic Vivien Rowarth's view of the essence of *New Worlds* poetry, "an illusionary picture of reality that becomes part of us".

SOURCES:

In addition to issues of *New Worlds* and other items indicated at appropriate places in the text:

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Steve Sneyd, a published poet, previously contributed to Vector 'Hearing From the Ion Engineers: A Quarter Century of SF Poetry', in Vector 180 (August/September 1994) and 'Barding the Future: Poets as Protagonists in Science Fiction', in Vector 211 (May/June 2000) – Eds



First Impressions

Book Reviews edited by Paul Billinger

All novels marked: are eligible for the 2002 BSFA Award for Best Novel
All collections and anthologies marked: contain stories eligible for the 2002 BSFA Award for Best Short Fiction

Tony Ballantyne – Recursion

Reviewed by Gary Dalkin

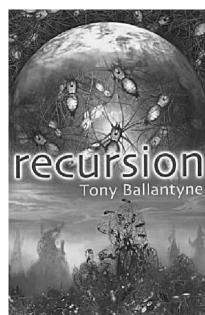
Tor UK, London, 2004, 345pp, £12.99, t/p (reviewed in proof), ISBN 1-4050-4139-0



Recursion is formally structured with chapters following three different sets of characters in three different times. In the England of 2051 every last move is monitored by the benevolent, stifling Social Care. Eva has an escape plan, though soon her only hope lies with Alison, Katie and Nicolas, three other self-professed 'loonies' in a rundown mental institution where everyone is concerned about the Watcher... (coincidentally, a similarly enigmatic entity informs the background to Peter F. Hamilton's latest book, *Pandora's Star*). Just because you're mad doesn't mean you shouldn't be paranoid, especially if you keep seeing the ghost of the brother you never had.

Australia, 2119, and Constantine is another sort of ghost; a corporate agent for one of the five companies behind the first Von Neumann Machine-built city, able to slip unnoticed through the world-wide surveillance web. His assignment is designed to culminate with three meetings in that city. Yet while Stonebreak is rotting from the inside, Constantine is focused on the Mars Project, the development of Warp drive technology and the trustworthiness of Artificial Intelligence. Perhaps the pressure is getting to him, because he has red, white, blue and grey personalities in his head and parts of the sky keep going missing.

Ninety-one years later Herb is caught by Robert Johnston of the Environment Agency, having accidentally ruined a planet with a private Von Neumann Machine experiment. Offered a Hobson's Choice, Herb finds himself assisting Robert in a surreal war against the Enemy Domain, an expanding sphere of machine intelligence rapidly heading Earthwards.



Of course connections are gradually revealed between the three strands, and the title is apt for there are plots within plots to a dizzyingly labyrinthine degree, making *Recursion* a remarkably ambitious first novel. *Recursion* is about many things, not the least of which is the nature of identity in a future where, increasingly, anything is possible. In part a virtual reality thriller – think *The Matrix* (or Daniel F. Galouye's *Simulacron-3*) as scripted with the deadpan absurdist humour of Douglas Adams, in collision with the Australian dislocations of Terry Dowling and the mind-spinning speculations of Greg Egan. Reality may not be what it seems for interior or exterior reasons, or both.

According to the blurb accompanying my advance reading copy, *Recursion* is "a wonderfully entertaining debut sf novel" which "will appeal to fans of Michael Moorcock and Stephen Baxter." Make that "Greg Egan and Stephen Baxter" and I'd agree 100%, but citing Moorcock as a reference point seems bizarre; Tony Ballantyne's extremely carefully plotted, philosophical, hard sf is diametrically opposed to Moorcock's freewheeling, often ramshackle fantasy. Ballantyne's handle on plotting is stunningly impressive, the twists and turns unfolding with clarity, precision and a powerful imaginative vision, ideas which could have resulted in the novel being expanded to three times its length concisely worked into the narrative without a hint of waste. And there are some fine ideas here, from the implications of the drug MTPH to speculations on the Fermi paradox.

There's scope too; from Eva's world, not so far removed from the dour Britain of a Christopher Priest novel, to the burning chrome of Australia a century hence, to the epic scale of chillingly-realised surreal interstellar warfare fought by vast inhuman intelligences. Add some welcome, very British humour and memorable characters – not least the charming, highly

mysterious Robert Johnston – and the result is an exceptional first novel (Ballantyne short stories have been appearing regularly in *Interzone* since 1998) which should be on every awards shortlist

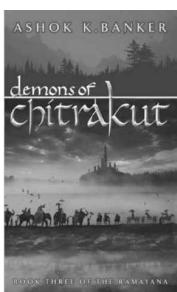
Ashok K. Banker – *Demons of Chitrakut*

Reviewed by K. V. Bailey

This is the third published volume of Ashok Banker's ongoing project of presenting the great Indian *Ramayana* epic in modern but compatible English prose. In earlier volumes, reviewed in Vector 229 and 232, Prince Rama's father, Dasartha, King of Ayodhya, has been ailing, while his princely heir-apparent is away from the court and city on various exploits connected with halting the advance from Lanka (Ceylon) into neighbouring territories of evil forces, headed by the *assura* (demon) Lord Ravana. In the course of coming to the aid of the city of Mithila, Rama, to the frustration of Ravana, becomes betrothed to and marries the Princess Sita, returning with her in triumph to Ayodhya as the present volume opens. Harem intrigue, combined with demon-related sorcery, had long been brewing, and now it comes to a head when the clandestinely demon allied Second Queen, Kaikeyi, is able to make the dying Dasartha fulfil two long promised boons. She now specifies that Rama, son of the First Queen, Kausalya, shall be sentenced to fourteen years of exile, and that her own son, Bharat, shall inherit Ayodhya. Rama obediently departs for the demon-dominated territories to which he is condemned, accompanied by his devoted brother Lakshman and, insistently, by Sita.

Bharat, however, remains loyal to Rama, and with a supporting army follows and overtakes Rama, intent on persuading him, Dasartha having now died, to turn back and ascend the throne. This Rama will not do, vigorously maintaining

Orbit, London, 2004, 628pp, £6.99, pb, ISBN 1-841-49178



Ben Bova – *The Silent War*

Reviewed by Mark Greener

The Astro Corporation and Humphries Space Systems are still squabbling over the rights to mine the Asteroid Belt and sell the raw materials needed to rebuild the environmentally devastated earth. But the fighting is getting dirty and more violent. And on earth, a Japanese rival plots complex strategies to pour fuel on the flames and take advantage as Astro and Humphries battle themselves into financial ruin. Meanwhile, out in the Asteroid Belt, space pirate Lars Fuchs plans his revenge after losing his love – Amanda – to Humphries

The blurb says that this is the finale of Bova's *Asteroid Wars*, and it follows the fast-paced and delightful pattern of the two previous books: *The Precipice* and *The Rock Rats*. I don't normally read much space opera or very hard sf, yet I've enjoyed this trilogy enormously. For me, Bova is close to being the perfect hard sf writer: the break-neck pace never lets up and he never allows the infodumps to get in the way of the story. And despite his position as one of the genre's grand masters, his almost youthful enthusiasm for high technology and astronomy pervades every page. Even when the nanotechnology that can chomp a spaceship into grey goo gets out of hand, it's a fallible human's fault. In these days of post-modern cynicism, I found this enthusiasm for the white heat of technology infectious and refreshing.

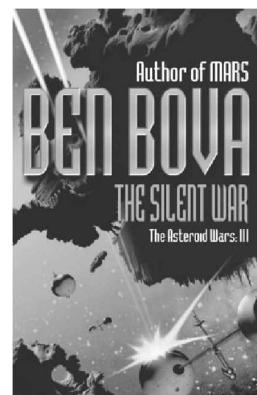
On the other hand, I found *The Silent War* to be a much darker book than either *The Precipice* or *The Rock Rats*. There are a couple of real shocks that I didn't see coming (but which make

come 2005). A new British star has arrived to join the likes of Hamilton, Reynolds and Banks.

that it is his *dharma* to adhere to his father's command, however this had been forced from him. The triple principles of *dharma* (sacred duty), *artha* (meaning and purpose) and *karma* (individual fate), which, as Banker points out in his invaluable glossary, are basic to Vedantic philosophy, operate strongly throughout the remainder of this narrative. Thus, although Rama has become committed to a non-violent way of life, it is his *dharma* to slay the 'fallen angel' demon, Viradha, the attempted abductor of Sita, just as it is Viradha's *dharma* to be slain only by Rama. This is not the only abduction of Sita. Even after the exiled trio have settled to dwell on the comparatively safe hill of Chitrakut, high above the demon-infested Dandakanvan, she is abducted by the arch-demoness Supanakha, who, moved by a lust for Rama, shape-shifts into her body form, but fails to deceive him. In the rescue, Supanakha is not killed, but is hideously mutilated by a restrained Lakshman. Seeking revenge, she returns with a remnant army from disintegrating Lanka, and the last part of this volume is mainly descriptive of the changing strategies of battle, the outcome of which awaits a fourth volume.

Plot as outlined in a brief review can give a misleading impression of simplicity. That of the *Ramayana* is actually quite complex. Ashok Banker's presentation enables appreciation of its many facets of character, landscape, magic and philosophy, while the essential unity of a great epic is preserved.

complete sense). Moreover, Bova highlights the main characters' mental and spiritual degradation. When Pancho wants to contact Lars, she claims to an intermediate (George) that "He knows me" / "He knew you," George corrected. "Ol' Lars isn't the same man he was back then." / Pancho gave him a long unhappy look, then muttered, "Who the hell is?". Those few lines represent the book's leitmotiv. It gives *The Silent War* a more human focus, make it a less technocentric book than the previous two.



Over the course of the trilogy, Amanda, Lars and Pancho lose their naive optimism and become all the more fascinating characters as a result of their psychological transformation. Only Humphries remains consistent: nefarious, scheming and evil. Amanda, for example, prostitutes herself to Humphries as part of a nuptial agreement that saves Lars' life. She escapes the degradation of Humphries's sexual perversions – his 'special performances' – through drugs. (Although she still manages to plot a type of revenge.)

Lars is willing to let some of Humphries' mercenaries suffocate slowly in space after he blasts their ship. He overrides his subordinate's pleas to show them mercy saying: "Think of it this way ... we've added a few more minor asteroids to the Belt". Lars' loss of compassion reflects the loss of his lover.

Pancho changes from an emphatic grease monkey to a high-flying executive willing to send countless people to their death to ensure her company's profitability. She manipulates Lars' love for Amanda and his bitter desire for revenge in an attempt to beat

Humphries at almost any cost. In so doing, she becomes more and more like Humphries, but manages to stay, just, this side of becoming overtly evil.

These changes in personality, and Bova's characterisation of the mental scars left by the previous events, is telling and at times moving. This is especially true of Amanda who seems more a victim of circumstances than Lars and Pancho. Amanda's external locus of control means that she can't influence events. Her only escape comes from pharmacological oblivion. Her only revenge

comes through subterfuge.

To be honest, the characterisation in the first book struck me as a little thin, even a little clichéd. In *The Silent War* Bova creates some psychologically deep and haunting characters that raise the series together to a new level of excellence and makes the three books stand some way above the standard space opera fare. *The Silent War* is a superlative end to an excellent trilogy.

Max Brooks – *The Zombie Survival Guide*

Reviewed by Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc

Frequenters of discount bookshops will undoubtedly be familiar with the plethora of SAS/CIA/FBI/B&Q survival guides available – you know the thing: how to eat like a prince when stranded in a carnivore-infested jungle in deepest South America armed only with a toothpick and a tube of Brylcreem. Normally, said tome is small and non-inclusive, or the size of a small shed and unlikely to be of any practical use in the field unless you use it as a shelter. And then there's the whole "What's the point?" factor, bearing in mind you are unlikely to have a supply of toothpicks, have little interest in male hair-grooming products and are, frankly, unlikely to find yourself in a carnivore-infested jungle in deepest South America. Silent garrotting techniques are of limited use in the back-streets of Bolton (arguably) and preparing red-back spider soufflé (a culinary delight) inappropriate in suburban Dudley. No, my friends, what you need is a real survival guide, one that is useful and relevant to you and your immediate family. One that doesn't require 6th Dan Aikido or elaborate military equipment (although that could prove useful – don't knock it), one that will save your life, not make you look macho on a paintballing weekend in Bognor. You may mock but you are under the imminent threat of invasion by the undead, which is where *The Zombie Survival Guide* comes in. Zombie attacks have been with us for some time and ignorance is the zombie's best weapon – people don't want to face the prospect of decapitating a loved one or the fact that the dead can rise and eat the living. *The Zombie Survival Guide* goes some way to address the myths, explain the latest scientific theories on the spread of the zombie virus and, most importantly, advise on what you can do to escape a fate worse than death... and death as well.

Packed full of useful tips and eye-witness accounts, *The Zombie Survival Guide* helps you to make those tough decisions: do you stay city bound where there are better supplies, high-rise flats providing stair destruction potential (always a good one to stop the shambling dead) and hope of contact with other survivors, but offers possible enemies, more zombies, greater risk of disease and the chance that the army might nuke you off the face of the earth? Or go to the desert – big visibility, fewer zombies, but no supplies and the heat will kill you off in a day? The choices are difficult but meticulously described so you can make an informed decision. Then there are weapons: Uzis might look cool in urban gangster films but in reality you want massive, accurate cerebral damage. Chainsaws look very *Evil Dead* but are, frankly, a liability. Remember the golden rule: swords don't need reloading.

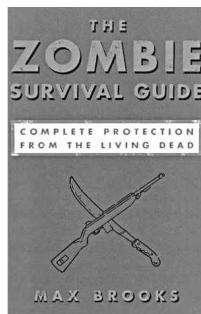
The Zombie Survival Guide is a well thought-out and amusingly illustrated straight-faced pastiche of the whole survival guide phenomena. In many ways it's the earnest tone that's the scariest – it could happen now! Comes complete with an outbreak section in the back for you to note your direct encounters and make your own zombie diary, should you still have a pen come the day that the gates of hell open onto the Earth...

Duckworth, London, 2004, 254pp, £8.99, pb, ISBN 0-7156-3318-X

Reviewed by Simon Morden

No, seriously. Max Brooks takes us where Andy McNab and Ray Mears would never dream of going – forget about how to infiltrate enemy lines or subsisting off a diet of grubs and ants. When the chips are down and the streets are full of shambling undead, it's Brooks who's going to save you and your loved ones.

As you'd expect in such a detailed book, almost every aspect of survival is covered. From the pathology of the lethally contagious Solanum virus, through zombie physiology, we understand the reason for the all-important 'head shot'. Weapons are discussed in significant depth: for we Europeans who lack access to firearms, it's not the end of the world, because common household implements – crowbars, lump hammers, axes, machetes – can be your friends too. Warnings regarding fuel-hungry power tools are given, as is the caveat that knives don't need reloading.



For a minor Class 1 outbreak, all you then have to do is sit tight and wait for the Armed Response Unit. But what about survival in a major Class 3 attack? Here, Brooks doesn't stint on information. Bicycles and motorbikes, especially those with off-road tyres, will be your best bet. Whilst the rest of your city is gridlocked in zombie-friendly cars, you're past the city limits and looking for a place to hole up until the emergency is over.

What if the worst happened? This is dealt with in the last chapter – Living in Zombie World. A pitiful remnant of survivors left on a planet with several billion undead would stand no chance, right? Brooks presses the requirement for absolute secrecy and stealth, for a fortress far away from civilisation, and ground in which to grow crops – for upwards of twenty years.

The book finishes with a series of studies, zombie attacks throughout recorded history, which shows the menace has always been with us. The ancient Egyptians removed the brains of their dead during mummification. Hadrian's Wall was erected in response to a Class 3 outbreak in Caledonia. The Chinese repeatedly report cases of 'Eternal Walking Nightmare'. Right up to the present day, zombies appear, are eventually dispatched by locals or the authorities, and all evidence swiftly removed to avoid panic.

None of this is true. It can't be. Zombies – virus-infected, re-animated dead – don't exist. Brooks' tongue is firmly in his cheek throughout every sentence. This is a parody of all the 'in the event of a nuclear attack' books, all the 'YOU can be a trained killer like the SAS' guides, all the 'you've got five lentils and a toothbrush – let's make a watertight shelter' programs. It's silly, pointless (much like supposedly real survival guides), and full of useless facts.

Yet, yet... the utterly dry 'Protect and Survive' telling style, the use of crude line drawings, the relentless made-up history and statistics, the sheer volume of detail included: the total effect is eerily overwhelming, and gave me the creeps for a week. I doubt that I'll read a more disturbing book all year. Buy it for yourself, your friends, put a copy next to your toilet. Brilliantly written, morbidly funny, completely convincing – who else are you going to trust to keep your brains fresh but Brooks?

N. M. Browne – *Basilisk*

Reviewed by Elizabeth A. Billinger

In a medieval-type world, typical of fantasy, there are two communities – those who live above ground and those who live below it, a much more science-fictional division. The combers live in a seemingly endless web of tunnels, with slippery cliff faces, rope networks, narrow caves and niches adopted as homes, insufficient food and a drug, Stenk, that makes life tolerable. Rej, whose home is in these catacombs, dreams of dragons – dreams he is a dragon – and tries to evade his brutal creditors.

In the refectory and university barracks Above, Donna, struggling to maintain the humility of a young scribe, suffers the privations and lack of food resulting from extreme Sumptuary Laws, and dreams of dragons – dreams she is a dragon.

It is inevitable that these two young people, only just become adults, will meet, will discover some unexpected link and in all probability fall in love. Browne's talent is to go with this simple structure. She attempts no pyrotechnics, no outrageous plot twists, but relies on her solid storytelling skills – to construct an intriguing mystery, to create believable and likeable characters and a fully realised world – to tell a gripping story.



Bloomsbury, 2004, 320pp, £5.99, p/b (reviewed in proof), ISBN 0-7475-6326-8

Donna and Rej (character-naming is maybe not one of Browne's skills) are the sort of stubborn, independent-minded young adults who cannot leave a puzzle or an injustice alone. From the discovery that there are privileged ones who disdain the Sumptuary Laws, dressing in furs, keeping warm by a real fire, maintaining a well-stocked cabinet of drinks and other potions, they are gradually drawn into a dangerous and complex plot. The conspiracy involves the war that engages the city and is responsible for the Sumptuary Laws, an unwise war that cannot be won; it also involves a terrible threat to individuals whom Donna and Rej try to protect, and to the whole comber community, regarded by the corrupt authorities of Above as entirely undesirable and disposable.

For all its fantasy *mise en scène*, this novel has a strong science-fictional flavour to it, maintaining an internal logic and building a picture of its own, admittedly mystical, science to explain the fantastic happenings. This is one of those odd books that on reflection seems to do nothing particularly new or startlingly original, but does it with such skill and conviction that the result is a memorable and satisfying read.

Charles Butler – *The Fetch of Mardy Watt*

Reviewed by Andrew M. Butler

The renaissance of fantastical children's fiction continues with this enchanting and scary novel. Mardy Watt is having a difficult time; her father died some time ago and her brother is now in a mysterious coma in hospital, possibly slipping away from life. Meanwhile at school she is thrown by Rachel Fludd, a new girl whom she thinks is a witch, and there is a doppelganger, a fetch, haunting Mardy, always one step ahead – causing havoc at home, buying chocolate in the shop, generally getting her into trouble. And because the double, the fetch, looks exactly like her, everyone is blaming Mardy, or thinking she's lost it. Mardy fears that she's about to be usurped from her own life.

Towards its beginning the novel has a flavour of early Garner, with the sense of another, more fantastical and also more dangerous world being merely a whisker away, with music being one of the things that can cross the gap. This may be a deliberate homage or an unconscious echo, as I know Charles Butler has written about Garner in the past. The sibling in hospital parallels David Almond's *Skellig*, although the patient's state has a entirely different significance to the plot (and Almond's book left me feeling uncomfortable about what he did with it). None of this is to say the novel isn't original; the plot moves in unexpected directions with more twists and turns than a twisty-turny thing.

For example, much as I liked Mardy's best male friend, Hal, as

Collins, London, 2004, 223pp, £5.99, p/b, ISBN 0-00-712857-6

a character, when he took centre stage in the plot I was worried that, as in *His Dark Materials*, a strong female protagonist had suddenly become helpless and was to be supplanted by an active boy. I should have had more faith in the story-telling, as nothing is quite what it seems and the title turns out not to have been misleading.

More annoying, and this is unlikely to be the author's fault, is that the typeface of the novel feels very childish to me. There is more to fonts than Times Roman, of course, but this left rather too much white space for me as an adult reader. Presumably HarperCollins have done research and it is appropriate for the target audience, which I'd guess is early teens, and probably female.

The book comes garlanded with praise from Susan Cooper and Diana Wynne Jones, and would be enjoyed by anyone who thrived to Ann Halam's horror novels. I missed Butler's earlier novels, something I hope to remedy soon although, sadly, none are currently in print. Even better, the ending of *The Fetch of Mardy Watt* suggests to me that there is more to explore in this collision of realities, and I'm hoping that Butler will return to these characters.

Ramsey Campbell – *Alone with the Horrors*

Reviewed by Mark Greener

For more than 40 years, Ramsey Campbell has published stylish, evocative, literary horror stories, closer in style and substance to M. R. James or Lovecraft than Shaun Hutson or Guy N. Smith. Lovecraft was notoriously dismissive of most of his fellow pulp authors and their lack of literary merit. However, I suspect Lovecraft would find much to admire in Campbell's work. *Alone with the Horrors* exemplifies perfectly why Campbell is one of dark fantasy's masters.

Alone with the Horrors collects almost 40 short stories published between 1961 and 1991. (This new Tor edition is

Tor, New York, 2004, 448pp, \$27.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-30767-7

essentially a reprint of a 1993 book, but with a new introduction.) The collection begins with a Lovecraftian pastiche, 'The Tower from Yuggoth' (another addition for this edition). Campbell's somewhat unpolished talent shines through in this early story. Indeed, the collection offers a fascinating snapshot of Campbell's literary evolution, his maturity into a master of the short story form.

But while some things change, others remain the same. Many of the stories betray traces of Lovecraft's influence: typically a personality flaw, either personally or in someone close, condemns

the characters to confront cosmic horrors. Campbell adds numerous twists to the basic structure. In addition, unlike Lovecraft, Campbell excels at character-driven horror.

As this suggests, Campbell writes classic transcategorical horror stories that span boundaries: between living and dead, between old gods and the modern age, between myth and reality. Campbell effectively uses horror's ability to allow us to escape the shackles of societal pressure and conventional morality to explore and dissect our sexual, psychological and physical fears and motivations. But in the end we face our demons alone: the book's title is telling.

Forget splatterpunk: Campbell's stories are more disturbing than most gore-fests because they creep up on you on a psychological rather than visceral level. What Campbell leaves unsaid is often all the more terrifying than Grand Guignol. Indeed, the cumulative effect of several stories can be profoundly disturbing on allegorical, sociological, psychological and sexual levels.

In 1996's 'Cold Print', a man with a fetish for spanking faces the consequences of his sexuality in a surprisingly moralistic tale. 'The Guy' and 'Another World' are truly unsettling, because the horror arises from the characters' flaws and Asperger's-like obsessions, rather than being imposed by an outside evil.

Other stories, such as 'The Bag' or 'The Chimney', offer insightful windows into aberrant psychology, epitomising the isolation and disenfranchisement that is, all too often, a feature of modern life. The stories personify our fears of the other; be that internal or external. (The fear of the other is, of course, a leitmotif in sf generally.) We identify with 'monsters' – whether it's the Wolf Man, Dracula, or Campbell's psychologically disturbed characters – because they reflect the conflicts, ambiguity and ambivalences in all of us that merge to create our personal

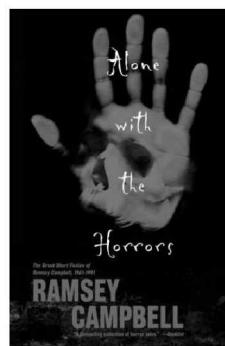
demons.

But *Alone with the Horrors* isn't uniformly bleak. Campbell often shows a deft touch of humour. 'Call First', from 1974, brought to mind the classic EC comics or Amicus movies. (Indeed, it was written for a Marvel magazine in homage to the EC comics.) The poetic justice of 'Out of Copyright' is laced with black humour.

Still other stories show Campbell's command of the short story form. In stories such as 'Baby', 'The Chimney', 'The Voice of the Beach' and 'Midnight Hobo', Campbell slowly tightens the narrative screw, building the tension. The end, which is logical yet unexpected, comes as a cathartic relief. Despite the slow pace, Campbell doesn't use a superfluous word. In many ways, Campbell is a modern Le Fanu.

Critics often condemn – without reason – the horror genre as lacking in literary verve. Campbell gives the lie to this with often-deft prose, especially in the latter stories: "Elaborate lichens swelled brittle branches; everywhere he looked, life burgeoned parasitically, consuming the earth and the forest, a contestant and ruthless renewal" [230]. "Everything was hallucinately intense: beyond cracks in the island's grassy coastline, the sea glittered as though crystallising and shattering; across the sea, Welsh hills and mist appeared to be creating each other". [296]. Campbell's evocative prose augments the disquiet that he so effectively evokes.

Alone with the Horrors confirms Campbell as a master of dark fantasy. If you've not read Campbell before, *Alone with the Horrors* is the perfect introduction. If you have, it's an essential collection of some of his finest work. Even if you have only a passing interest in horror or dark fantasy you really need to own this. Now.



Trudi Canavan – *The Novice*

Reviewed by Andrew A. Adams

Orbit, London, 2004, 577pp, £7.99, pb, ISBN 1-84149-314-7

This is Canavan's second novel and the middle of her *Black Magician* Trilogy. From the speed of publication (and the copyright dates) the complete trilogy had already been published in her native Australia before gaining a UK release from Orbit. I'm eagerly awaiting the final instalment which I'm hoping will follow quickly.

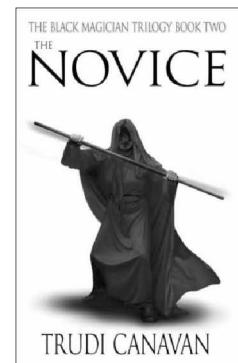
We continue to follow Sonea, the lower-class girl admitted to the Magician's Guild at the end of the first book. There are two main strands to this volume: Sonea's progress as the eponymous Novice, studying magic at the Guild University, and various people's investigations into the illicit activities of the High Lord of the Guild, Akkarin.

Sonea's treatment at the hands of the rest of the 'noble' intake of students at the University will ring disturbingly true for anyone bullied as a child. Disturbing, but so well written it's compelling. Her attempts to take the moral high ground, turn the other cheek and not cause trouble fail to make any impact on the malice of her primary tormentor Regin (a regal name for a truly nasty piece of work). His unwanted attentions force Sonea to reach for her potential with all her efforts and she makes some interesting discoveries along the way, including the labyrinthine layout of the Guild enclosure and its buildings. Unfortunately her discovery of Akkarin's illicit activities returns to haunt her, her friend and mentor Rothen and the Guild

Administrator Lorlen. Forced to become Akkarin's chosen novice she, and they, fear the worst.

Meanwhile, Rothen's friend Dannyl has been named an ambassador and is attempting to surreptitiously investigate the High Lord's past. New to the game of discreet investigation, however, he and his friends tip their hand to Akkarin. Dannyl is recalled to the Guild to face him, and Canavan sets up the denouement of this middle volume with aplomb. There is a cracking twist in this tale that I won't spoil, but it's a bit like *Babylon 5*: "No one is exactly what they appear". There are bigger things going on in the world than Rothen, Dannyl and Sonea believe, and even the Guild Administrator is mostly in the dark.

If Canavan can complete the trilogy with the same level of excitement, mystery and intrigue present in the first two books she will have reached a level rarely attained by a new author, writing with the assurance and deft plotting and characterisation of someone with many years' experience. In the midst of the plot, character development takes place that's as natural as breathing. At just under six hundred pages this book has a page-turning quality that will have you staying up half the night to finish it without dragging once. This author will be one to watch out for on her future projects.

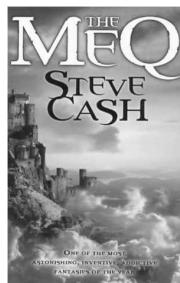


Steve Cash – *The Meq*

Reviewed by Estelle Roberts

This is Steve Cash's first novel and, once again, book one in a series which utilises the idea of 'those who live among us'. They may look like us, they mostly mean us no harm, but they are different in various ways, some more obvious than others. In this case, they are the Meq of the title, an ancient and mysterious race, apparently with strong connections to the Basque land and people. Their main physical attribute is that, unless they choose to undergo a particular ancient ritual, they do not age once they reach twelve years old. They also heal extremely quickly and have true soulmates, who undergo the aforementioned ritual with them and can bring joy and despair in equal measure.

The story centres on a young Meq boy by the name of Zianno, who is usually called Z. Following the death of his parents in a train crash, he fortuitously comes under the protection of an old man called Solomon. He finds a home in St. Louis with a friend of Solomon's, meets more people like himself, and begins to learn more about his heritage; in particular, about a set of stones that he inherits, sewn into a baseball glove, which possess the power to influence the thoughts of ordinary humans. His interest is further piqued when he discovers that there are several other sets of stones in existence. However, the main action, certainly of the later part of the novel, is concerned with Z's attempts to thwart the plans of a much older, renegade Meq known to the others as the Fleur du Mal. Displaying psychopathic tendencies, this



Tor UK, London, 2004, 545pp, £7.99, p/b, ISBN 0 330 49315 9

character – who, it transpires, has killed several times in the course of his very long life – kidnaps the young daughter of Z's very close, non-Meq friend, prompting him to conduct an obsessional search lasting many years, despite the fact that he has only just met his own soulmate, or ameq. This is combined with the background story of the Meq's attempts to adjust to a world that is changing ever more quickly, and to find their own place within it, as they realise they must adapt or face the end of their kind.

The novel is interesting, fairly intriguing, and has positive elements, but it does contain some grammatical tics, which can become wearying towards the end, particularly the overuse of quotation marks. The majority of the characters, both Meq and ordinary human, are well-rounded and individual, some having very long back stories, which benefit the narrative. Zianno is a sympathetic narrator as he attempts to negotiate the emotional, personal and moral conflicts in his life. The Fleur du Mal, however, comes across as a moustache twiddling villain, relishing his intrigues, and is one of the novel's less original elements. The feel of time and place throughout the entire novel is very well handled; you are transported to many different countries and time periods, and they do feel genuine. How to cope as an outsider in a changing world is another strong element. All in all, this story is a good, if not particularly outstanding, read.

Peter Crowther (Ed.) – *Postscripts #1*

Reviewed by Niall Harrison

Postscripts, the new quarterly magazine from PS Publishing, is notable for its wide remit. All genres are welcome, it seems – science fiction and fantasy predominate, but happily rub shoulders with horror and crime. Are pirate tales, or Westerns, or (even) romance stories far away? Personally, I wouldn't mind if they weren't; partly because I like the uncertainty that comes with not knowing what a magazine is going to put in front of me, but mostly because I trust Pete Crowther's taste enough to (mostly) read what he recommends.

It helps that there are also a lot of stories to choose from – thirteen in the first issue, which means that you're almost certain to like something; although that said I'd be just as happy to see a smaller number of longer stories in future issues. I'd even be willing to see the non-fiction sacrificed, since although all the pieces here – a guest editorial by Christopher Fowler; a lengthy interview with James P. Blaylock; a look back at previous genre magazines by Mike Ashley – were diverting enough, I didn't find any of them particularly memorable. On a more shallow note, the design of the magazine is good, with high quality paper, a clean layout, and a gorgeous Edward Miller cover. The only thing I'm not entirely convinced by is the choice of typeface for the magazine logo.

However, all of the above is somewhat by-the-by. What really matters is this: are the stories any good?

A couple are excellent. Peter F. Hamilton's cover story, 'Footvote', is probably top of the heap. It's a recent-past alternate history in which 2003 went a little differently: a wealthy entrepreneur somehow opened up a wormhole to a brand-new green and pleasant land that now offers everyone dissatisfied with the Blair government somewhere to emigrate to... as long as they meet the entrance criteria. Very political, very smart, quite funny, and, I think, one of the best stories of the year so far. Hamilton's short fiction (such as his previous PS novella 'Watching Trees Grow') often leaves me wishing he'd visit the form more often,

PS Publishing, Harrogate, 2004, 170pp, £6.00, p/b, ISBN 190461920-7

and this is no exception.

Quieter, more thoughtful, and very nearly as good is Eric Brown's 'A Choice of Eternities'. In this future Earth has been visited by an alien race, the Kethani, who can and will, if asked, fit an individual with an implant that allows their resurrection after death. Brown has written about the Kethani technology before (for instance 'The Wisdom of the Dead', *Interzone* 186), but this is the best use of the setting that I've seen, and the story offers a real debate centred on humanity's beliefs about life and death.

I also liked Adam Roberts' 'Roads Were Burning' and Jay Lake's 'The Rose Egg'. Both of these stories boast vivid imagery – the Roberts via a powerful metaphor that envisages roads as a country's circulatory system, the Lake through a sparkly, memorable first-person voice and a nicely dirty future. However, both also have endings that feel slightly rushed, and for me neither story quite fulfilled its promise. Elsewhere James Lovegrove's 'Seventeen Syllables' offers a new and visceral definition of 'minimalist horror'.

On the downside, I felt that several of the contributions from established names were disappointing. Brian Aldiss' 'Tarzan of the Alps' is a relatively minor slice of whimsy, Ramsey Campbell's 'Direct Line' was a disappointingly obvious mobile phone horror, and Ray Bradbury's poem 'The Visitation' left me cold. I can't help feeling that maybe some of these pieces were included as much to make the contents page look impressive as on their own merits.

And if that's the case it's a real shame because, on the evidence of the other stories in this issue, *Postscripts* isn't going to have a problem getting by on those merits. My only concern is that perhaps some readers will be put off by the diversity on display. To any such who might be reading I'd say this: true, you should not buy *Postscripts* expecting another *Interzone* or *The Third Alternative*. You should still buy it, though, simply because it is good – and occasionally, excellent.

John Grant & Audre Vysniauskas – *Digital Art for the 21st Century: Rendrosity*

Artists' and Photographers' Press Ltd., London, 2004, 160pp, £19.95, h/b, ISBN 1-904332-18-8

Reviewed by Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc

Digital Art's easy, innit? Just scan in a few photos and press a button – instant art that even a five year old can master at the click of a mouse. Well, believe it or not, digital art is more than that – it's real honest-to-goodness art, but it uses a different and relatively new medium. Part of the perceived 'problem' with digital art lies with its very strength and accessibility – it is reproducible and malleable in a way that Andy Warhol could only dream of. This accessibility, combined with technophobia and cultural snobbery that treats only unique single works as somehow worthy of attention, has given the digital art movement a bad press as somehow less worthy than traditional art forms. This notion is challenged by Rendrosity.com, an online art community comprising a large number of digital artists from a variety of backgrounds who all use the digital format. This lavishly illustrated book offers us works from 21 of these artists.

Each portfolio is accompanied by brief autobiographical notes and it's interesting to appreciate the range of artists on offer here. We have professional illustrators alongside talented amateurs who all work by day and render by night, and from a variety of nationalities as well. Interestingly, many of the digital artists trained as scientists before discovering the joys of digital art, a

further example of the medium's encompassing accessibility outside of more accepted routes – a truly socialist art movement in many ways. The works themselves range from the photorealistic to the abstract and the book is all the better for it – what unites these artists is the medium not the style.

As for whether the artwork's any good, well, that clearly boils down to being a matter of taste. Our personal preferences include Bernard Dumaine's organic Gigeresque forms, Tina Oloyede's stunning fractal abstracts, Elizabeth Legget's mysterious portraits and Kees Roobol's hyper-realistic landscapes and cityscapes. We're generally not that into the fantasy stuff, but Andy Simmon's *Dragons Day Off* is a rather amusing image of a dragon sitting by a tranquil pool, fishing, rendered in the style of John Constable.

Digital Art for the 21st Century offers an eclectic and thoughtful selection of works in a traditional artbook format, far removed from their digital origins. You won't like it all – you're not meant to like it all – but it offers a good indication of the current state of play and waves a solid flag for the future acceptance of digital art as a legitimate form of expression.

David A. Hardy & Patrick Moore – *Futures: 50 Years in Space*

Artists' and Photographers' Press Ltd., London, 2004, 112pp, £17.95, h/b, ISBN 1-904332-13-7

Reviewed by Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc



If men are from Mars and women are from Venus, then men are cold, red, dry and have a giant volcano, while women are hot, cloudy and rain sulphuric acid. Hmm, best not pursue this train of thought. But this conjecture does give us a hint as to the contents of *Futures: 50 Years in Space – The Challenge of the Stars*. *Futures* is authored by the wonderful

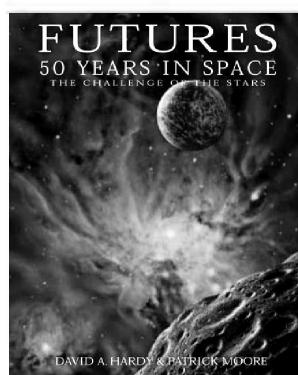
Patrick Moore, who needs no introduction, and illustrated by artist David Hardy, who was the first artist on *The Sky at Night*. It is an updating of *The Challenge of the Stars*, originally written some 30 years ago. The book comprises a written introduction to every planet in the solar system, with detailed descriptions of its composition, atmosphere and geography, and all lavishly illustrated, making full use of the book's ample dimensions – you could use it as shelter should you be washed up on a desert island with a gramophone and the complete works of Shakespeare.

Time is an important factor in this edition; each description also gives us an idea of how theories about a planet's composition have changed over the years, with modern thinking enhanced by the information sent to us by sophisticated telescopes and probes, improving our understanding of other worlds. Did you know, for example, that the gravity of Saturn's satellite Mimas is so weak you'd have trouble distinguishing up from down? Or, if you viewed Saturn from Mimas, you'd never see the full beauty of the rings, because Mimas moves in the same plane as the ring system. Or that Pluto and its satellite Charon have identical rotation periods and could therefore be viewed as a double planet? Once

the solar system has been covered, Moore and Hardy move out of our immediate galactic backyard and onto the increasingly speculative realms of galaxies, nebulae and black holes where our everyday conceptions of scale and even existence are severely challenged.

The text is unquestionably fascinating even for those with only a passing interest in astronomy, with Moore's enthusiasm and knowledge leaping out from every page. The illustrations are more variable. The best artwork depicts the impressions of the pure landscapes and spacescapes. There is a stunning illustration of polar aurorae on Jupiter and a view of Neptune from the south pole of its satellite Miranda (as could be seen in 2029, fact fans, although

hurry if there in some of include possible probes or and, relevant to nature of somehow But that's personal quality of



you'll have to you want to get time). However,

the paintings images of space craft, even base stations although perfectly the speculative the book, are less interesting. purely a matter of preference, the the artwork cannot be faulted and manages to be informative without being overly cold and technical.

A fascinating and enlightening read but you are left asking one question: are cats from Callisto?

Kate Jacoby – *Trial of Fire*

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

Finally, the fifth and last volume of Kate Jacoby's Flita sequence, which I for one have been waiting for with interest and

expectation. Having read it, I wasn't disappointed, but it's hard to write the review which inevitably has to be of the whole sequence and not just this single book.

For those unfamiliar with the series, the kingdom of Lusara has suffered for many years under oppressive rulers. The people with the will and the ability to free their country are a group of sorcerers, led by Robert Douglas, Duke of Haddon, but their efforts are constrained because sorcery is banned and discovery would mean their death. Robert Douglas also has to contend with a prophecy which seems to say that he will destroy what he most loves. His fears of what that means warp his relationship with Jennifer Ross, whom he dare not allow himself to love. Joined with them in the prophecy is an evil sorcerer, Samdon Nash; it's possible that Jennifer may be destined to ally herself with him and not with Robert.

This brief summary doesn't do justice to the detail of Jacoby's world, the complexity of its politics, or the variety of characters. She gives Lusara and its surrounding areas a solid reality; this isn't just superficial genre fantasy.

In this fifth book the characters begin to move towards their final confrontation. Nash has used vile means to regenerate himself after a previous defeat, and emerges as a figure of frightening power. His opponents, in contrast, are limited by their own decency. The focus of much of the book is on Robert and



Jennifer's son Andrew, who at first does not know that Robert is his father. Robert's ambition is to put Andrew on the throne of Lusara; most of the obstacles arise out of Andrew's own nature, and I was impressed by the way the story is worked out and the true meaning of the prophecy becomes clear.

My only reservations are that I felt sometimes the plot becomes too complicated, particularly in the build-up to the final conflict between Robert, Jennifer and Nash. There are also one or two incidents presented as having vast significance that to my mind they did not quite deserve. I also wonder if the epilogue, showing a glimpse of the survivors' lives a few years after the end of the conflict, was really necessary.

However, these are minor niggles. The sequence as a whole is intelligent, impressive in the way it presents the stories of individuals against the sweep of great events covering a number of years, and well worth reading. However, there's simply no point in starting with this volume. Although it begins with a brief outline of what has gone before, I doubt any reader could grasp the full complexity without beginning with the first book, *Jile's Return*. I'd recommend any lover of fantasy to do just that.

Diana Wynne Jones – *Changeover*

Reviewed by Penny Hill

This is a welcome re-issue from Moondust Books of Diana Wynne Jones' first novel, a book previously so hard to get hold of that a keen fan like me hadn't even heard of it. It is a pity that the cover art doesn't reflect the wealth of humour of the story within – however this can probably be ascribed to the limited budget of a small press.

It occupies rather different territory than her later works, being an update on the story of Lieutenant Kije (made famous by Prokofiev's eponymous Concert Suite) – the man who exists only as a clerical error but becomes a hero, wins a princess and is sent into exile. Here the non-existent 'Mark Changeover' starts as an ineffectual aide-de-camp's note of instruction to celebrate the time of the handover of an African country and is misunderstood by the crusty Governor to be a dangerous criminal.

The effect snowballs as the Governor attempts to find out more about this person. In this believable satire upon the sunset of British patriarchal imperialism, the 'Emperor's New Clothes' effect means that each new person pretends to know all about Mark Changeover, adding "artistic verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative". The rumour becomes more detailed, leading to a complicated plot with all the frenetic pace and coincidences of a screwball comedy or extravagant farce. The convergence of all the principal characters on the Blue Banana made me think of the Blue Parrot in *Casablanca*, but I'm not sure if that was deliberate.

The believability of this satire is founded in the snivelling nature of the junior aide-de-camp Harold, the need of the new Prime Minister Aweyo to save face and the rivalry between the different sections of British Military Intelligence. Add to this the selfishness or self-seeking nature of most of the characters and everyone has a reason to join in the conspiracy.

Moondust Books, London, 2004, 256pp, £9.99, pb, ISBN: 0-9547498-0-4

The various characters are all appropriately flawed, most notably the caricatured academics, Lucille and Tony, who represent a horrific type most famously lampooned in *The History Man*. On the other hand Tessa, the equivalent to the princess in the Russian original, decides to use the Changeover situation to change her decisions about her future and learns about her own weaknesses in the process – as well as providing some wonderfully observed adult comedy in her various 'wooing' scenes.

Although the end-of-Empire setting was contemporary at the time of writing and is now no longer directly representative of World politics, the novel does not come across as dated but rather as a reflection of a period in recent history. Tony's comments on white supremacy in South Africa just make us hope that it is unlikely for someone to state this overtly nowadays.

However, the satire of misinformation is still relevant today given extra resonance by the current state of information about Iraq. It would not be stretching imagination too far to picture a similar situation arising there. There is a whole sub-plot involving the American military which rings as true today as when it was first written.

I would say that the author's own distinctive voice can be discerned even in this early work, although the influences of other writers may be clearer here than in later books. The tone and content are more adult than her subsequent works – the comedy being fairly suggestive and not suitable for children. It remains however an exhilarating story, with merit in its own right. It certainly demands a wider audience than Wynne Jones' completists.

[Available from www.moondustbooks.biz]

Stephen Jones (ed.) – *The Mammoth Book of Vampires*

Reviewed by Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc

The Mammoth Book of Vampires does exactly what it says on the cover – it's a huge tome and it's full of vampires. It's so big you could use it as a mallet to help hammer a stake home should you encounter one of the living dead on a dark and stormy night. But it would be far more enjoyable (and less gory) if you read it. It's an anthology of vampire short stories written by a number of

Robinson, London, 2004, 628pp, £7.99, pb, ISBN: 1-84119-926-5

celebrated authors – Clive Barker, Brian Stableford, Michael Marshall Smith, Ramsey Campbell, Robert Bloch, Hugh Cave, Nancy Kilpatrick and many more. And with such a diverse range of authors come an eclectic range of stories – we have vampire as metaphor, vampire as serial killer, updatings of time-honoured vampire tales (some modern and some classic) and so on. The

influences extend from traditional Victorian literature to *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* with lengths ranging from a couple of pages to novellas. Some have appeared in print before and others are completely new, so you're bound to find several stories of interest and, in fact, most of them are jolly good reads.

So, what's on offer? Best of the bunch includes Les Daniel's 'Yellow Fog' which is a nod to the Victorian penny dreadful, with horror and mystery in equal measure. Neil Gaiman offers a series of unusual vignettes, all based around a vampiric tarot deck. 'Beyond Any Measure' (Karl Edward Wagner) is a tale of decadence, debauchery and doppelgangers, while Paul McAuley's 'Straight to Hell' offers us a sordid look at the rise and fall of a rock star and the rise and rise of his vampiric mentor. Speaking of sordid, Harlan Ellison's 'Try A Dull Knife' tells the sorry tale of the downfall of empath Eddie Burma, drained of his psychic energy. Tanith Lee provides an alternative Snow White tale, 'Red as Blood', where the Witch Queen seeks to

destroy the vampire Bianca. Making full use of Christian mythology, the story twists the reader's perception of which character is good and which is evil. The highlight of the tome, however, is Kim Newman's 'Andy Warhol's Dracula' (bit of a mouthful, that), especially for those who know and love the alternate history *Anno Dracula* series. The latest story has reached the 1960's and 70's and pop is definitely, most definitely, in. The story is a particular joy if you are familiar with the culture of the time as it contains many *presque déjà vu* to those who know about the beautiful people, works and writings of that particular era. It's also great for film buffs as you try to spot the references – you can bet that many of the character names have appeared on the silver screen at some point.

So, recommended for those who like big books, but don't have time to dedicate themselves to a single story. A veritable pot pourri of nosferatu nibblings.



Hodder & Stoughton, London, 2004, 430pp, £20.00, h/b, ISBN 0-340-82718-1

Stephen King – Song of Susannah

Reviewed by Alan Fraser



Susannah looked at her with mounting excitement. "It's another twin-thing."

"Do you say so?"

"Yes. Only this time Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee are science and magic. Rational and irrational. Sane and insane. No matter what terms you pick, that's a double-damned pair if there ever was one."

Bob Dylan's last studio album, which includes the song *Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum*, was called 'Love and Theft', and each song, though uniquely Dylan-esque, borrows both lyrically and musically from a wide range of American popular music and culture from the 20th Century and before – from Shakespeare and F. Scott Fitzgerald, for example. Dylan fan web-sites list the many references to songs, books and films. Of course, with America being such a litigious society, many in the press have howled "plagiarism"! Much to their chagrin, none of the copyright holders of the loved and stolen have chosen to invoke the law. I mention this because Stephen King's *Dark Tower* books are works in a similar jackdaw vein, and also because Stephen King is a Bob Dylan fan (his last non-Tower book was called *From a Buick Eight*, echoing Bob Dylan's 1965 song 'From A Buick Six'), and the *Dark Tower* books refer to and quote from Dylan many times.

Song of Susannah is the latest and penultimate chapter in the *Dark Tower* saga, set in the alternate American West of Mid-World (yes, there are Tolkien references, too) and various realities and times of our world, following the fortunes of gunslinger Roland of Gilead and the three mismatched refugees from New York in various dates in our 20th Century who have joined him. It's once again lavishly illustrated by Darrell Anderson. Susannah Dean, once the schizophrenic Odetta Holmes/Detta Walker, has now had her body taken over by a new personality, Mia, and has come to a version of New York in 1999 to bear a child, Mordred – the son, by demonic means, of Roland of Gilead, destined to kill Roland and prevent him from saving the Dark Tower.

In the previous volume, *Wolves of the Calla*, where King reworked the *Seven Samurai / Magnificent Seven* story, he started

with a synopsis of the series so far, but warned at the end of it that *Wolves* was not the place to start reading, and advised all readers to start at the beginning. Not only do you need to know the complex plotlines, but you also need to have absorbed the atmosphere and background of the *Dark Tower* series. So don't start here either! This book does not have a beginning or an end, it just starts, continues the story, and then stops – when you don't want it to. Fortunately the final novel in the sequence, *The Dark Tower*, will be published on 21st September 2004 (Stephen King's birthday) to conclude the story.

A major character in *Wolves* was Father Callahan from King's 1975 vampire novel *Salem's Lot*, who had been transported to Mid-World, and was now again a priest in the border town of Calla Bryn Sturgis (a reference to *Magnificent Seven* director John Sturges). In this book Father Callahan has joined Roland's band or 'ka-tet' and goes with the boy Jake to New York in 1999 to stop Susannah-Mia, while Roland and Eddie Dean go back to 1977 in search of Calvin Tower, a rare book dealer from New York on the run from the 'low men' in King's home state of Maine. Tower holds the key to success in 1999, and the low men are agents of

the Crimson King, King's equivalent of Satan, who also appear in King's *Hearts in Atlantis*. King puts himself as a character in the novel, albeit in an alternate reality – in 1977 meeting his characters Roland and Eddie, and in a coda purporting to be a writer's journal, explaining the history of the *Gunslinger* stories. It reads convincingly but ends in 1999 after King has been killed in the hit-and-run accident that actually left him critically injured. Not only does he paint an unflattering portrait of himself, but he actually kills himself off.

I haven't read many of King's horror stories, but I've followed this series since the beginning, and it's kept me reading. As well as having a gift for plot and an eye for what makes readers (and viewers) jump, King has a cinematic style of writing that concentrates on describing actions rather than what the characters are thinking – this makes his work very suited for adaptation to the screen. This is less in evidence in the *Dark Tower* series, and much of this book goes on in Susannah's head, as she battles with the Mia personality. However, the *Dark Tower* has a wider role – King himself said of Book 4, *Wizard and Glass*, "I am coming to

Review by Alan Fraser, *Telegraph*, Jan 26, 1997

STEPHEN KING DIES NEAR LOVELL HOME

POLAROID MAINE WRITER KILLED WHILE TAKING AFTERNOON WALK

INSIDER CLAIMS MAIN DRIVING LETHAL VAN TOOK EYES OFF THE ROAD AS HE APPROACHED KING ON ROUTE 7

By Ray Routhier

LATILL, ME (UPI) — Maine's most popular author was struck and killed by a car while walking near his summer home yesterday afternoon. He was driving his Toyota 4WD SUV off I-95 westbound to his summer home when he was hit from behind by a car driven by a man who was reported to have a history of alcohol abuse, police said. King, 54, was rushed to a local hospital and died en route. His death was ruled a hit-and-run. King had been hospitalized in Rockland, where he was presented dead at 10 AM Saturday after an 11-hour stay.

A tragic ending and the case of death was extremely bad

injuries King's family, which had gathered in preparation for his 55th birthday.

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understand that Roland's world actually contains all the others of my making." Indeed, *Black House* (the 2001 sequel to *Talisman* by Stephen King and Peter Straub) revealed more details about the Dark Tower and the Crimson King. King has apparently slipped references to his other works into his books almost from the

beginning but now he's doing it much more overtly, using *The Dark Tower* to tie all his work together. Consequently, if you're a King fan, this series is unmissable – if you're not a King fan, try *The Gunslinger* first.

Tanith Lee – *Cast a Bright Shadow*

Reviewed by Penny Hill

The initial impression that we get is that this could be the story of Saphay, a minor princess, kidnapped and raped by a God on her way to a political marriage; but Saphay never steps out of the passive role and remains peripheral and marginalised. In the Cinderella reversal section, where after working as a slave for Nabinish, she becomes head of the household, we are alienated by her casual cruelty to Nabinish whom she enslaves in turn.

Although Saphay's relationship to her three household Gods is a central theme and provider of plot, the details remain unclear – we don't know why she was chosen. She appears to be an active participant in the situation and yet this is clearly described as rape not romance. Later in the book, we meet Saffi – the mindless body cast off by Saphay when kidnapped – and this starts to raise questions about character, individuality and identity but these are never explored.

A major difficulty for plot and suspense is the infallible protagonist NoName, child of the rape (later called Lionwolf). Because he has no physical weakness there is no sense of danger in anything that happens to him. He is already aware of his own powers so there is no conflict or development there. As a character he remains one-dimensional. This is perhaps a result of him physically growing twice as fast as normal humans – 20 years in 10 – leaving him mentally immature. He is, however, unlikeable without any of the redeeming qualities of a child. The closest we get to any scenes of emotional closeness is that between the infant NoName and his mother Saphay as they cross the ice with Guri, the ghost of a hunter. Guri's role as reluctant mentor gives him a rare spark of individuality.

The other characters are undeveloped and



Tor UK, London, 2004, 431pp, £10.99, tp, ISBN 1-4050-0634-X

unengaging, the worst-served being Lionwolf's opposite number, the woman Chillel who was created by one of the Gods purely to have sex with as many men as possible.

I was looking for clues as to the nature of the world this story was set in. The permanent winter and the secret doomsday weapons make it look like a post-apocalyptic world in which gods are corporeal and powerful, magic and ghosts are possible. When I have read other fantastical works I've had no trouble believing in gryphons and hippogriffs and other obviously imaginary and equally biologically impossible beasts and yet I must admit to having problems with the myth of the Lionwolf which is central to this world – I simply couldn't suspend my disbelief in the biological impossibility. I had similar trouble with the giant flesh-eating whale. As you do.

Sadly, despite having been intrigued by previous Tanith Lee works, I didn't really like this very much and struggled to get through it. I can't see what merit there would be in a whole trilogy.

Thinking of a suitable age range for this book, I found that the immature and undeveloped characters would be unlikely to appeal to an adult audience and yet the darkness of much of the content would make this unsuitable for anyone younger than a mature 14. My doctor asked if this would be suitable for his 11 year old and I don't think so. There is too much unpleasant sex, much of it non-consensual, and I found the various societies depicted all depressingly traditional. This is not examined or explored in any way – just taken for granted. I'm uncomfortable with this and yet I wouldn't want a politically correct world or one where all the good guys have 21st century liberal opinions.

Steve Lines & John B. Ford (eds.) – *The Derelict of Death and other stories*

Joe Rattigan – *Ghosts Far from Subtle*

Paul Kane – *Funny Bones*

Reviewed by Simon Morden

Three more books from the Ford/Lines stable to be picked over in this issue, after highly favourable reviews of earlier works in Vector 235. *The Derelict of Death* is an anthology of the wickedly macabre and grotesque that contains some genuinely brilliant and scary stories, featuring authors from both sides of the Atlantic.

The title story, a collaboration between Simon Clark and John Ford, is a haunting, supremely powerful tale of the last voyage of the *Jenny Rose* and the fate that befalls her crew. Imaginative, compassionate and intensely disturbing, Clark and Ford make this one of the best horror shorts you'll find anywhere. 'The Dedicated to the Weird' by Mark Samuels also appears in his collection *Black Altars*, where Vector 235 described Samuels' writing as "unfailingly sharp, with lucid prose and unflinching coolness". Michael Pendragon's 'The Curiosity Piece' deals with the extravagant Scarlotti and his amusing artefact. The story is short, swift, and completely to the point. Paul Finch takes considerably longer to tell his slow-burn 'Shadows in the Rafters'. This classic mystery, set in Victorian England, stacks up the clues steadily until

Rainfall Books, Calne, 2003, 151pp, £7.99, pb, ISBN 0-9540877-3-9

Rainfall Books, Calne, 2003, 68pp, £8.00, pb, ISBN 0-9546178-1-9

Rainfall Books, Calne, 2003, 171pp, £6.99, pb, ISBN 1-894953-14-2

the explosive and vicious denouement. Finch has always been a careful writer, concentrating on both plot and character, and this is an excellent story. With contributions from Paul Kane, Sue Phillips, Eddie Angerhuber, Richard Bennett and Steve Lines, together with a smattering of poetry, this collection is truly great.

Ghosts Far from Subtle is much more of a curate's egg. Ford's normally spot-on production values have slipped a little, with two variations of the title on the cover and a third just inside. The six stories inside show that Rattigan can write, and write well. He builds atmosphere and tension superbly, but often lacks the drama to complete what he starts.

'The Cursed Tree' is the best of the stories: Kate becomes increasingly fixated with the dead tree in her new back garden, and her husband's tale of psychological disintegration and possession is assured and potent. Arboreal menace also features in 'The Dark Side of the Woods' and 'In the Deep Dark Woods'. Council executive Walsh becomes lost in the forest he's planning to bulldoze, and Angela loses her husband in similar

circumstances during a stay at a country hotel. Both stories go for the walk, but never really reach their destination. 'The Wrong Side of the Tracks' is better for plot progression and is again highly atmospheric, but the plight of poor commuter Hudson is too drawn out. 'When She Calls' is an urban nightmare of creeping doom, but whilst the images are strong, the reason for the story is missing. Likewise in the final tale, 'Seen But Not Heard'. The stories are probably all better than described, but for a reader who likes to sit on a three-legged stool, balancing on just two was ultimately frustrating.

Paul Kane's *Funny Bones* is a collection of those rare beasts, the humorous horror story. For those people who really dislike this sub-genre, stop reading now, because Kane actually pulls the rabbit out of the hat more often than not.

The stars of the show are the two paranormal detectives Dalton Quayle and Humphrey Pemberton: in the three stories in which the bungling duo appear ('Master of the White Worms',

'The Sheepshank Redemption', 'Temple of Deadly Danger'), they battle with evil worms, weresheep, and Quayle's arch-nemesis Siphilati. Attempting to cross Sherlock Holmes with Indiana Jones could have been an unmitigated disaster. However, the writing manages to transcend mere pastiche and enters its own bizarre world where all the tropes of detective, Hammer and adventure films are ruthlessly abused with pithy asides and groan-worthy puns. 'All the Rage' – about a couture collection that runs amok – is much more savage and sly, while 'Dracula in Love' provides a neat twist to the conundrum faced by all vampires. Less successful were the 'Bones Brothers' and 'The Last Temptation of Alice Crump', but Kane can be forgiven much for the exuberance and flair shown in Quayle and Pemberton's triptych.

[Available from 95 Compass Crescent, Old Whittington, Chesterfield, S41 9LX]

James Lovegrove – *Gig*

Reviewed by Dave M. Roberts

PS Publishing, Harrogate, 2004, 138 · 129pp, £35.00, h/b, ISBN 1 902880 83 8

Gig is a novel consisting of two interconnected novellas, *Gig: Mik* and *Gig: Kim*. These are published back to back (as per the old Ace doubles), and we are told that they can be read in either order. There is little to push the reader to either one or the other first.

The band God Dog is ending a long tour by returning to their home city, where they have never performed, for an end-of-tour stadium concert. Both novellas cover the day of the concert from just before the band's arrival to the concert itself. *Gig: Mik* is centred on the band's lead singer Mik Dyer, *Gig: Kim* on God Dog's most obsessive fan Kim Reid.

Both halves take you on a tour of Rotor City. *Mik* to trace his childhood with his closest (possibly only) friend Dave, to provide background of just why it is that God Dog have never played there and *Kim* in order to carry out instructions she supposes she received from Mik during a drug trip.

The book is self-consciously structured and plays heavily on its palindromic form, with the two halves moving from the cover to the climactic events at the centre of the book. The chapters are paired across the two stories and Kim is portrayed as an equivalent but inverted Mik, the obsessive musician and the obsessive fan. Palindromes are distributed liberally throughout, most obviously in the chapter titles, which if you like looking for that sort of thing is quite fun. There is a danger, though, that this can get in the way of the actual story, and it can occasionally become irritating.

This structure proves to be slightly unbalanced as *Gig: Kim* is, on its own, a much stronger novella than *Gig: Mik*. Apart from

revisiting a pivotal event from Mik's childhood and introducing the abusive father, *Gig: Mik* amounts to little more than a day in the life of a band at the end of a long tour. It's no big surprise they don't all get on as well as they might. *Gig: Kim*, on the other hand, is a much denser affair. As she moves through the city we are introduced to the nostalgia of the place. There are gangs who are associated with particular bands, but all from the sixties. The Doom Rats are a group of God Dog fans who are only interested in the two albums they made before leaving Rotor City. Kim's alienation from all of these groups becomes representative of her alienation from life generally and there is a very real sense of a person who is on a mission she knows to be wrong, yet finds herself unable to move from her chosen path. The city represents the past, which is paradoxically the one place from which you cannot escape and to which you cannot return. Mik and Kim are placed at opposite ends of this dilemma.

There are hints that the instructions Kim received may not have been as illusory as it would first appear. This, along with much else leaches between the two stories. They complement each other well, and the reading of *Gig: Kim* is greatly enhanced by the reading of *Gig: Mik*. I strongly suspect the reverse would have been true had I read the stories the other way round.

The way the novel is presented may be a little tricksy, but I'm not convinced that it would have worked better in any other form. This is an intriguing, if not entirely successful book, but its merits far outweigh its flaws.

[Available from www.pspublishing.co.uk]

Ian McDonald – *River of Gods*

Reviewed by Paul N. Billinger

Simon & Schuster, London, 2004, 583pp, £12.99, t/b, ISBN 0 7432 5620 0



A body floats down the Ganga river: turning in the current, slowly unwrapping a sari and disappearing into the early morning light. An ordinary body in an extraordinary place: Varanasi in the year 2047, a body dumped in the river by the young wannabe-gangster Shiv. As he drives off to sell the ovaries he removed from the body we are introduced to the city and to this future India, a place of heat, noise and crowds – a place of seeming chaos. The discarded body works beautifully as a potent metaphor for this book, incorporating life, death and rebirth.

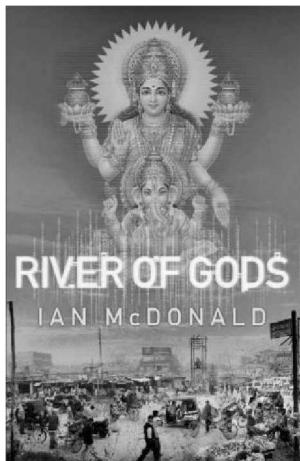
McDonald's captivating novel is not only an exploration of

India but of m-star theory, a message from the past (which may also be from the future), and the fate of a small idol on a Varanasi roundabout. The novel interweaves the tales of ten diverse and dispersed people – including a Krishna Cop, stand-up comic, drop-out genius, ambitious reporter, prime-ministerial aide and a nute (surgically altered to be gender-neutral) – all played out against the backdrop of a looming war, ostensibly over water, between two Indian states.

These tales are not told in a rigid, formulaic way, but much more organically, weaving in and through each other. Shiv's journey into the crush-hour traffic of Varanasi exemplifies this, being without compromise: the sights, sounds and smells of the city come at a tremendous rush; full immersion in the Indian culture. Initially this is made even more daunting by McDonald's use of language, mixing English, Hindi, Hinglish and construct

words in a torrential, free-flowing, rhythmic way. There is a temptation to analyse this, to break the flow and attempt to understand each individual, unfamiliar word (and to anyone with little knowledge of India, its myths, religions and history, there will be many). To do this would be wrong: on first reading trust the author and plunge yourself in the flow. On repeat readings – and this is a book which demands more than one – there is less urge to know, precisely, each word's meaning and I suspect that this should not be done. Although a glossary is included this appears deliberately vague and incomplete (it would be better to use the glossary in any of William Dalrymple's India books).

With this multitude of narratives and lush language the book could be confusing and hard to follow. It is not. Each chapter signals the lead character and with their strength and vitality they soon become individually memorable and easily differentiated. The initial confusion on first exposure is found not just by the reader but by the characters as well, with, for example, Lisa – an American scientist new to India – coming to realise "this was a



thing she was discovering about this alien world. It only looked like chaos. Things got done and done well". And things within the narrative are done very well indeed, with the plotlines mixing and building towards a climax, both of the individual and combined stories, often in unexpected and poignantly tragic ways.

McDonald's most memorable previous novel, *Chaga*, has some similarities to *River of Gods* in that it shows the effect of science on an Earth culture (Kenya in the former), an approach which is much more successful than when he is using a more traditional far-future setting as in *Out on Blue Six* or *Ares Express*. *Chaga* and, possibly, *Necroville* are superb novels but *River of Gods* exceeds them both: never has McDonald written one which is quite so brilliant or pulsating with life. Here, he truly captures the marvellous, chaotic energy of India, which when melded with such an imaginative and original storyline has produced one of the most captivating and enjoyable books of the year.

George Mann – *The Human Abstract*

Reviewed by Niall Harrison

It is often said that science fiction is a genre in dialogue with itself. It's true that ideas and themes recur, as authors respond to the works of their predecessors. In fact, there are surely those who would argue that this strong connection with the past is (perhaps paradoxically) one of science fiction's most appealing qualities.

The Human Abstract – George Mann's first published fiction, although not his first published writing – takes us to Copernicus, a quiet backwater in a human-colonised galaxy, to confront a not dissimilar historical dialogue on a societal scale. The prologue, in the form of an excerpt from a history of the colonies written by one Friederik Roch, informs the reader that the colony was first terraformed by machines, not humans. Then, in the story's present, we are introduced to our protagonist, Rehan Mihajlovic, who muses that books are 'footprints or impressions, the graffiti of history [...] they allow the dead to speak'.

Consequently, it's not a great surprise to find that Mihajlovic is a dealer in antiquarian books, and that the plot, initially at least, centres around the sale of a notable collection after the death of its owner. Soon enough we find that, amongst other things, the collection contains a first edition of the Roch, and that it differs from the version we were shown in the prologue. Cross-referencing with some other titles in the collection leads Mihajlovic to conclude that some events in the colony's past have indeed been written out of history, and sets him on the path towards discovering what those events were.

Thereafter the story unfolds as a mystery, with the mild-

Telos, Tolworth, 2004, 133pp, £7.99, p/b, ISBN 1-903889-65-0

mannered Mihajlovic cast in the role of reluctant investigator. Mann's writing is good (his description sometimes better, his dialogue sometimes worse), his subject is interesting, and his pacing is brisk. I have some reservations about the ending, which comes perhaps a touch too close to normalising for my taste, but on the whole this is solid work.

However, for me the most interesting aspect of the book was the feel of it. *The Human Abstract* is set a long time from now (reference is made to our sun going nova), but it seems to me that it remains a defiantly old-fashioned style of future. Als exist, for instance, but if there has been a singularity it hasn't affected people's day-to-day lives; their affairs feel contemporary, albeit with a shiny technological coating. And whilst Mann is clearly aware of recent sf – most explicitly *Stone* by Adam Roberts – I think I also caught references to older antecedents as diverse as *The Fifth Head of Cerberus* and the later *Foundation* novels.

Not original, then? Perhaps not. It's certainly not cutting-edge; Mann works within the genre, unswayed by slipstreams or interstices. Still, no story is truly original, and *The Human Abstract* is an enjoyable remix of some common and not-so-common ideas. Whilst it may not break new ground it reminds us, with pride, of the importance of our genre's heritage.

[Available from www.telos.co.uk]

L. E. Modesitt – *Darknesses*

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

This is only the second volume in *The Corean Chronicles*, and yet there is already a discernable familiarity about the plot in which Alucius, a herder of the Iron Valleys, conscripted into the militia, leaves his home to fight an invading enemy force, destroys them and their magical weapons with his Talent and, with the help of the mysterious beings known as soarers, destroys a greater, magical evil. This time around, the enemy is Aellyan Edyss, the nomad warlord and leader of the Myrmidons, who has discovered and resurrected the flying mounts and skylances of the original pre-Cataclysm Myrmidon warriors, and is intent on conquest, beginning with the land of Deforya. Meanwhile, the Iron Valleys

Orbit, London, 2004, 551pp, £7.99, p/b, ISBN 1-84149-259-0

militia have, for reasons of politics and trade, and against the will of the troopers, become part of the forces of Lanchrona, and are now to be known as the Northern Guard to distinguish them from Lanchrona's Southern Guard.

Alucius finds himself made Overcaptain of the squads of Northern Guards who will be sent to Deforya to defend it against the advancing nomads. Summoned to a meeting with the Lord-Protector of Lanchrona, he discovers a new enemy residing in the Lord-Protector's palace. From the first, Alucius is aware that his being sent to Deforya is not as simple as it seems, for he faces several attempts on his life that he surmises must have more to do

with his Talent than his position in the militia.

Just as in the first volume of this series, the reader is given a detailed account of the political infighting, economy, and geography of the world of Corus. The reader is also given an incredible amount of detail about the daily lives of Alucius and his troopers – Alucius spends a deal of time washing his clothes – which holds up the action. The real problem with all this detail, however, is that it results in the reader knowing a great deal about Alucius and very little about any of the other characters whose actions are crammed into short chapters between the longer sections featuring the protagonist. Aellyan Edyss, who is causing

such consternation, remains a two-dimensional figure. The Lord-Protector fares a little better, but to a large extent the creation of believable characters has been neglected in favour of descriptions of journeys, places and weapons. The overall plot of the series does advance in that Alucius discovers more about the evil that threatens Corus, and it is made clear to the reader that he is more than just a simple herder, but the structure of this book is so similar to that of its predecessor that it does not bode well for future volumes. Fantasy is often accused of being formulaic and it does not need books that add to this largely erroneous opinion of the genre.

Caiseal Mor – *The Well of Yearning*

Reviewed by Lesley Hatch

Pocket Books, London, 2004, 515pp, £6.99, pb, ISBN 0-7434-6856-2

The story here is narrated by an old storytelling woman, to an unidentified and unnamed listener whose reason for visiting is not made clear. In any event, he (or she) provides the framework for the events that the storyteller relates, and a strange set of events they are.

The tale takes place some time after the Crusades, and centres around the quest for vengeance (amongst other things) undertaken by a Knight of the Hospital following his expulsion from the order for failing in his duties. He blames this on one man, another Templar, who was born in Ireland and raised there, and the expelled Knight travels there to complete his quest. However, once there, he discovers that things are not all they seem.

There are ancient forces on the move, with the Queen of the Night (one of the ancient deities of Ireland) amassing her armies so that she can attack the mortals of the land, and she enlists the help of the aforementioned Knight in her plans. She promises him the High-Kingship of Ireland and the crown of England if he will help her. Unfortunately, he has, prior to meeting her, unleashed the fury of the Watchers, two immortals who have been imprisoned in a well for centuries (in worm shape) and they are now free to rampage wherever they see fit.

Then there is a young Benedictine monk, in Ireland

accompanying his superior, a scribe, who is dying. The young monk is entrusted with a quest to find two particular ancient books, which are desired by several people. Add to this the fact that the monk has occasional glimpses of the future, and things begin to get complicated.

And then you get the young woman from the Middle East seeking a cure for her husband's amnesia; an immortal priestess; a host of Redcaps (servants to the Queen of the Night); a couple of talking ravens; and various other characters to create a backdrop for the main action, which is to defeat the Normans and the Redcaps once and for all.

I wish I could say that the story worked for me, as a whole, but I am sorry to say that it did not. Somehow the main story got lost amongst a host of minor incidents, such as the random transformation of various Normans into trees, and the pursuit of the young Benedictine for the books he carries. The novel concludes with one quest ending and another starting for some of the characters, with another two books to follow in this series. I found the story a little confusing, and the cast of characters was so vast that it had me checking back to see who was who and what had happened to them on more than one occasion. Not a book for me, I'm afraid.

Larry Niven – *Ringworld's Children*

Reviewed by Andrew A. Adams

Oberon, London, 2004, 367pp, £16.99, hb, ISBN 1 84149 170 5

Ringworld is one of the classics of 'Big Science' sf. An enormous structure creating a sense of wonder and allowing an author huge scope for action and adventure. Unfortunately, Larry Niven's original specification for his *Ringworld* had some problems and so he keeps returning to the place in order to fix his creation. Thus, there are now four books in the *Ringworld* sequence from 1970, 1981, 1996 and 2004.

Ringworld's Children starts very soon after the end of *The Ringworld Throne*. Since I'd read the previous ones I decided to read *Children* without going back to them. While it is possible to read it this way I don't actually recommend it. Much better to read at least *The Ringworld Throne* again unless you have an excellent memory for plot developments. Niven gives sufficient information about the background to explain what's going on, without becoming boring, but I'm sure I missed out on some of the context.

What it would be impossible to do is to read *Ringworld's Children* without ever having read the rest of the sequence, and indeed without having read some of his other Known Space sequence. This is one of the problems with large 'Future History' type sets. It can become impossible for an author to write grand scope pieces without having to rely on information from previous books. To really grasp what's going on here one has to know about Kzin, ARM, Protectors, Pierson's Puppeteers and a bunch of other stuff. So, not one for Larry Niven newcomers.

Having been rather disappointed with *The Ringworld Throne*, I approached *Ringworld's Children* with some trepidation. Book

three had shown signs of trying to fix mistakes in previous books, with a long, rambling tale full of sexual fantasies and other wish-fulfilment. Luckily, *Ringworld's Children* is a much shorter and more realistic tale. The sex is kept to a minimum and doesn't get in the way of the plot. The writing is much tighter, although at times it seems as if the author is impatient to get to the denouement and the breakneck pace skips over major events with a bare description. In fact, in many ways the mistakes Niven seems to be trying to fix this time are as much the poor writing of *The Ringworld Throne* as the plot and science holes. While maybe swinging too far the other way at times, this has led to a very readable book. The technobabble is kept to a minimum, although much of that is possible because the 'magic' level of technology is already well established in both Known Space and on the *Ringworld* itself. The plot is driven by character rather than by technology, which is a welcome development from one of the classic techno-sf writers. In itself this inspires me to check out some of his other recent books, since I'd pretty much given up on Niven after *Throne*.

The plot manages to have some intriguing twists and turns, although because of the breakneck pace the treachery, betrayal and personal agenda don't have quite the impact they might have if more time had been spent building the characters' relationships. It's difficult to care that someone gets betrayed by a person they've been lying to since they met a few days ago, especially since both sides were, or should have been, very wary about their circumstances anyway.

Known Space can be a fun place to visit, although I wouldn't want to live there. If you've read the rest then this won't be a disappointment, although needing to re-read *The Ringworld Throne* first might put some people off. I hesitate to say that this will complete the *Ringworld* sequence, although it looks like

that's Niven's intent. Certainly there's a final explanation of Teela Brown's 'luck' that pays homage to Dawkin's genetic theories as well as tying in nicely with the Protector background in Known Space.

A satisfying read that keeps you turning the pages.

Marianne De Pierres – *Code Noir* [H]

Reviewed by Colin Bird

Following swiftly on from *Nylon Angel* we have the second volume of a trilogy of Parish Plessis adventures, complete with a map of the chaotic Australian megacity, the Tert. The author's website promises the third volume in six months or so.

Parish may have survived the gangwars of the preceding book with her abrasive charms intact but the Cabal turn up unexpectedly on her doorstep demanding goma (blood debt) for saving her ass. They want her to find some missing karadji (gangster shaman) and on the way she can execute Loyl Daac, an ex-Cabal member who experiments with genetic manipulation. Meanwhile, the clock is ticking down to King Tide, a mother of a flood coming the Tert's way in a few days.

Parish Plessis remains the same resourceful Amazonian character with attitude to spare. But in this book she's changing, especially as she battles the parasitic Eskædlim which infected her in *Nylon Angel*. The Eskædlim is an alien creature (whose origin is never really explained) that feeds off adrenaline and causes its host to lose control and become a shape-shifter. The Cabal offer Parish the hope of finding a cure and she soon finds evidence that

Orbit, London, 2004, 311pp, £6.99, pb, ISBN 1-84149-257-1

Dr Anna Schaub, the scientist who accidentally released the Eskædlim parasite, is still alive and a devoted follower of Loyl Daac.

Parish follows her leads into Dis, and finds a seemingly uninhabitable slum town covered with wild-tek, bio-mechanical pollution. As she gets closer to her target she realises she has to come to terms with what's happening to her body before she can tackle the challenge the Cabal has given her.

For fans of the first book this is more of the same with a twist of darkness as Parish battles her demons both internally and out on the mean streets of the Tert, this time delving into some new areas of the megacity. As the characters and setting have already been established De Pierres concentrates on developing the plot and there's not much time for background detail so you have to keep up. The end result is a tad less involving than *Nylon Angel* – the thrill of discovery is gone. However, Parish Plessis remains an enjoyable creation and De Pierres has a knack for spinning her tales at breakneck pace.

Stefan Petrucha – *The Tunnel at the End of the Light* [S]

Reviewed by Niall Harrison

The Tunnel at the End of the Light is what you might describe as second-generation sharecropping. It's one of a number of Telos novellas chronicling the ongoing adventures of American ex-GI Honore Lechasseur and his amnesiac companion Emily Blandish. The characters were introduced in one of the *Doctor Who* novellas for which Telos is best known (*The Cabinet of Light*), and as you might expect from this fact, these adventures involve a certain amount of time-travel.

Lechasseur, you see, is a 'time-sensitive': he can visualise the timeline of any person he comes into contact with, seeing past and future events superimposed on to the present. Blandish, meanwhile is a 'time-channeller'. She cannot perceive time in the way that Lechasseur can, but she can move through it. Together, they fight crime! Or at least, on the evidence of this offering, solve horror- and sci-fi-tinted mysteries featuring monsters that wouldn't be out of place in a standard *Doctor Who* story.

As *The Tunnel at the End of the Light* opens, our heroes are making a place for themselves in post-war London, working partly as private investigators, partly as all-round fixers. Early in the story, they are approached by a man who is convinced that his life is in danger. The man, going by the name of Randolph Crest, turns out to be a poet, and certain that he'll be the next victim of a savage murderer whose actions have been reported in the press. More intriguingly, Crest tweaks Lechasseur's timesense; there's something

Telos, Folio, 2004, 104pp, £7.99, pb, ISBN 1-803889-37-7

odd about the man, but what?

Petrucha, from his biography, seems primarily to be a screenplay and comics writer, and this novella has a feel more commonly associated with those media: long on action and short on atmosphere. His monsters, strange subterranean creatures with elements of dog, lizard and ape, are effective, and his pacing is brisk, with just the right amount of story to fill out the length of the book (although there is a slight feeling that plot coupons are handed out just a little too conveniently). The weaknesses here are perhaps more those of the material than the writer; as ongoing characters, Lechasseur and Blandish can only develop in the smallest of increments, and somewhat inevitably they have a nemesis who turns out to have a hand in the foul play. The story builds to a classic moral choice – one of the common time-travel questions, along the lines of 'if you could kill Hitler as a baby, would you?' – but the dilemma is simplistically drawn, with no real doubt about the outcome.

Still, it's a diverting enough adventure, and for the Telos audience, reading with a greater knowledge of the series and the background, *The Tunnel at the End of the Light* will probably prove an enjoyable read. Others, however, are advised that they may find it unsatisfying.

[Available from www.telos.co.uk]

Philip Pullman – *Lyra's Oxford*

David Fickling Books, Oxford, 2003, 66pp (+ fold-out map), £9.99, hb, ISBN 0-85660699-0

Nicholas Tucker – *Darkness Visible: Inside the World of Philip Pullman*

Wizard Books, Duxford, 2003, 207pp, £10.99, pb, ISBN 1-84046-482-8

Reviewed by Andrew M. Butler

Philip Pullman has become a phenomenon in children's fiction, rivalled only by Jacqueline Wilson and trumped by Harry Potter and its merchandising. With films on the way of *His Dark Materials*, he may yet overtake Potter. Pullman and Rowling have both put children's fiction on the news agenda, have won awards and of

course have enormous crossover audiences of children and adults. Both have also begun to accrue the barnacles of critical commentary – with probably about ten critical books on Potter by now and one and a third devoted to Pullman. The third is the section on Pullman by Millicent Lenz in *Alternative Worlds* in

Fantasy Fiction (2001) and the one is by Nicholas Tucker.

Tucker is a former teacher and educational psychologist, and is currently a lecturer at the University of Sussex. He has written widely on both classic and contemporary children's fiction, contributing to such specialist journals as *Signal* and *Children's Literature in Education*. Here he attempts to survey the entire terrain of Pullman's fiction, from *Calathea* (1978) to *The Amber Spyglass* (2000) and *Puss in Boots* (2000), sometimes bringing his background in psychology to bear. For example, he suggests that Pullman's early loss of his father in an aircraft and then his acquisition of a stepfather could explain the treatment of fathers in the novels, and that his relationship with his mother, who at times seems to resent the young Pullman's presence in her London flat, echoes the relationship of Lyra and Mrs Coulter and *The Broken Bridge*'s Ginny and her mother. He also links the demons of the trilogy to Jung's notion of the anima/animus, although stops short of connecting the Spectres of Cittagazza with the Jungian shadow.

Inevitably in such a book, some of the novels are rather skimmed over: *Calathea* merits two pages, and the disowned *The Haunted Storm* is mentioned but not even named. All the other books are given a plot summary and some discussion, but about a quarter of the volume is devoted to the Sally Lockhart quartet and half to the *His Dark Materials* trilogy. This is probably as it should be. Tucker notes the increasing radicalisation of Sally, and like many readers is disappointed by the less radical politics of *The Tin Princess* (1990), where Pullman steps back from what teeters on the edge of preaching to a more traditional adventure in an imaginary European country.

The bulk of the book is an analysis of *His Dark Materials*, with useful plot summaries of all three volumes for those who may not have read them recently, and a discussion of Pullman's most important literary forebears: John Milton, William Blake and Heinrich von Kleist, whose "On the Marionette Theatre" is reprinted from the *Times Literary Supplement* translation as an appendix. There is also a useful comparison of the trilogy to the Harry Potter phenomenon, and an intriguing examination of C. S. Lewis's work that concludes – rightly I think – greater kin between the two than Pullman's comments might suggest.

A shortcoming of the book is that, aside from occasional notes of precursors to the trilogy, there is no sense of Pullman's oeuvre either as an organic whole or a series of contradictions. Tucker notes that *The Ruby in the Smoke* (1985) begins with Sally Lockhart about to kill a man and that *The White Mercedes/The Butterfly Tattoo* (1992) begins with Chris Marshall meeting the girl he will kill, but does not link the two, nor does he link this to Will Parry as murderer at the start of *The Subtle Knife* (1997). The discussion of free will, predestination and physics in *Clockwork* (1996) could also be profitably linked with these themes in the trilogy. It is also a shame that there is no index. Tucker is clearly a champion of Pullman's work, not feeling let down by the ending of *The Amber Spyglass*, and disagreeing only with some of Pullman's statements on organised religion. Despite the book's wealth of references, this

is clearly not an academic book, rather something that the lay reader and even the late teenager should be able to read from and enjoy.

Towards the end of his discussion of the trilogy, Tucker notes how, unlike Tolkien's work, we don't get the endless details, languages and histories of Lyra's world. Perhaps he wrote too soon, for Pullman has compiled *Lyra's Oxford*, including a short story, an entry from a tourist guide about Jericho, Oxford, a brochure for a cruise ship, a map of Oxford and a postcard – although the latter is from Mary Malone's Oxford.

I've long thought that the delay to the publication and the eventual length of *The Amber Spyglass* suggested some reluctance on Pullman's part to complete the narrative which had found him. The possible endings – and if you haven't read the trilogy and plan to, stop reading now – were that Lyra and Will live happily ever after or that they part. Wish-fulfilment or tragedy. Pullman, stuck in the logic of his novel, chose the Douglas Sirk melodrama route of separating the star-cross'd lovers and ensuring that It Could Never Be. (Presumably given the many-worlds theorem, there is another universe where It Actually Was.) The best that Lyra seems to be able to hope for, having now been sent to school, is a blue-stocking existence. Surely Lyra deserves more than that?

But just as Pullman suggested in his *Locus* interview with Tanya Brown that he wanted to write more Sally Lockhart books (and Tucker quotes this from Tanya's website), so it seems likely that there will be more Lyra books. Whether this proves to be a mistaken yielding to public demand, or an artistic triumph, remains to be seen. I confess my doubts whilst itching to read it. In the meantime we have this teaser, a short story called "Lyra and the Birds" in which Lyra leads a witch's dyrron to the house of Sebastian Makepeace in the Jericho area of Oxford. Presumably the new adventures will explain the identities of these two characters, and will involve a meeting at the Café Antalya, Süleiman Square, Smyrna, at 11 am on Monday 11 May. If Pullman has been reading his T.S. Eliot then one of the parties will be a merchant, dealing in currants.

This is a slight volume, and the story is not Pullman's finest hour. The postcard at first sight could be in the running for the most boring in the world, were it not that its four images are of Mary's college and the street where she lived, the place where Will cut his way through into another universe and the bench in the Botanical Gardens where he and Lyra commune across universes. The page from the tourist guide is amusing, and the verisimilitudinous adverts and other materials on the map are also satisfying (and reminiscent of the now defunct illustrated version of *Count Karlstein* (1991)). I'm not convinced that this is worth a tenner, but it is in the end a rather pleasing object to have.

Rudy Rucker – *Frek and the Elixir*

Reviewed by Gary Wilkinson

It's 3003 and the world is a very different place. Almost every single animal and plant species that we know was eliminated hundreds of years ago by the all-powerful NuBioCom. They even purged the DNA records from all databases. Now there are only a few heavily genetically engineered species. People live in houses that are grown like trees, their only pets are dogs – that all look the same – and they eat from 'anyfruit' trees and cut slices from their 'anymeat' that continuously replenishes itself.

The book's hero is 12 year old Frek. He's unusual in that he comes from a single-parent household. His father, chiding against the authority and conformity of the current regime, left for the asteroids several years ago. Frek seems to live a happy enough life

for, New York, 2004, 47pp, \$27.95, hb, ISBN 0 765 31058 9

with his mother and two sisters but deep down he knows something is not right. Suddenly his life changes when he finds a strange device under his bed. This object draws the attention of the 'councillors' (read cops) who serve Gov, the controller of the nearest city. This object is a 'flying saucer': inside is an alien cuttlefish that tells Frek he will save the world and find the Elixir that will restore all of Earth's natural species. Soon Frek finds himself on the run to escape having a lobotomy at the hands of the councillors. He first goes to the mysterious Grullo woods full of unusual experiments in genetic engineering. From there Frek will go on into space and beyond into parallel universes to fulfil his quest.

In many ways I found this a frustrating book as it does not seem to know what it wants to be. It has a child protagonist and in many ways it is a children's novel, but it uses a huge number of made-up words (like the 'anytree' example above) and advanced scientific concepts that any child is going to become frustrated with if they keep having to flick to the glossary at the back. Any advanced science is indistinguishable from magic and this seems unable to distinguish itself from fantasy. It has the classic quest plot structure for a start – Rucker has obviously been studying his Hero's Journey.

It's also unbelievably twee. Even fairy tales need a bit of grit and beef to them. The 'grullo' – genetically engineered intelligent 'kittens' with only a human-like head and arms plus a

tail make the hobbits of *Lord of the Rings* look like hard-bitten orcs. I'm afraid I found their saccharine presence utterly nauseating.

There's a humorous, knowing tone to *Frek and the Elixir* and there is some fairly well-aimed satire targeting such diverse topics as corporate culture, fashion, small-town conformity and television among others, but this does not really go far enough to classify it as an actual satirical novel. Frek's family is well-drawn and Frek himself is an appealing character. However, in the end this one just did not work for me, continually falling between two stools.

Caroline Stevermer – *A Scholar of Magics*

Reviewed by Pamela Stuart

Imagine a fictitious University in an Edwardian England which gradually becomes apparent as situated on an alternate history-line...

Into the idyllic cloistered life of the all-male Glasscastle University, where magic is taught against a background of Latin chants and pealing bells, where top hats take the place of mortarboards, and most areas are out of bounds to strangers, is transplanted a solitary American sharpshooter, Samuel Lambert, employed as a technician in the top-secret Agincourt project. Totally barred from magical studies because "no American can learn magic; if they were capable, then they could not have crossed the water in the first place", he knows only that when called upon he must fire whatever weapons they hand him at the targets they set up. He is enchanted by the place but totally barred from entering as a student; not only is he American, he can't speak Latin either.

Enter the Provost's sister Jane, from France, where she teaches mathematics at a women's University, which also teaches magic. She drives a motor-car, too, suitably attired in goggles, gauntlets and veiled hat, and soon sweeps Lambert off his feet. Her main

Tor, New York, 2004, 300pp, \$14.95, hb, ISBN 0 765 30308 6

aim is to force the researcher Dr. Fell to leave his projects and Time Studies to take up his important place as one of the Wardens of the World, a duty which he prefers to avoid.

Samuel and Jane soon find themselves united in trying to trace Dr. Fell, who has vanished, and whose rooms have been ransacked by an unknown villain in a bowler hat. Also on his trail are two of his students who desperately need their final marks before the end of term. While they are still trying to trace him, the Provost also vanishes, ostensibly en route to Ludlow, and it appears that both have been abducted by someone who wants the secret weapon developed by the Agincourt project.

While Samuel and Jane try to trace the missing men, the missing documents and the secret weapon, using such normal things as trains, motor-cars and policemen, the villains are playing dirty with magic, and using that secret weapon for evils its designers never intended.

A lightweight story, but gently amusing. A good choice for a long train-journey or those interminable hours at the airport waiting for your flight.

Christopher Varian – *Dr Tim (Book One)*

Reviewed by Gary Wilkinson

Well, this odd... The description on the back cover runs as follows: "Book One documents the journey of Dr. Tim an unassuming genius on the run for what he knows. Travel with Dr Tim across the globe eluding capture. Follow Dr. Tim through the galaxy as he tries to return to earth. Watch Dr Tim escape danger armed only with a nervous stomach and a No. 2 pencil." Well... sort of.

Physically it is a series of cartoons – one a page – with a caption underneath. These run into a loose, very loose, plot. The 'story' they tell is of Dr Tim, short and cute (who reminded me of the old children's cartoon character Bod) as he sort of battles with evil scientists and then travels to alien worlds. Various running characters are introduced – including a 50s thug, a femme fatale/love interest, an evil nemesis and an alien – for a few cartoons, then mysteriously dropped. I'm sure these cartoons are supposed to be funny. However this is humour, Jim, but not as we know it. To be fair some actually do raise a smile. There is one I found quite funny where Tim is staring into a 'magic shop' which has a prominently displaced voodoo doll of himself riddled with pins with the caption: 'This explains a lot'. However, the majority

Hampro, Southampton U.S.A., 2003, 110pp, £7.95, pb, ISBN 0 9721091 0 2

left me very much with a puzzled 'eh?'. Actually I think this would have run better if, like a lot of these sort of cartoons, it had been run one at a time in some sort of publication or daily on the internet. Even the sublime *Far Side* (which I think *Dr Tim* may be aspiring to) loses its impact and humour if many are read one after the other.

The cartoons themselves are drawn with a simple but appealing style, Photoshop shaded with grey. This is a pity as I think some inventive use of colour would have made them much more interesting and the 'greyness' definitely brings down some of the more wacky visual ideas. However this would have probably been prohibitively expensive. I could be wrong, but *Dr Tim* has all the appearances of either being a self-published book or at the very least published by a very small press.

Overall *Dr Tim* is very cute but, for me, just not funny. You might have differing opinions and humour is very subjective. (I, for instance, loath *Garfield* but it's very popular). You can however see for yourself if *Dr Tim* would appeal by checking out some sample pages via the website at etompro.com.

Mark Walker – *Amida: A Novel*

Reviewed by K. V. Bailey

Formally titled 'a novel', this is the story of the siege of Amida, which occurred in the 4th century A.D. when forces of the Neo-

Pineapple Publications, Amersham, 2004, 264pp, £14.99, hb, ISBN 0 9547473 0 5

Persian Sasanid empire found their expansionist surge southwards into what is now Iraq impeded by this Roman frontier

fortress town. It is straight, not alternative, history, based on accounts of the contemporary historian Amianus, but holds additional interest for a reviewer and readers of genre literature both for its form and for its exploration of the numinous experiences of many of its characters. The narration of these experiences, as well as of the progress of the siege, is through first-person documentation: letters, exhortations, sermons, soliloquies, recounted dreams and visions. There are passages of dialogue between the garrison commander Horatius, last of his legendary line, and Lars Familiaris, the line's household god; and there are manifestations of the deific entity Mithras. Here, then, is a strand of metaphysical and often fantastic imagery woven into the historic action, episodes of which are actually observed and recounted by the ghostly Persian ally, Prince Atrabates, battle-slain early in the story.

The plot pivots around several personal involvements: the avenging of Atrabates; the hostility existing between the Italian-Roman tribune, Horatius, and the Gallic-Roman tribune, Marcellus; above all, the love affair of Horatius and Helena, she being the wife of a Roman officer who has changed sides and is now in the Persian camp. Much of the progress of the siege is reflected in letters between the lovers, carried through the lines by Helena's maid-servant. These, and such passages as Marcellus's address to his troops, contain swathes of personal back-story, slowing down the main narrative but filling out the characters.

Marcellus and Horatius are of different temperaments, Marcellus always on the offensive, Horatius favouring defensive tactics – that is until he mounts a foray to rescue Helena from a death sentence. The usages of ballista and siege tower are described in detail, the latter device having the final say.

Historically, the Neo-Persian Sassanid empire did not last long, and Rome was in irreversible decay. Mark Walker so shapes his novel as to mirror the inevitable decline of great powers, giving expression to this theme particularly in the 'Ecstatic Vision of the Future' of the Mithraic High Priest, Magus. The revelation is that monotheistic religions of dominating powers are exclusive and cruelly intolerant, while pluralistic faiths, embracing a pantheon of gods, nymphs of the streams and forest-dwelling presences, are infinitely more tolerant, offering a joyful existence. Symbolically apt is the fantasised fate of the Lars figurine, plucked from the rubble of Amida by a mahout of the Persian elephants and eventually taken on to the Orient, where, it speculates, "I may be accepted alongside all the strange gods of India [in] a place where every village and every household still has its own protecting deity."

[Available from www.pineapplepubs.co.uk]

Ian Watson – *Mockymen*

Reviewed by L. J. Hurst

Golden Gryphon Press, Urbana (USA), 2003, 324pp, \$26.95, hb, ISBN 1-930846-21-5



It's not a question of what Ian Watson has been reading – it's a question of what he has been thinking. Who else could have combined reincarnated Nazis, British secret agents, and mind-stealing aliens – thrown them together – and then let them fight it out? And who but Ian Watson would have provided each of them with an apparently rational reason for their actions, even if none of them know it at the time? Nor might any other of our authors, in sf or out, throw in such extraordinary historical revisionism – *Mockymen* includes a major rehabilitation of Vidkun Quisling.

Watson is not alone in this way of working – other titles coming from the small Golden Gryphon Press, such as Nancy Kress's *Nothing Human*, seem to have the same underlying principles in examining what it is to be human, and perhaps the same near-future history (it is bleak). Equally, with some of his earlier works now being reissued, readers struck by the originality of *Mockymen* will be able to discover that leaps of imagination hidden by intellectual sleights of hand are a feature of Ian Watson's work (*Death Hunter*, extraordinarily, is based on a piece of linguistic confusion that argues that death and dying are not related). Since the blurb on the inside sleeve is a long synopsis of the novel I would infer that his editor at Golden Gryphon is more interested in ideas as well; otherwise the jacket would play up the thriller elements of the novel – which starts with a long horror story involving occult rites in Norway intended to reactivate the Nazi spirit and lead to a child being tortured (this was the *Interzone* story 'Secrets'). The novel jumps to a near present where the Mockymen have landed, taking the form of pure intelligences who occupy the bodies of drug addicts – a new drug of choice wiping out the mind after a period, leaving the body free for use. The government, unable to cope with another depression, is happy to use the new tools offered by the aliens and to suppress opposition, which might be no more than a sort of racial discrimination. On the other hand, as agent Anna Sharman discovers, perhaps the Mockymen's intentions are not

benign. Then, as the stories start tying up, reincarnation comes back. Reincarnation, of course, is another way in which an intelligence takes its place in a body, that body normally being a baby in the womb. Perhaps, though, if the Mockymen can insert themselves in empty adults, so can floating Nazi spirits: the Mockymen's way is not the only way. It just requires knowing how the Nazis would do it. Well, we know how they do it; we've read about occult rites in the first part of the book; the question is, can something be done before the Mockymen put their big plan into action?

At this point it is worth making a diversion as great as between the first two parts of *Mockymen* to mention Eva-Marie Liffner's *Camera* (Harvill, 2003) because her novel (first published in Swedish in 2001) is a thriller with a similar Scandinavian occult underpinning. Unfortunately she does not carry off Watson's trick of stealing the occult roots – the thesis of *Camera* is that in Edwardian London a Swede joins a group of Theosophists involved in murder. Actually, they were just a group of half-pathetic, half lunatic dead-beats and I assume that Ms Liffner has misremembered some of the Masonic readings of the 'Jack the Ripper' murders and misattributed them. That would not matter so much if she had managed Watson's tricks of taking possession of ideas and using them to his own ends.

This is where Ian Watson's extraordinary powers come into their own. The whole premise of the battle against the Mockymen has to be Nazi revisionism – how could the most ghastly occult forces that might have underlaid Hitler and his gang be used in the fight back? Essentially this is a fantastic creation because Ian Watson seems to have created his own Occult Roots Of Nazism. He mentions real individuals but they are not the individuals mentioned in Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke's classic text – yet Artur Dinter, the Gauleiter of Thuringia in the 1920s, before his early expulsion, was an Ariosophist. He might have played the role Watson attributes to him, and Himmler believed in reincarnation.

Ultimately Watson manages to have Nazi principles save the world and I do not believe that he believes a word of it – nevertheless before the threat of the Mockymen he makes it true. He has created a world of his own imagining.

[Available from www.goldengryphon.com]

Kim Wilkins – Autumn Castle

Reviewed by Iain Emsley

In some ways it is difficult to know what to do with the new Kim Wilkins novel, *The Autumn Castle* (Europa Suite book 1). Having successfully carved her name out as a horror writer, she has turned her hand to a serial fantasy. Yet this is not a bog-standard secondary or slipstream world, it becomes the land of fairy tales, an intricately nested doll of stories, or a set of Club Stories. Indeed this novel is one of dovetail joints, as fairyland nestles next to our reality, horror sits side-by-side with fantasy and *märchen* stories sits next to the full-length novel.

Set in an artist's commune in Berlin and the fairy land of Ewigkreis, the novel revolves around the pairing of Christine (a struggling artist whose parents were killed in a road accident) and Mayfridh (the fairy queen who was stolen as a child from her human parents). When Christine concusses herself, she travels to the fairyworld and is brought before the queen to explain herself. Mayfridh gradually recognises her and opens a portal between the two worlds so that both women might move freely. Gradually both come to acknowledge each other and also learn about each other's worlds. However, the worlds are not conjoined; they intersect. As they do so, each affects the other, giving rise to the release of fairy's true magic: story.

Within the overarching story, Wilkins takes time to give the characters their own tales of transformation which eventually link together into the larger plot. She has the understanding that there

Gollancz, London, 2004, 46pp, £17.99, hb, ISBN: 0-575-07574-2

is a kernel of truth to each tale if the listener has enough time to find it. Her linked tales of *Eisengrimm* and *Starlight* explore this to some degree as well as developing a counter-balance to Mayfridh. As well as being transformative stories, they are ones of release. Mayfridh makes contact with her mother which changes her narrative arc but also, on one level, becomes a matricidal tale.

As Christine and Mayfridh's friendship regrows, stories of death and murder lie nested in the actions of Jude, Christine's boyfriend, and Immanuel Ziegler, the commune's landlord. At some level, both are involved with killing and seem to allow Wilkins the chance to create a neat little horror novella which complements the fantasy. In the best tradition of horror, these are not one note stories, in terms of retribution and justice, but ones where the morality is put to the practical test.

Wilkins has taken the essence of the fairy tale and renewed it in her own vision in what rates as her most accomplished novel yet. She manages to reuse the tropes and settings and revitalise them in a new hub of culture in Germany, rather than retracing the exact steps, and in so doing goes back to the oral roots of storytelling – though the written form is, paradoxically, concrete. This is something that Wilkins may yet resolve in further volumes. This book promises so much for the future.

Gene Wolfe – Innocents Aboard

Reviewed by Chris Hill

Innocents Aboard is Gene Wolfe's latest collection, containing 22 stories. The earliest was published 1988, the latest in 2003 (making the subtitle 'new fantasy stories' just a little bit misleading – 'previously uncollected' would be nearer the mark). In his introduction Wolfe states that the collection contains only fantasy and horror, but no sf, which is also arguable; at least four are ultimately sf, even if they do not necessarily feel like that to start with.

As you would expect from Wolfe, there is a wide range of styles. There are fairly straightforward narratives ('The Waif', 'The Night Chough'), legends or fairy stories ('The Legend of Xi Cygnus', 'The Sailor Who Sailed After the Sun'), tall stories ('A Fish Story', 'How the Bishop Sailed to Inniskeen') and ghost stories ('The Friendship Light', 'The Walking Sticks'). As with any collection, not everyone will get equal enjoyment from every story, but any reader will find some things that they like.

The atmospheric and chilling 'The Tree is my Hat' is that staple story of the westerner getting involved in a less developed society that he does not understand as well as he thinks. In tone and content it put me in mind of much of Lucius Shepard, or perhaps Christopher Priest's *Dream Archipelago* stories. 'The Friendship Light' is a creepy story of sibling rivalry, let down by the slightly clumsy execution of the 'twist' ending. In 'The Waif', Earth has been invaded and the remnants of humanity are reduced to a relatively primitive existence. Contact with the aliens is a crime punishable by being burned at the stake. This ultimately tragic story works well because the conclusion is obviously inevitable to everyone but the protagonist.

'The Sailor Who Sailed After the Sun' is, as mentioned above, a fairy story in which a sailor stays on an island paradise while a monkey takes his place on board the ship. The monkey's journey takes him to an unexpected destination in this amusing little tale. In 'Wolfer' a woman who seems to be able to understand her dogs, becomes involved in a plot to return wolves to American

Tor, New York, 2004, 304pp, \$15.95, hb, ISBN: 0-765-30790-1

parklands. The story does rather wear its environmental awareness on its sleeve, but that is not necessarily a bad thing.

'The Night Chough' is a spin-off story from Wolfe's *Long Sun* books in which Silk's pet gets involved in a man's revenge against the murderers of his girl. It is an effective tale in its own right, but will be particularly interesting for those people who have read the relevant books, shedding some light on the bird's relationship with one of the gods. 'A Traveller in Desert Lands' is an effectively creepy story of ancient power, reminiscent of some of Clark Ashton Smith's fantasies (coming from a collection called *New Tales of Zothique* it is perhaps not surprising).

Another fine story is 'The Lost Pilgrim' where a time traveller goes to study a particular part of history but turns up at the wrong time. Not only is his knowledge patchy, but he cannot remember where he was supposed to be. It may take the reader a little time to pick up on what is happening, but you will probably get there ahead of the protagonist, which is part of the fun of the story.

Some of the stories worked less well for this reviewer. I found 'Houston, 1943', about what befalls a boy's spirit when separated from his body, very heavy going. Not dissimilar in tone to Tim Powers' America-set novels, but it seemed muddled and I definitely lost the plot. Somehow I could not take the haunted title implements of 'The Walking Sticks' terribly seriously. 'Pocketsful of Diamonds' strays into Ray Bradbury territory with a story of children dreaming their way into a strange fairground. Alas, it is a territory that Bradbury maps rather better. Of the remaining stories, some are just too slight to really stick in the mind ('A Fish Story', 'Queen') and some I did not feel quite came together ('Slow Children at Play', 'The Wrapper').

So, overall *Innocents Aboard* is an enjoyable collection and any Wolfe fan will find something that they will like. It is unlikely, however, to convert anyone who is not already an aficionado.

Particles

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.

Poul Anderson – *The Boat of a Million Years*

Tor, New York, 2004, 480pp, \$14.95, hb, ISBN 0-765-31024-4
Great quality (as always) paperback re-print from Tor of this classic 1989 novel on the theme of immortality

Isaac Asimov – *I, Robot*

Voyager, London, 2004, 249pp, £6.99, pb, ISBN 0-586-02532-4
Film tie-in edition of Asimov's classic collection of robot stories examining the implications of his three laws of robotics (which means you get Will Smith on the cover looking extremely cool having stolen Angel's leather coat). If you haven't read these, then why not? This was one of the first sf books I remember reading – borrowed from the library – so just look how much of an influence it can have

Neal Asher – *The Skinner*

Tor, New York, 2004, 480pp, \$26.95, hb, ISBN 0-765-30737-5
Great to see Neal Asher being published in America, and in a very handsome hardback edition too. This is his second novel, set on the deadly water-world of Splatterjay (which is one of the best names for a planet around). As with all the author's works, this is recommended. His most recent novel, *Cow!*, was published by Tor UK earlier this year, and was reviewed in Vector 234

James Barclay – *Shadowheart*

Gollancz, London, 2004, 438pp, £6.99, pb, ISBN 0-575-07544-9
There's lots of traditional heroic fantasy published – just look on the shelves in any bookshop – and identifying the wheat from the chaff can be difficult. Which is one of the reasons Vector is here: the main column covers some very routine volumes this issue, but *Shadowheart* is not one of them. Vikki Lee has covered all of Barclay's works (*Shadowheart* was reviewed in Vector 232) finding them universally excellent and the very best of today's heroic fantasy not to be missed. Her only negative comment concerned the black/red cover design and red-edged pages, thinking that this made it look like an awful '60s imported American fiction. (I disagree. It has a simple, elegant, style which makes it stand out from the standard fantasy covers)

Stephen Baxter – *Coalescent*

Gollancz, London, 2004, 536pp, £6.99, pb, ISBN 0-575-07553-8
The first of two particles this column with a Roman theme (see also *Roma Eterna*). This is the first part of the *Destiny's Children* trilogy, which interweaves the present day story of George Poole, searching for a sister he never knew he had, and that of Regina in the dying days of the Roman Empire, as she tries to protect her family. The gradual exposing of the link between these is fascinating and probably one of Baxter's strongest works to date (although I am still unsure about the coda). Reviewed in Vector 232 by Gary Dalkin, he found it gripping and intriguing and a more literary and personal odyssey than anything Baxter has attempted before. There were some reservations about pacing but the book is recommended and was short-listed for this year's Arthur C. Clarke Award.

Michael Cobley – *Shadowgod*

Pocket Books, London, 2004, 470pp, £6.99, pb, ISBN 0-7434-1600-7
In the traditional heroic fantasy vein, this is the second volume of the *Shadowkings* trilogy, the first volume of which, *Shadowkings*, was reviewed in Vector 220. Vikki Lee recommended this series to fantasy readers, and the series does get described as 'gritty,' 'violent,' 'complex', which is encouraging

David B. Coe – *Seeds of Betrayal*

Tor, New York, 2003, 608pp, \$27.95, hb, ISBN 0-312-87808-7
Book two of the *Winds of the Forelands* tetralogy, this is more traditional heroic fantasy (maps but no appendix/cast of characters).

Eleanor Druse – *The Journals of Eleanor Druse*

Bantam, London, 2004, 249pp, £6.99, pb, ISBN 0-533-81696-9
Now this is an oddity. A tie-in to the Stephen King-developed TV series *Kingdom Hospital* (as opposed to the far superior Lars von Trier version). This is an investigation, by the author, of the Kingdom hospital incident – played completely straight and as if it were real (you mean it isn't?).

Steven Erikson – *Gardens of the Moon*

Tor, New York, 2004, 496pp, \$24.95, hb, ISBN 0-765-31001-3
American hardback edition, which is the start of a mammoth ten-book *Malazan Book of the Fallen* series (so you can guess from the title that we are in traditional heroic fantasy territory). The UK edition was reviewed by Vikki Lee way back in May 1999 (Vector 203) when she found it to be one of the rare fantasy books that not only attempts to be huge in scope, but actually succeeds in being so. In the UK the series is up to the fifth book with *Midnight Tides* having recently been published by Bantam (and we hope to include a review in a future Vector)

Simon R. Green – *Deathstalker Legacy*

Gollancz, London, 2004, 504pp, £6.99, pb, ISBN 0-575-07452-3

Simon R. Green – *Deathstalker Return*

Gollancz, London, 2004, 390pp, £18.99, hb, ISBN 0-575-07508-2

These two novels recount the end of the Golden Age two hundred years after the death of Owen Deathstalker to save the Empire and Humanity, and continue the violent, but extremely witty, *Deathstalker* series following a few years' break. After the coronation of King Douglas, the paragon Lewis Deathstalker, the diva and King's fiancee Jasamine Flowers, the conman Brett Random, the psychopath Rose Constantine and a reptoid called Saturday are outlawed by the Empire. On the run, travelling from world to world in search of the Madness Maze, Lewis must tread the path to glory that his namesake took and save Humanity and the Empire. Better than average traditional heroic fantasy.

Ed Greenwood – *The Silent House*

Tor, New York, 2004, 384pp, \$24.95, hb, ISBN 0-765-30817-7

Part of the *Band of Four* traditional heroic fantasy series, with the fourth volume, *The Dragon's Doom*, reviewed in Vector 231 with a less than glowing review.

Tom Holt – *Tall Stories*

Orbit, London, 2004, 368pp, £8.99, tp, ISBN 1-84149-343-7

Reprint omnibus edition of two of the author's earlier comic fantasy novels, containing *Expecting Someone Taller* (from 1987) and *Ye Gods* (from 1992). I really don't understand why Orbit is packaging together two unconnected stories in this way rather than just individual editions in the new style (other than saving the reader money, which is commendable).

Jane Jensen – *Dante's Equation*

Orbit, London, 2004, 695pp, £7.99, pb, ISBN 1-84149-306-6

Reviewed in Vector 233 by David M. Roberts, this book was not well-liked, not well-liked at all. He described it as unlikeable, flat and with the characters behaving in a clichéd and slightly hysterical manner. The author appears to be making a serious attempt to produce something that is deeply profound, but failing. It could, however, be just the right time for the paperback edition of this book as it is in a similar territory to the phenomenally successful *The Da Vinci Code*, by Dan Brown, so there may be a huge market available (which in itself is worrying as I found *The Da Vinci Code* to be poorly plotted, obvious and quite ridiculous).

Stephen Jones and David Sutton (eds) – *Dark Terrors 6*

Gollancz, London, 2004, 560pp, £7.99, pb, ISBN 0-575-07407-8

Sixth volume of this horror anthology series (the title is a clue) first published in 2002 and now in mass-market paperback. All stories are original to the collection, coming from both well-established names, such as Stephen Baxter, Kim Newman and Michael Marshall Smith, and less well known ones. As always from these editors, this is an excellent collection and strongly recommended.

Greg Keyes – *The Briar King*

Tor UK, London, 2004, 553pp, £6.99, pb, ISBN 0-330-41945-5

The first volume in Keyes's *Kingdom of Thorn and Bone* tetralogy is now out in paperback and is another traditional heroic fantasy series, with large mythical beasts coming to life, a gypsy-like race of humanoid entities and murderous courtly intrigue. But don't be deceived. Estelle Roberts in Vector 231 described it as all being very well developed and easily engaging the reader's interest and sympathy. And as the author used to be known as 'J. Gregory Keyes', who wrote the excellent *Age of Unreason* series, this is likely to be well above the norm (and why the change? J. Gregory sounds way cooler). The first volume of the *Age of Unreason* series, *Newton's Cannon*, has just been published in the UK (and will be reviewed in the next Vector).

Paul Levinson – *The Pixel Eye*

Tor, New York, 2004, 336pp, \$14.95, pb, ISBN 0-765-30131-7

In future New York a forensic detective is called to investigate an urgent case – squirrels are missing from Central Park. Ok, I'm sold. Unfortunately, when the hardback was reviewed in Vector 232 the overall result did not match the premise. Colin Bird found the characterisation dull and the book never attaining the kind of committed tone a story with such wacky ideas requires to be convincing. Still worth trying.

Ken MacLeod – *Newton's Wake*

Tor, New York, 2004, 322pp, \$24.95, hb, ISBN 0-765-30503-8

American edition of MacLeod's latest novel, published in the UK earlier this year when it was reviewed very favorably by Peter Young in Vector 235 (and selected as a Recommended Read). This is a standalone space opera and highly recommended. Interestingly this household had the same reaction to the cover of the American

edition: wanted to pick it up and read it right then. Whereas the reaction to the UK cover was: all right, may pick it up one day (but don't think I ever will). The superb cover art on the American edition is by Stephen Martiniere.

L. E. Modesitt – *Wellspring of Chaos*

Tor, New York, 2004, 448pp, \$27.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-30907-6

The twelfth volume in the ongoing *Recluse* series. So this is either something you have been looking forward to or just another traditional heroic fantasy, depending on whether you are a fan of the series and have been keeping up.

Andre Norton & Lyn McConchie – *Beast Master's Circus*

Tor, New York, 2004, 320pp, \$24.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-30042-7

This is the fourth in a sequence of novels that started with *The Beast Master*, in 1959 (yes, 1959), followed by *Lord of Thunder* (1962) and *Beast Master's Ark* (2002). That's quite some time-span! This is described as "fast-paced, adventurous science fiction".

Robert Rankin – *The Witches of Chiswick*

Gollancz, London, 2004, 434pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07545-7

Paperback edition of the latest from the very popular humorist Rankin that has the eponymous Witches re-writes 19th century history so that *The War of the Worlds* was based on a real event, the Invisible Man existed, Queen Victoria had an affair with Dr. Watson and Jack the Ripper was a terminator robot from the future. Which makes this all sound rather fun (but remember, it's by Robert Rankin). Interesting quote on the back cover which describes Rankin's prose as a cross between Douglas Adams and Aaron Sorkin by way of Mother Goose: bizarre.

Adam Roberts – *Polystom*

Gollancz, London, 2004, 344pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07541-4

Robert's fifth novel is high concept sf, set in a world where Polystom can sail through the atmosphere to nearby planets. Told in three parts – 'A Love Story', 'A Murder Story' and 'A Ghost Story' – and using the conceit of story coming from a found manuscript (incomplete, partly corrupted, and in translation). Andrew M. Butler had a number of problems with the novel. Reviewed in full in Vector 232 he concluded that "there's nothing wrong with being playful – as I think Roberts is trying to be here – but I'm not sure which rules he is playing by".

Robert Sawyer – *Far-Seer*

Tor, New York, 2004, 304pp, \$14.95, p/b, ISBN 0-765-30974-2

First volume in the Quintaglio Ascension, this is a paperback re-print of this 1992 novel. The premise here is that aliens transplanted Earth's dinosaurs to the moon of a gas-giant world, where they evolved into intelligent saurians and are now emerging into the stars. Difficult to resist any book with intelligent dinosaurs in it.

Robert Silverberg – *Roma Eterna*

Gollancz, London, 2004, 385pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07556-2

Second Roman-themed book this column. This one takes as its premise that the Roman Empire did not fall. The implications of this are then explored over the next 1,500 years with ten chapters, each set at different times throughout the period. Tanya Brown, in Vector 233, was impressed by this approach with the large events of history played out in the background, between the chapters, and between the lines, concluding that the book was an understated and thoughtful alternate history.

Norman Spinrad – *The Druid King*

Time Warner, London, 2004, 564pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-7515-3530-3

An almost straight historical novel, with just a hint of fantasy, from the author best known for the brilliant *Bug Jack Barron*. The story is built around Julius Caesar's campaign to conquer Gaul and the clash between the two cultures. Reviewed in Vector 229 where Sue Thomason found it to be mostly plot-driven and not a book to read for sensitive character development or deep cultural background, but it was commended to late-adolescent action-adventure fans.

David Zindell – *Lord of Lies*

Voyager, London, 2004, 675pp, £7.99, p/b, ISBN 0-00-648621-5

Second volume in *Ea Cycle* (which is ominous – could be never-ending) this is a massive traditional heroic fantasy work, complete with maps and many appendices. (How many times have I had to use 'traditional heroic fantasy' in this column? Prize for the first correct answer emailed to me).

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