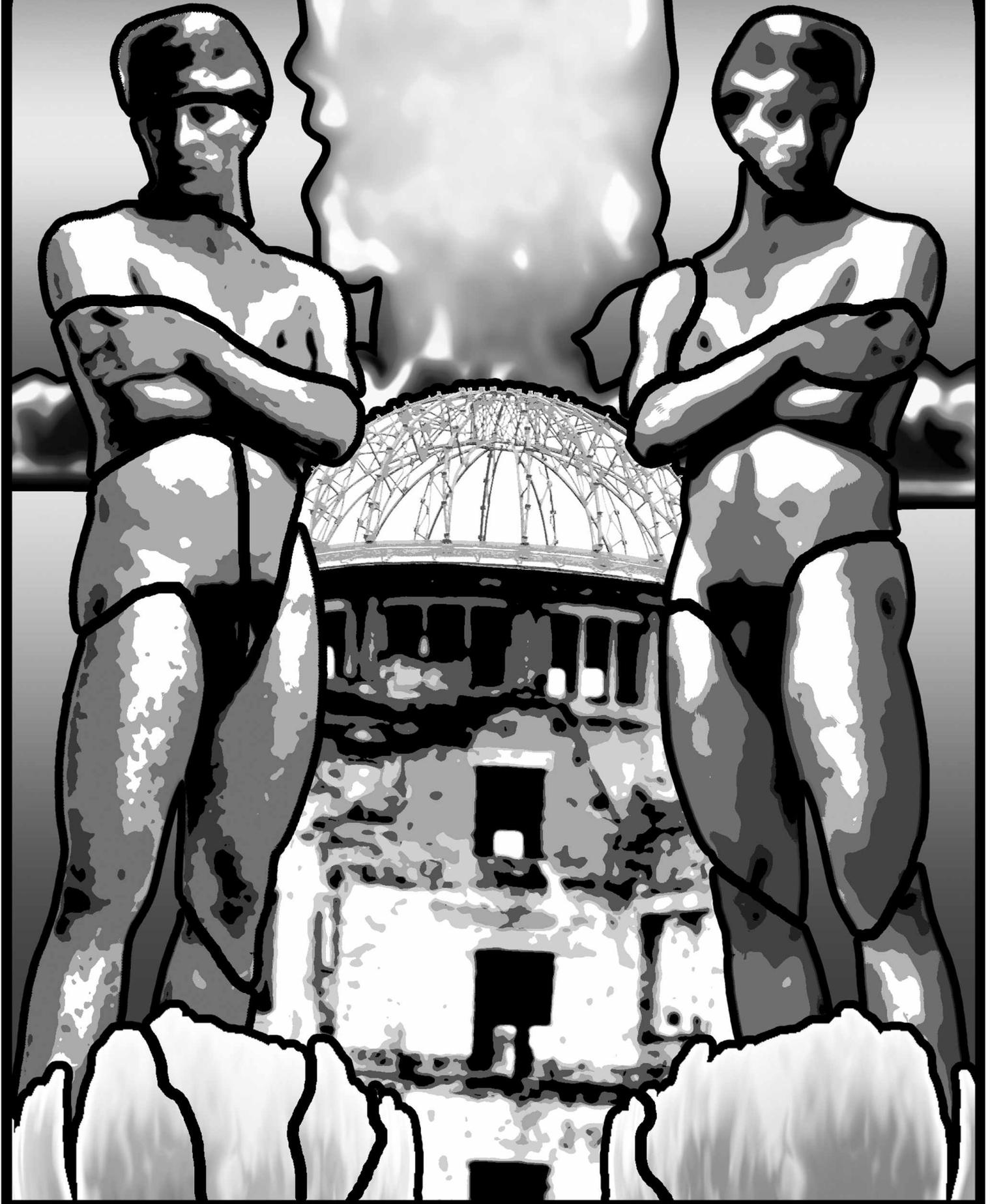


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Editorial

The View from Retirement

No one would have believed, in the last years of the twentieth century, that BSFA affairs were being watched keenly and closely by intelligent people greater than any standard as their own; that as editors busied themselves about their magazines they were scrutinized and studied, perhaps almost as narrowly as an author with a new book might scrutinize Aristotle. With infinite complacency subscribers went to and fro this globe about their little reading, serene in their assurance of their subscriptions. Yet across the gulf of space minds that are to ours as ours are to the beasts that perish, intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic, regarded these magazines with envious eyes, and slowly and surely drew their plans to edit them.

Unfortunately someone else got there first.

In the early summer of 1995 Maureen Kincaid Speller, then chair of the BSFA, was looking for a team to edit Vector as Catie Cary was to retire. Paul Kincaid and Stephen Payne were already the reviews editors, and Tony Cullen was keen to hammer the magazine into some kind of layout. Both Gary Dalkin and myself were approached to look after features, despite the fact that neither of us had any experience other than writing the odd review for Vector or Foundation. And both of us accepted, leading to a sticky moment when both of us assumed that we would be the editor with the other as lackey. (Or perhaps I assumed authority which Gary rightly laughed in the face of.) Maureen would review magazines, and came in for a couple of issues as a figurehead to keep us on track.

I hadn't met Gary at that point – indeed it would be a few years until we did finally meet – and so all editing would be done on the phone or through the post. Yes, my children, in those days we did have email but it was a limited service, and Gary as I recall wasn't online until a year or so later, moving through a bewildering array of email addresses – I kept more or less the same one, but half the time it wouldn't work as my employers kept assuming I didn't exist. This inevitably happened just before a deadline. We would have lengthy phone calls, usually lasting two hours, in which we would discuss the minutiae of editing Vector, only after we'd talked about what movies we'd seen.

In those days I was still living in Hull, renting a room from friends, and was gearing up to submit my PhD. I was scraping together a living from various part time jobs teaching and doing web thingies, and trying not to dream of murdering one of my bosses with a baseball bat. Remarkably, life wasn't as tight as it might have been, the Hull SF Group were around me to call upon for help, and Chris Terran was an hour away in Leeds

editing Matrix into the small wee hours. It all seemed possible, for two young turks. Well, young-ish.

I don't recall any grand plans, but we certainly wanted to pay more attention to non-written science fiction than had been the case in the past. We also wanted to celebrate British fiction – not in any strictly patriotic sense, but because British writers seemed more likely to produce the sort of singletons or loose series that we preferred to the franchises and wookie books that were dominating US outputs. We did, however, begin to notice and push what was later christened the British Boom. I, at least, had a platonic ideal of an issue of Vector: an interview with an author paired with an article on or by that author (ideally both, and a bibliography), an in-depth article, an entry-level piece, and something on film, comics or television. We looked toward the New York Review of Science Fiction for one way of how to do it, but also allowing ourselves the publishing of the occasional article which would not look entirely out of place in Foundation. We wanted to take it seriously.

In the run-up to the 1995 Worldcon we put together some ideas for an issue, and asked Paul to have his interview with Samuel Delany recorded so that it could appear a couple of issues down the line. What we didn't anticipate, of course, is that John Brunner would die at the convention, and that our first job would be to try and compile a series of appropriate tributes when at that point our address books were more or less blank. We found the material, somehow, and didn't have to write as much of it ourselves as we'd feared for a couple of days. A rather spiffing layout came back from Tony, we haggled over typos, and issue 185 went off, whilst we wrestled a special issue on Delany into shape – and this time most of the issue was written by Gary, Paul – the interview – and myself.

Then silence fell. As Christmas 1995 approached, and we considered our third issue, we realised that neither of the ones we had done had appeared, and, well, we'd no idea if we were doing the right thing. All of us do this in our spare time, none of us are paid, and every so often there is a logjam that nobody quite notices. The BSFA held a Council of War, and we hammered out where we were to go in the next five years. Gary and I began to get into a rhythm, not quite alternating duties, but his times of distraction were balanced by his compensating for me when I was busy. We colonised more of the magazine, so that the editorial, letters and features went up to the central staples rather than just covering a third of the pages. This also meant we could shift from articles which were two thousand words to an average of four thousand words. We could devote six thousand words to interviews with established authors, and two thousand or more to newcomers. The zenith of this was Steve Baxter's article

on the *Warhammer* series, which was originally budgeted at about ten thousand words and as I recall came in at about fifteen. It was worth clearing the decks for.

Meanwhile I'd first moved into my own flat, then out of Hull back to Nottingham thanks to a nightmare experience with a sixteen-year-old stripper – a story for another place, buy me a pint – and spent a few years commuting between part-time jobs. It was tough, but somehow Vector kept going, and we passed the milestone of issue 200 by going into glossy covers – an innovation we've maintained with one exception, a Chris Priest special where the combination of paper and the cover's print quality suggested a modern re-run of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. (This was the second of several unintended upsets of Christopher Priest. The first had been the appearance of a review article under the suspicious name of Seri Fulton.) At some point Gary decided that he need to focus on earning a living, and I decided it was as easier for me to go solo on the features as to work out a relationship with a new co-editor.

I knew I wouldn't do it forever, although I quite liked the idea of being in the post continuously for longer than anyone else – although this was made more complex by the fact that I was a mere features editor whereas features had usually been the province of the overall editor. Life has filled up over the decade with full-time jobs and almost a dozen books being produced in addition to writing too much of my own copy. I decided it would be good to retire rather than be fired or leave no replacement in place, so I started scribbling around with schedules to find a suitable point of departure. My fiftieth issue seemed like a good moment, but I still had enough enthusiasm that it felt too soon. Issue 250 would be a big splash, but that felt too far away and I'd already done V200. I realised, however, that despite the shaky start we'd done six issues a year, and autumn 2005 would mark my tenth anniversary. I remember Michael Moorcock – a predecessor in this post for a couple of issues – saying that no editor should stay in an editorial post for longer than a decade and whilst clearly I'm not in the same league – being more northern conference than Premiership – that seemed good enough for me. I handed in my notice and started the countdown. Tony, of course, will beat my record with the next issue. So it goes.

I'm not sure how I feel about how easy it was to find two suckers editors, nor that these turks are younger than we were when we started, and of course turks is probably not the term used by the kids on the street any more. In a couple of years they've already become bigger names in fandom than I've reached in a decade, and these are more than capable hands to leave features in. Welcome and good luck to Geneva Melzack and Niall Harrison. I hope they'll invite me back to contribute the odd article, the embarrassing old fart who hasn't quite grasped that things have moved on and he

doesn't have his own office any more, and who hasn't yet gotten around to his long cherished dream to keep bees on the Sussex Downs. I will be seeing you around, and I'll likely be editing something else, in another place. I'm also playing my part in Serendip, the organisation set up to support the Arthur C. Clarke Award.

It only remains for me to thank all the people who have contributed material over the years, and to shrug my shoulders at those who have got away – I won't name names but you know who you are – and apologise for those interviews which never happened or were lost in transit. Because I won't mention them later in this paragraph, a special thanks to Steve Baxter, Kev McVeigh, Andy Sawyer and Steve Sneyd for their generosity and enthusiasm in offering articles over the years, and to Colin Greenland who helped draw me into the loop by commissioning reviews for *Foundation*. My co-editors on Vector have been almost entirely painless to and infinitely patient with me – a shout out to Paul N. Billinger, Tanya Brown, Tony Cullen, Gary S. Dalkin, Steve Jeffery, Paul Kincaid, Stephen Payne and Maureen Kincaid Speller, and everyone who has been part of the BSFA Committee. More people than I can do justice to have offered floors or shoulders at difficult times, a partial list would include Elizabeth (and obviously Paul) Billinger, Mark Bould, Robert Edgar, Carol Ann Kerry Green, Edward James, Steve Kerry, Michelle Le Blanc, Andrew Macrae, Farah Mendlesohn, Colin Odell, Dave Roberts, Estelle Roberts and Chris Terran, many of whom have also suffered at the nib of my blue pencil.

Lest this start to look like the dead of two world wars, I will stop, and apologise to anyone inadvertently omitted. There are also people outside of science fiction, with no interest in the subject, whose names would mean nothing to this audience, but who nevertheless have been there for me. They would almost certainly not see this editorial, but I hope that if they did they would instantly know who they are, and that they get even a fraction of the comradeship from me that I've received from them; love, peace, light and hugs to all of them.

Two remaining people contributed to this whole enterprise in differing ways, and it would have been impossible without them. Sadly, neither are with us any more. KVB showed the way to be enthusiastic, open and eclectic about the field and was generous in his material. I don't recall JDR ever actually sending us an article, but there were letters – long letters – phone calls, and latterly emails, but he pushed me to be always rigorous and to treat science fiction and fantasy as seriously as I would literature. Their presence and wisdom is missed.

Thank you all, it's been.

Andrew M. Butler – Canterbury [via Hull, Nottingham and High Wycombe and points in between, Autumn 1995-Autumn 2005]

A PROLIFIC FILM JOURNALIST FOR MAGAZINES SUCH AS FILM REVIEW, DREAMWATCH, STARBURST, SHIVERS, ZOO AND SFSITE.COM, THE SUBJECT OF THIS INTERVIEW IS NOW THE AUTHOR OF A BRAND NEW BOOK DETAILING THE HISTORY OF FANTASY FILMS WHICH WE HOPE TO REVIEW IN THE NEAR FUTURE. MEET ALEC WORLEY.

Surveying an Empire: An Interview With Alec Worley

by Stuart Young

Stuart Young: Your new book, *Empires of the Imagination*, covers the entire history of fantasy films, from the silent movies of George Méliès right up to the recent *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. That must have involved a tremendous amount of research. Have you spent the last five years doing nothing but watching DVDs?

Alec Worley: Pretty much. I didn't have a back catalogue of notes when I started and since I was writing to deadline I had to see pretty much everything I was going to see within that time. I kicked off by writing a sort of ultimate list of fantasy films from the year dot to 2003. *The Return of the King: Special Edition DVD* was a perfect cut-off point. I included every single film title I could possibly scrape out of the BFI archives and every film guide and catalogue I could lay my hands on, including every other movie and TV series that put the main films in context. But no matter how deep I dug, new titles were always turning up, and are still turning up. It drove me nuts. In the end I just had to regard the book as a kind of work in progress.

Anyway, I ended up with around one thousand titles and went through every single dang-blasted one, deciding which were important enough to track down and view. Did Wojciech Has's elusive *The Saragossa Manuscript* seem to have anything interesting to say about the nature of fairy tale movies? Definitely. How about *Snow White and the Three Stooges*? I doubt it – although I still want to see it if anyone out there has a copy...

In the process I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. One memorable afternoon I had to sit through all four Herbie movies. I was curled up in a ball by the time I got to the TV remake with Bruce Campbell. But then I also found some gems like Jonathan Miller's *Alice in Wonderland*, the Irish body-swap comedy *Rat* and the forgotten Russian epic, *Ilya Muromets*.

SY: What attracted you to writing about fantasy film as opposed to, say, horror or science fiction?

AW: Well, it wasn't my idea at all. *Shivers* editor David Miller and I were talking about the possibility of collaborating on a film book. He suggested something on the fantasy genre, simply because it seemed like an open goal. Clute and Grant's *Encyclopedia* and one or two others aside, no one ever seemed to have properly gotten to grips

with the subject, perhaps because definitions of the genre are so varied. I spent a week or so developing the idea that one can identify fantasy narratives on a scale spanning documentary realism and avant-garde expressionism. Everything else just seemed to drop into place, how to differentiate between types of fantasy and yet acknowledge what connects them, the ways in which fantasy is distinct from horror and sci-fi.

Remember that episode of *Blackadder*, when Edmund annoys Samuel Pepys by coming up with words left out of the dictionary? Well, a friend of mine said he was going to

come up with the fantasy "sausage", the one movie that would go through my theory like a proton torpedo. I've managed to shoot down every suggestion. So far, that is...

I wrote up my ideas and pitched them to David – very badly as I remember – and to his eternal credit he let me run with the book on my own.

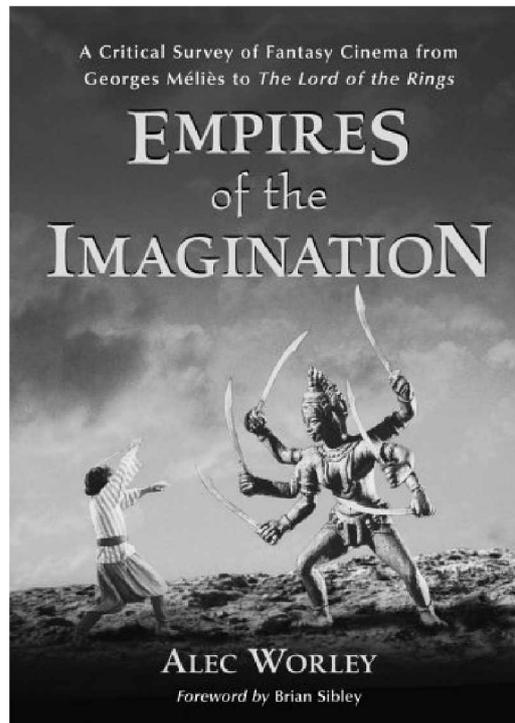
SY: Fantasy is a pretty broad genre. Did you have any problems defining what you would actually class as fantasy?

AW: It's odd, but the entry requirements into the fantasy genre always seemed pretty obvious to me, even as a kid. I had a hunch that Darth Vader and the Gods of Olympus couldn't exist in the same universe since each relied on a different set of narrative rules. I'm a real nerd about these things, but it's given me a good sense of

where a story is coming from in terms of ideas and on which plain of reality a story exists. Ultimately, that's really what fantasy consists of: differing levels of reality, a reality that is itself fictional and modified to varying degrees in comparison to the world we physically inhabit. I feel another headache coming on...

SY: Were there any films that you couldn't fit into the book and would like to have covered?

AW: Only a few hundred. Because I wrote the book in monograph, like one big long essay, certain films by necessity had to stay on the bench. Generally, I had to stick to the most famous and influential films, even the really bad ones – I make no apology for slating *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*. The more obscure films had to illustrate a particular point in passing. The downside of this approach is that movies like *Simply Irresistible* got in because they proved a certain theoretical point, while a masterpiece like Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad* and an awful lot of Asian fantasy



got left out merely for reasons of space and timing.

One blind spot I'd be eager to rectify in future is my bypassing of Hayao Miyazaki. It seems all the attention the director has been getting recently is a case of too little too late, and it was only in reading Andrew Osmond's features on his work in *Sight & Sound* that I realised I'd missed out on that rarest of things: the fantasy auteur.

SY: Fantasy Films are big box office at the moment what with *The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter* and the forthcoming adaptation of *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*. Which films do you think will keep fantasy in the public eye? Or is the bubble about to burst?

AW: Fantasy has always been a mainstay of cinema. There have always been afterlife comedies such as *Just Like Heaven* or bodyswap fantasy like *Being John Malkovich*, it's just that audiences rarely recognise these as part of one big genre.

In terms of bursting bubbles, I think that only really applies to fantasy as people view it through *The Lord of the Rings*, that is epic adventure set in a medieval secondary world. The biggest problem with fantasy, as I see it, is that the common perception of the genre is of questing and sword-slinging and the like. The fact is this stuff, as wonderful and relevant as it is, really only constitutes something like thirty per cent of what fantasy is all about. The rest branches far away into surrealism, fairy tale, tall tales and every kind of story about magic and the miraculous penetrating the real world.

SY: Many of the current crop of fantasy blockbusters are adaptations of novels. Do you think the film versions will inspire people to go out and read the original novels and maybe even try fantasy authors whose books haven't been made into films?

AW: Definitely. I mean sales of Tolkien have skyrocketed since the release of the films, as has just about every other fantasy novel turned event movie. But again fantasy has a major image problem. Perceptions of the genre still haven't found their way out of the genre-mire of quests and magic swords and if readers new to the genre peruse the other half of the bookshelves they'll find the genre represented by an awful lot of crap, five-part doorstops about callow youths on quests to save sundered kingdoms with the help of a psychic goldfish or something.

The truth is fantasy reaches much further. If you want to read great fantasy outside the schools of Tolkien and Robert E. Howard, read *Elementals* by A.S. Byatt, *Great Apes* by Will Self, *The Time Traveler's Wife* by Audrey Niffenegger, *The Lovely Bones* by Alice Sebold, *Kafka on the Shore* by Haruki Murakami. And yet how often do books like this get reviewed in *SFX* or nominated for British Fantasy Awards? Oh, and read Susannah Clarke's *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*. I'm half way through it at the moment and loving every page. I think this book could be a landmark.

SY: Your book doesn't look at fantasy purely as escapism but puts the films in a broad social and cultural context. Do you think modern films continue this tradition, or are they reinforcing the public's perception of fantasy as being all wizards and elves and Tolkien knock-offs?

AW: Again with movies like *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*, which judging by the trailer is coming on like *The Lord of the Rings 4*, the danger is definitely there. But whether audiences realise it or not, fantasy is thriving in its own subgenres. They just need to be recognised.

SY: Do you think modern special effects and CGI make it easier for modern filmmakers to produce fantasy films?

AW: Of course, I mean the relative cheapness of CGI even allowed secondary world fantasy to make the jump to TV in the 1990s with *Hercules* and *Xena*. Although now I think the CG bubble has pretty much burst, if realist blockbusters like *Batman* (the first half anyway) are any indication. Movies often forget that special effects are supposed to be invisible even when they're describing the impossible. It's this literalism I think that has always threatened fantasy films, the idea that fantasy has to be manifest in some way and dancing on the screen like a chorus line.

Even Harryhausen – as much as I love his movies – is often guilty of this. I think his best films are those that achieve a sense of magic without relying on effects. *Jason* and *Golden Voyage*, for example, both have a really vivid sense of existing in this febrile world even when Harryhausen's stop-motion stuff isn't on screen.

SY: Do you have any plans for books exploring other genres? Or are you going to devote all your energy to that Adam Sandler thesis you're longing to write?

AW: My blockbuster novel, *The Sandler Code*, which suggests the Catholic Church pinched all its ideas off *The Wedding Singer*, is currently in development. Film journalism-wise I did have an idea for a book about superhero cinema, building on a theory I put forward in the Heroic Fantasy chapter of *Empires*, but there seems like an awful lot of such books around right now. Part of the attraction of writing *Empires* was that no one else had done anything like it that I knew of, so I wasn't dictated too much by what had gone before.

I'm kind of at a crossroads at the moment, I guess, just figuring out what I want to do next with my writing. Having finished the book I feel like I have the film journalism thing pretty much in the bag if I want it, although I'm just not sure I do. And yet there's still an awful lot of movies out there I want to write about.

SY: Although you're best known for your non-fiction your short stories have placed well in short story competitions and have received Honourable Mentions from Ellen Datlow. Have you any plans to write more fiction?

AW: I've been away from fiction for so long. I really miss it. I must have filled an entire notebook with ideas over the past couple of years. Creatively speaking, I've dropped a few fishing lines in the pond since finishing *Empires*. The moment anyone bites I'll let you know.

SY: Thanks for your time.

AW: Cheers.

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Empires of the Imagination: A Critical Survey of Fantasy Cinema from Georges Méliès to The Lord of the Rings is published by McFarland and features a foreword by Brian Sibley. Copies are available online at www.mcfarlandpub.com, www.amazon.co.uk (go via www.bsfa.co.uk), and Blackwell's and London bookshops The Cinema Store and Zwemmers. Stuart Young has had stories published in various magazines and anthologies including *Nasty Piece of Work*, *Here & Now* and *The Mammoth Book of Future Cops*. He has had three short story collections published: *Spare Parts*, *Shards of Dreams* and the latest, *The Mask Behind the Face*, from Pendragon Press — Eds.

Thanks for the Memories: The Films of Philip K. Dick

by Andrew M. Butler

There is a moment in the early film writings of Hugo Münsterberg when he sees that film is the art of the mind, as painting is the art of the eye and music the art of the ear:

[Film] does not and must not respect this temporal structure of the physical universe. At any point [film] interrupts the series and brings us back to the past ... With the full freedom of our fancy, with the whole mobility of our association of ideas, pictures of the past flit through the scenes of the present. Time is left behind. Man becomes boy; today is interwoven with the day before yesterday. The freedom of the mind has triumphed over the unalterable law of the outer world.¹

The freedom to cut between or juxtapose virtually any image – more so in the age of CGI – offers a means of exploring human consciousness and the way our memories move from image to image, from memory to memory. If the art of film is the art of memory, then it may be fruitful to explore film as a means of representing consciousness, and memory as a means of constructing identity.

Film is an assemblage of chosen pictures, put together in an order which has also been chosen to a greater or lesser extent within limitations of time and budget. The film world, the diegesis, is constructed, and the characters who are part of that diegesis are constructed, replicants of people in the real world. The memories are constructions. This becomes more significant within a science fictional diegesis, and within one that has the residual elements at least of the theme of what it is to be human and what it is to be real. These are, of course, the themes of the novels and stories of Philip K. Dick, for better or indeed for worse one of the most frequently adapted science-fiction writers.

It has to be admitted that the Hollywood film is not the best venue to do philosophy – although at the same time few of the adaptations to date have been straightforwardly Hollywood productions. *Blade Runner* (1982) was directed by a Brit, Ridley Scott, *Total Recall* (1990) by the Dutch Paul Verhoeven – the adaptation having passed through the hands of that most Dickian of directors, David Cronenberg – *Screamers* (1995) was a Canadian production and *Paycheck* (2003) was directed by erstwhile Hong Kong action maestro John Woo. That leaves *Impostor* (2002) and *Minority Report* (2002). *Impostor's* Gary Fleder, an interesting director working within what was clearly meant to be an exploitation picture. *Impostor*, along with Guillermo Del Toro's *Mimic* (1997) and a film by Danny Boyle of *Trainspotting* (1996) and the Wyndham-esque *28 Days Later* (2002) fame were to form an anthology film, a science fictional/horror portmanteau akin to *The Twilight Zone* (1983) movie, but after seeing the rushes the decision was taken to shoehorn more material into the first two of

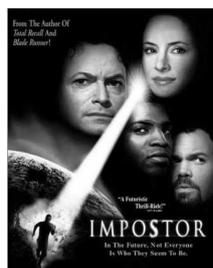
the three and release them as features instead, although it took five years in the case of *Impostor*. *Minority Report's* Steven Spielberg ought to be able to purchase his own freedom but sentimentally works his way through the theme of the sanctity of families in a fallen world, and whose track record has been in decline over the last decade. As the subsequent re-pairing of Tom Cruise and Spielberg for *The War of the Worlds* (2005) shows, they were trying – Cruise as suicide bomber, anyone? – but all too often have ended up very trying. The tyranny of the happy ending, the eucatastrophic over the catastrophic, means that Spielberg's films tend to end long after their natural point of closure – compare the decision to reunite Jim and his family in *Empire of the Sun* (1987) which the novel left offstage, and the much subtler lack of reconciliation at the end of *Jaws* (1975).

But this is not a place to simply take pot-shots at Spielberg, tempting as that may be, or to simply argue about Dick's superiority as an artist of the written word over literally hack directors. For a start, Paul Verhoeven has a tradition of satire and irony in his films that is too easy to overlook – the politics of *RoboCop* (1987) and *Starship Troopers* (1997) spring to mind. And secondly, frankly some of the stories that have been directed are not some of Dick's finest hours. Some of the moments that critics objected to in *Screamers* came straight from the source, 'Second Variety', and 'Paycheck' was a bit of an overlong romp in the first place. It also feels as if I am breaking a personal commandment to write one more time about *Blade Runner*. I remember seeing the film for the first time, and bristling at the distinctions between it and the source novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), but over two decades on I can finally just about separate the two for myself even if I don't entirely do it here.

The idea of memory is central to the film as a motivating factor. The Nexus-6 replicants are more real than real, more human than human, and as such have started to develop emotions which destabilise their use as a presumed slave work force – whether as workers, gigolos, sex-toys or whatever. As Tyrell tells the blade runner Rick Deckard:

"We began to recognize in them a strange obsession. After all, they are emotionally inexperienced, with only a few years in which to store up the experiences which you and I take for granted. If we gift them with a past, we create a cushion or a pillow for their emotions, and consequently, we can control them better."

They are programmed by their memories, which must be chosen and implanted by Tyrell Corporation scientists or engineers. It seems, however, likely that this has not been a great success, given that there is a profession of bounty hunters entirely dependent on retiring escaped replicants. The reason why the replicants have returned to Earth is that



they are pre-programmed to die after approximately four years – a detail taken from the novel – and so Batty in particular is concerned about the loss of his memories:

“I’ve seen things you people wouldn’t believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain. Time to die.”

At least Batty knows that he has a finite lifetime; Rachael has been brought up as if she is a human child, and had no idea that her memories were those of (apparently) Tyrell’s niece. (Where is this niece? Has she fallen prey to radiation sickness or accelerated decrepitude?) She can play the piano, because she has been programmed to, but this doesn’t seem to be enough for her. Her whole life has begun to fall apart. It is telling that part of the deeply uncomfortable seduction scene between her and Deckard, she says: “I can’t... rely on... my memories...” in response to his demand for her to demand he kisses her. She is seeking an emotional bedrock in a traumatic period, and her memories can no longer supply it.

If Rachael’s memories are faked and she does not realise it, this opens up whole avenues of speculation as to how many of the other characters are also replicants. At this point I am always reminded of the line from Zaphod in *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* (1978) when they are trying to persuade him to give up his brain in favour of an artificial replacement – he would not notice the difference because he’d be programmed not to. Controversy has raged for the last twenty years as to whether Deckard is himself a replicant – which transforms his noirish plank of a performance into the subtle portrayal of an automaton. Clearly it would make no sense whatsoever for Deckard to be one of the six escapees that he is informed about by his boss at the start of the film – number six being Mary the all-American mom, a character discarded in the process of shooting. If Deckard is a replicant then his boss at least has known about him for a number of years – unless Tyrell provides body doubles – and presumably this would run up against the four-year lifespan.

Deckard has his memories and his photographs, as do the replicants, and it is odd that when we first see Deckard he is reading the very same issue of a newspaper as Leon has used to line his drawers. The re-insertion of footage of a unicorn has been taken to be an indication that Deckard is a replicant, although I don’t recollect seeing that entry in any bumper book of symbolism. Gaff’s placement of an origami unicorn might be an indication of his knowledge of what dreams Deckard has been programmed with, although to me it has always felt as if the message is much more basically Freudian and sexual.

There remain other ambiguities in the film, even in the so-called *Director’s Cut*. For example, Batty seems to have crammed an awful lot into what is much less than four years, in fact closer to three. All these memories might be lost like tears in the rain (and you have to have a heart of stone not to laugh at that speech) but there is every

possibility that Tyrell have gifted their most Nietzschean of *Übermensch* with such memories, and they are waiting around in some database, ready to be uploaded into the next model.

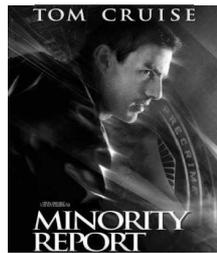
It is the uploading of memories which is the heart of *Total Recall*, in which blue-collar worker Douglas Quaid (Quaid in the original short, “We Can Remember It For You Wholesale”) decides he wants a vacation and, not having enough money to go to Mars, decides to purchase the memory of having been to Mars. The problem is his new memories of being some kind of secret agent collide with what appear to be genuine memories of being a double agent and so he can no longer ascertain whether he is a blue-collar worker or an action hero – the programming to not notice has failed. Like the final sections of *Brazil* (1984) and *Videodrome* (1982) which would have been written at the same time as the early drafts of the script for *Total Recall*, it is difficult to be certain about what is real and what is dream or hallucination or *Videodrome* once the hallucinated world has been entered into. Certainly there are moments of doubt for the viewer, as when Quaid meets a character who tells him that he is hallucinating:

Quaid: Suppose this is just a dream, and I pull the trigger, then it wouldn’t make any difference?

Dr. Edgemar: It won’t make any difference to me. But it will make a hell of a difference to you. Because here in your fantasy, I will be dead. And without me to guide you out, the walls of reality will eventually come crashing down around you. One minute, you’ll be running from more assassins, next being part of the underground resistance, learning of the discovery of aliens in the Martian caves, learning that you’re really Coahaagen’s bosom buddy, defeating the bad guys, becoming the saviour of Mars, but down on Earth at Rekall, you will be lobotomized! Now get a grip and put down that gun!

At the end of the film, as Quaid and his lover Melina walk across a terraformed Mars – a scene evoking the memory of the opening dream sequence where a space suited Quaid falls, damages his helmet and asphyxiates – the thought is entertained that this ending is all a dream. “I’ve had a terrible thought. What if this is a dream?” In the end, this question is impossible to answer – within the diegesis there is nothing to confirm it is a dream, Quaid does not wake up in bed. Equally, there can be no certainty that it is real – and after all, it isn’t real, it is a diegesis, a film vision.

R.J. Ellis marshals the complexities of the film, and of the audience having to decide between contradictory explanatory narratives, to suggest that the film can offer a commentary upon the politics of popular cultural artifacts, including film. To some extent “the film can be seen to present itself as a ‘dream’ of the audience”.² Just as Quaid has paid to have memories implanted, so we have paid to have these dreams – solitary, in darkness, usually at night – in which we are manipulated into becoming someone else. The film takes over our perceptions for a couple of hours, and then fades or sticks like memories of ‘real’ experiences. Sometimes some of the dream/film – the ideological content – can collide with our existing thoughts,



feelings and memories and have an impact on our behaviour. All the time, of course, the film disguises itself as just action, just entertainment.

The semi-exploitation film *Screamers* is perhaps the most Dickian adaptation to date, with lead actor Peter Weller bringing memories of his roles in *RoboCop* and *Naked Lunch* (1991) to mind. Whereas Dick's original story, 'Second Variety' was firmly set in the context of the Cold War perpetuated by both the superpowers, this film is relocated into an outer space location, with a mining planet Sirius 6B being defended from the New Economic Bloc. The planet is defended by Screamers, semi-intelligent, initially subterranean devices, which lock onto nearby heart beats and destroy the person with it. Over the years these have evolved into more effective and mobile devices, until they have been able to mimic human beings, who are able to infiltrate their way into the underground bunkers to wreak havoc. Hendricksson (Weller), feeling more of a political pawn than ever, decides to go to make peace with his local enemies, taking with him a rookie soldier who has crashed on the planet.

Whilst the lower end of the Screamer scale evokes memories of Harryhausen stop-motion, the human doubles appear pretty much like real human beings and as Hendricksson gathers a group of mutually suspicious people around them, everyone is certain that one of their number is a Screamer in disguise. The only usual clue is that their programming can be limited and so they get stuck on particular phrases – as the quasi-orphaned child Davids do. Since at least two of Hendricksson's party also do this – and the eventual revelation of the impostordom does not depend on this – either there are more models around than previously anticipated and actually discovered or their evolution has speeded up. It is an act of faith that Hendricksson – a buttoned down, largely emotionally flat one – is human, although the (fake) Roman coin he plays with at various points seems to anticipate the silver discs and triangles that are the Screamer master circuit boards. Certainly none of the advanced Screamers betray any self-awareness that they are robots, until the killing program literally cuts in.

When Hendricksson returns to his own base, it seems almost as if he had been lured away by a false message, since his bunker has clearly been infiltrated by Screamers in his absence. Crackly two-way radios can't help him tell if Chuck in the bunker is the friend he remembers, with whom he shares memories of Earth and Hendricksson's ex-lover. The repeated "Come on down" of Chuck could be attempting to get a simple message through, or an invitation to their deaths. The detail of Hendricksson's taste in classical music, if we remember it, provides a ruse to expose the capture – he asks to speak to Don Giovanni, and Chuck puts him on the radio, whereas the real Chuck would recognize it as the name of a Mozart piece.

Impostor also features the infiltration of a society with copies of human beings, and like the short story it expands upon – a very economical piece – we are invited to side with Spence Olham, who has been accused of being a

human bomb. Watching the film for the first time, you wonder whether the downbeat ending of the original can be retained –

He gaped.

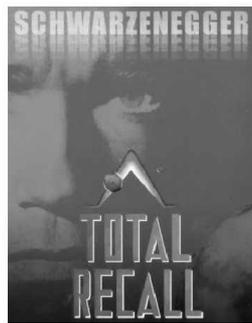
"But if that's Olham, then I must be –"

He did not complete the sentence, only the first phrase. The blast was visible all the way to Alpha Centauri.



Blockbusters – although this film only really aspires to that league – love an explosion, but such an unsuccessful conclusion, where the hero is a suicide bomber and cannot stop his own detonation is hardly part of the usual script. We've been introduced to this character in voice-over, we've heard about his childhood work in rocket building and his work in building weapons, and we root for him to be the nice guy, upset at the accidental death of a friend, trying to contact his wife, and having to escape from a series of traps and interrogations for the narrative to continue. In the current political climate such an identification is intriguing to say the least, though it is difficult to ascertain whether we should read the wildly divergent sets of security that hamper (or fail to hamper) Olham's journey as a commentary on our current uneven security measures or as idiot plotting. I fear the latter, and in the end the film has its cake and eats it, laminating on a happy closure. (The film also seems to assume we have no memories – I don't recall (ahem) the last film which was so fetishistic about letting the audience know where and when each scene is set.)

Spence clearly has no memory of being a bomb, he only has memories of being himself, although his would-be nemesis Major Hathaway, claims: "Memories, senses, knowledge – you pilfered them all." The film does not explain how Spence has all these memories and how the replicant looks like its human double; the mimicking process is presumably one which destroys the original. A thoroughly paranoid Spence, who has already mimicked a replicant as part of his escape process, cannot be certain whether he can trust his wife, and that he can get her to trust him. If he is human, he needs her help to prove his authenticity, if he is a replicant bomb, he needs her help to get fake his authenticity so he can undertake the assassination.



In the end it is a shared memory that can bring them together at a place hopefully unknown to the authorities – the place where they first met, Sutton Wood, the generically necessary green space outside of the city which has somehow escaped the ravages of the age (see for example *Blade Runner*, *Brazil*, *Dark City* (1997) and *Minority Report* to differing degrees). A moment's reflection would suggest that a shared memory of a rendezvous is no guarantee that Spence is the real Olham: if his memories have been stolen and pilfered and copied, then surely something significant like meeting one's wife is going to figure in them. It does then offer a coincidence that the assassin's craft should crash at a significant figure's vacation spot and where he first met his wife, but then some people like reliving their first encounter. And reflection suggests that since Olham is *not*

Olham, this spot is precisely where he first met his 'wife'.

I confess to a sense of *déjà vu* when eventually watching *Impostor*, a better film than I feared – it has echoes of *Minority Report* which I'd seen first (the latter being a better film when being watched than almost immediately afterwards). Here we have Tom Cruise playing John Anderton, a man mourning the memory of his kidnapped son and dealing very badly with his estranged wife. When he is accused of being a murderer, by an ambitious but ultimately dim security officer, he goes on the run to prove his innocence and has to negotiate differing levels of security as he attempts to infiltrate the very building he has escaped from. There are even parallel scenes of him being hunted through tenement buildings. The ending, as already suggested, offers a retreat to a rural idyll, and the reinscription of family. The film doesn't go as far as returning the missing son, but Anderton is at least reconciled to the position.

The gimmick is, of course, that isn't that Anderton has murdered, but that he will commit a murder. A law enforcement agency in a near-future America uses three pre-cognitives to predict when murders are going to be committed and by whom. Agatha, Art and Dash – their names are meant to invoke Christie, Conan Doyle and Hammett, masters of crime writing – have memories of the future. This is a time-travel narrative by another name, and obviously risks running into all kinds of paradoxes in terms of what they are remembering/anticipating if the arrest is made before the murder can take place. Can you be certain that you are arresting someone who is not-yet guilty rather than someone who is innocent? We certainly end up with a causal circle or an a-causal circle. Anderton has been framed for murder because it is feared that he will discredit the use of pre-cognition. However he had only gone on the run because he has been framed, and it is this framing that leads to the discrediting of precognition...

The pre-cogs are able to see possibilities and probabilities rather than certainties, as evidenced by Agatha's ability to see Anderton's son's past and alternative future:

Sean... He's on the beach now, a toe in the water. He's asking you to come in with him. He's been racing his mother up and down the sand. There's so much love in this house. He's ten years old. He's surrounded by animals. He wants to be a vet. You keep a rabbit for him, a bird and a fox. He's in high school. He likes to run, like his father. He runs the two-mile and the long relay. He's 23. He's at a university. He makes love to a pretty girl named Claire. He asks her to be his wife. He calls here and tells Lara, who cries. He still runs. Across the university and in the stadium, where John watches. Oh God, he's running so fast, just like his daddy. He sees his daddy. He wants to run to him. But he's only six years old, and he can't do it. And the other men are so fast. There was so much love in this house.

Hindsight may well be 20:20 vision, but foresight is less reliable.

The latest adaptation to date is John Woo's rather forgettable *Paycheck*, which ironically does at least provide a pay check for some of the finer actors familiar from independent film. There is the moment towards the end of *Total Recall* when you remember some of the extraneous detail you've been provided with earlier in the film, and you know instantly what means Quaid will use to escape his

predicament. There are all those scenes in the James Bond films – a franchise which has admittedly bordered on self-parody for a decade or more – in which Q gives Bond some gadgets which will be used in term to achieve his mission. If there is a gun over the fireplace in act one, then it will be fired in act three. *Paycheck* is that premise as a movie, and it has to be noted that the original story is not one of Dick's classics. Again it is necessary for the future to be anticipated, with all the problems that entails.

Ben Affleck is Michael Jennings, an ace computer engineer who sells his services to companies to work on major projects, and who, to maintain corporate secrecy, agrees to have his memories erased each time. Naturally this is likely to take a toll on his mental faculties, and his latest job, his biggest to date, requires the longest erasure of all – and the biggest risk. During the course of this job he falls in love, but obviously he will have to leave her behind with the amnesia. Back in his own life, he is worried about his memory, not certain that he has been dealt with entirely straight, and the recipient of an envelope of goodies: his Allcom pass, an allen wrench, some ball bearings, a BMW key, a bullet, a bus pass, a crossword puzzle, a diamond ring, a fortune from a cookie, hairspray, an half dollar, a janitor's key, a lighter, a matchbook, a mirror packet of cigarettes, a paperclip, a stamp, a pair of sunglasses and a watch. Each of these items in turn will help him into or out of a situation and the film can only be over when he has remembered to use everything, and he has remembered the love of his life. To say this strains credibility would be an understatement, but this is a John Woo film made in America – well, made in Vancouver but financed in America – and you check your brain at the door whilst everyone is made to look pretty.

The films of Philip K. Dick have to date been widely uneven, and one of science fiction's most philosophical writers has yet to really set the box office alight to recoup the bigger budgets. *A Scanner Darkly* is in post-production after several abortive attempts to make it over the last decade, and other stories are in production – the Philip K. Dick brand at least demands attention, whilst for better or worse *Blade Runner* continues to receive attention. The films do offer a few Dickian pleasures around the theme of memory and forgetfulness, and if we are indeed defined by our memories, and what is really real to us is what we remember, then a flavour of Philip K. Dick certainly remains in these films, perhaps despite the directors, writers and stars. A memory, perhaps...

Notes

1. Hugo Münsterberg, *Hugo Münsterberg on Film: The Photoplay: A Psychological Study and Other Writings*. New York and London: Routledge, 2002, p. 133.
2. R. J. Ellis, "Are You a Fucking Mutant?' *Total Recall's* Fantastic Hesitations.' *Foundation* 65 (Autumn 1995): 81-97, at pp. 92-93.

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Andrew M. Butler was features editor of *Vector* 1995-2005 and for several years was recruitment secretary for the Science Fiction Foundation. He is the author of the *Pocket Essential Film Studies* – now in a second edition – and the editor of *Christopher Priest: The Interaction (SFF)*. He currently should be working on another book on Terry Pratchett – Eds.

SUSANNA CLARKE SPENT OVER A DECADE LABOURING ON HER NOVEL, *JONATHAN STRANGE & MR NORRELL*, BEFORE IT WAS FINALLY PUBLISHED TO GREAT ACCLAIM LAST YEAR. HER TRIUMPH IN WINNING THE BEST NOVEL CATEGORY AT THE HUGOS AT INTERACTION IN SCOTLAND THIS SUMMER – ONE OF SEVERAL AWARDS THAT HER DEBUT HAS GARNERED – POST-DATED HER INTERVIEW WITH GRAHAM SLEIGHT AT A BSFA MEETING.

Difficult Magic

an Interview with Susanna Clarke by Graham Sleight

Graham Sleight: The place I wanted to start was with that first *Starlight* story back in 1996, which I re-read a couple of weeks ago. I was really astonished by how much it's close it is to *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*, not just in featuring Strange and Norrell but in having such a similar tone and voice. That was your first published story. How did that come about, getting published in an America anthology rather than a British one?

Susanna Clarke: The story of that story, 'The Ladies of Grace Adieu', is quite simple. I started work on *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* at, I think, the beginning of 1993. I hadn't really attempted a fantasy book, a book of magic, before, so I thought I should go on some kind of course. There was one being run by the Arvon Foundation, and the tutors were Colin Greenland and Geoff Ryman. Very annoyingly they wanted a short story and I hadn't written a short story. I was writing a novel. So I came up with this idea of writing a short story which was basically a little outtake – it was sort of what Jonathan Strange did when he went on holiday. That was 'The Ladies of Grace Adieu'. It is true that the style is there, which means I must have got that style really quite early in that first year. Nothing else came easily in that first year. The plot and all the structure was still to come. The tone was there. I wrote it for that course, and somehow or other a bit of it got shown to Neil Gaiman and then the whole of it got shown to Neil Gaiman. Without consulting anyone he showed it to Patrick Nielsen Hayden, who bought it, which was great.

GS: But you were plugging away at the novel by then.

SC: Yes.

GS: You did clearly have a sense that it was going to be about these two magicians?

SC: Yes. The first thing I knew when I knew I wanted to write a book about magic, a fantasy novel, and I went through a lot of ideas, very, very quickly. But it was only when I decided to set it in England and an England not that far away from our own England, that it suddenly felt grounded. It felt more like a project that I might actually do. It seemed to me that it was a matter of thinking of a chronology of magicians, fitting them in, and almost simultaneously I came up with two ideas. One was a nameless magician-king, a very powerful magician who would be a medieval magician and also two men who would always be linked together in the public mind and who would hate it because they thought they were very, very different. Once I'd got the relationship of two men who were complete opposites, but who everybody muddled up, and mistook one for the other, then everything flowed.

GS: Mr Norrell in particular is the sort of character you don't get in fantasy novels; I think the book says at one point that he does stuff for Lord Liverpool and then sends

him the bill. You don't get characters like that who are, I guess, prudent, and, small-horizons magicians, if I can put it like that. Jonathan Strange you can see being a more attractive figure to people, but Mr Norrell, I don't know. Were they both there at the same time, as it were, when you started thinking about it?

SC: I had thought of Strange before. In some ways he is the oldest character in that years and years before I'd had this vision almost of a man standing in a piazza, and I thought it was in Venice, in Eighteenth-Century clothes at that point, talking to some English tourists. That was how I came up with that.

GS: At what point did you settle on which period it was set in?

SC: That happened very naturally because when I started to write about it, I originally thought they were both Eighteenth Century but they kind of crept forward. Just because I knew Jane Austen's books so well, and I knew the style in which she wrote and I knew her dialogue, it just became very easy to start to use that knowledge. I also realised that there was this thing called the Napoleonic Wars which might be really good if I could get it into the book. That I have to admit was scary at first because it meant that I had to do all this research and I knew nothing about military history at all.

GS: And Byron?

SC: Byron always looked interesting, particularly since, as I say, one of the first things I knew about Strange was that he was going to go to Venice at some point. I always intended Byron to be an offstage character and we'd have people come on and say, "Byron says this –" and "Byron says that –", but for him to not actually appear. But by the time I finally got to Venice it was just too tempting, and I couldn't quite resist having him actually come on. He makes a big impression for a character whose only there for about a page in total.

GS: But that's what Byron did.

SC: Definitely, that's exactly what Byron did.

GS: You mention Jane Austen, and clearly she's an author who's influenced you a great deal, but in one of your *Starlight* author's notes you named another three authors, who you said had influenced you a lot, and I'd be interested to hear how they fed into this. They are G.K. Chesterton, Charles Dickens and Neil Gaiman.

SC: I think Dickens is particularly easy because one of the things that Austen didn't do was big adventures, she didn't do battle scenes, she did intrigue, but of a very social sort rather than political. As soon as you go away from the domestic world, as soon as you go outside the drawing room into the streets, and into the battlefields, and into the rooms where the politicians are talking about what needs to be done, you step away from her idiom. It was also that I

needed to do more description, it's a fallacy that Jane Austen describes very much. She described very little because she knew what drawing rooms and streets looked like. I wanted to do more description, so then you start drawing on Dickens more. He's also wonderfully surreal – there's often something very surreal about his descriptions which I like as well.

The book of Chesterton's that I like most is *The Man Who Was Thursday*. What you find there and in some of his other books is the most wonderful visual, almost filmic scenes where things are presented in very simple colours – scenes of heraldic simplicity, very, very vivid and unusual and that's always something that I would love to do whenever I can. He just drops these startling images into your head.

Neil Gaiman was somebody who I'd read in the three or four years before I started *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* and whom I felt this close connection with because of everything he wrote about magic. One of his fans once wrote that he'd provided the furniture of her mind, and once he furnished part of my mind, it stayed furnished like that. It was very useful to me when I started writing about fairies, which was something I'd never done before. I think my fairies were pretty close to Neil's fairies. I loved the way they were more wicked than they were nice, and that they also had a sense of innocence about them. I think as well as Neil's actual writing, another influence on my fairies was some of his illustrators for *The Sandman*. The fairy-story in the Inn at the World's End sequence was drawn by an artist who I don't think drew any other *Sandman* but he just drew this picture of a fairy face with these most wonderful innocent eyes; this fairy was doing the most awful things but he maintained this look of innocence. That was what I wanted my fairies to be; they were completely amoral, they didn't understand morality. And so while doing these dreadful things they could maintain this core of innocence.

GS: It's the sense of strangeness isn't it? I think it was John Gardner who said that the one thing you couldn't fake in fiction was strangeness.

One of the other names to throw in the mix is Hope Mirrales, *Lud-in-the-Mist*.

SC: That's an interesting one because I didn't read *Lud-in-the-Mist* until I was halfway through writing *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*, and I was talking to Farah Mendlesohn about this about a week ago, saying that I was disgusted when I was reading it because I was reading it in this really tatty, falling-apart American paperback. I didn't take to it as much I was expecting to, or as much as everyone had told me I would. I think partly it was reading this awful type on this really horrible woodpulp paper.

GS: Edition phobia.

SC: But I think it's also to do with the fact that writers like Neil have already gone to Hope Mirrales, and taken from Mirrales, and so a lot of these ideas I have already seen in Neil Gaiman, in *Stardust*. Very often the first place you find an idea is where you treasure it. I love Hope Mirrales more through the prism of Neil Gaiman than in her own right. Having said that, I'd like to go back and read it again and see what I think. In a better edition.

GS: I want to come back to this idea of Englishness because it's not just that this is a book that could not be set in another country, but it's interesting to me in that it is not treating England as if it's one homogenous blob.

There are clear distinctions between the urban and the rural, between the north and the south. Was there a conscious revisionist impulse there or was it just the way things evolved?

SC: I think it's significant that my first hazy thoughts about this book were had in Bilbao, where I was finishing a teaching English as a Foreign Language job. In the middle of '92 I came back and one of the reasons was I knew that I was going to write this book and that I needed to be in England to write it. I came back to my parents' house because I didn't have a job at that point. They were living on the East Durham coast, not far from Peterlee, and so I think that's why the Raven King's capital is Newcastle because the biggest entertainment I had at the time was to get on a bus and go to Newcastle; that was a great treat for me. I was surrounded by these huge Durham skies, these northern skies.

When I was growing up we moved around a lot because my father was a Methodist minister. We lived mostly in the north and the north Midlands. So although I don't speak like a northerner – and any self-respecting northerner will spit on me when they hear my southern ways of talking – I feel very northern. I've been very aware all through my life that the north and the south are two completely different places. I love to get back to the north whenever I can. I miss northern landscapes.

GS: One of the things that the book does with Englishness is to kind of threaten it. Particularly towards the end there are sections where England just seems to shimmer. One of the ballads about the Raven Kings says "This land is all too shallow, it is painted on the sky.", an image which just stayed with me for ages. That is what the fantastic does, I suppose. It makes you look at this world outside the window and start to go, "Hmmm."

SC: It's faerie coming through, but it's not just faerie, it's kind of the magic which is in England's bones coming through the mundane and coming through what seems safe. I think that in this book there's this big romantic thing about the English countryside, because this is the era when they were just poised before a lot of industrialisation. The countryside, particularly in the north, was about to be destroyed. There is this real romantic ideal that the real England, the countryside, could kick back.

GS: As I reread it recently I felt that it was an extraordinarily threatening experience as I got towards the end of the novel, as you see what's happening. One of the tensions that you are resolving is having this very calm, very controlled Jane Austen-esque language and yet you are describing things that Jane Austen, or Dickens even, wouldn't have dreamed of doing. Was that something you thought about as a technical challenge or was it that there was a voice that told you how you were to do this?

SC: To be honest I don't think that I realised what a tension I was setting up at the beginning. I fell into this voice because in some ways it was a very familiar voice. It also draws on later writers. It's always interesting the echoes that people hear. There are certainly echoes of E. Nesbit and Nesbit is a writer that C.S. Lewis drew upon for his narrative voice in the Chronicles of Narnia. They are all very English voices. Some people hear bits of Sherlock Holmes in it, and I wouldn't be at all surprised if that were right. The only echoes that surprise me are the people that I

have not read or not heard of. I think that might be a bit too far. I found the narrative voice very flexible and it could do these things that Austen and Dickens had never done. I'm not a writer who sits down and thinks out the problems before, I just sort of find a way of muddling through.

GS: Staying on questions of style, it's so interesting to me because so much bad fantasy is written in this god-awful High Style – to use the technical critical term. I suppose it's interesting that early on you realised that this book was going to involve large scale magic, and depictions of big and scary things happening, and yet you decided to write in a voice that was more used to writing about interiority and small scale.

SC: As I said, I chose the voice first, and at the beginning – because I'm not a writer that begins at the beginning and goes on to the end, I start with bits and scenes and so on – at the beginning I was doing a lot of the drawing room scenes, and a lot of the conversations. In other words I was doing a lot of the Jane Austen bit and I was taking this to a writing group in Cambridge, and they said this is all very well but this is a book about magicians and you haven't done any magic yet. And I was thinking, yeah, I'm going to have to get around to that, to do some. I was quite nervous. In my usual way I hadn't really sorted out any of the problems.

GS: In a sense it works because in the early stuff the Mr Norrell stuff is relatively constrained, because that's how he is. Once you meet Jonathan Strange it becomes much more expansive and relaxed.

SC: When I started writing the magic it seemed to me that the thing you to do was not to ape what people see on videos and CGI so you had to do something different than what they would find on TV or film – or what was the point? I thought about the magical writers that I like – like Ursula Le Guin, and also people like Joan Aiken, who don't so much do magic but whose books have this magical feel. From Ursula Le Guin I got the idea that magic must be difficult, had to be probably boring for the actual magician who was doing it, although wonderful for anyone who was watching, and from Joan Aiken I felt that it have to have atmosphere, which was the thing that the special effects people couldn't really do, but a novelist could.

GS: On the visual side I wondered what input you had into the look of the book and the illustrations.

SC: A lot. I was incredibly lucky. Cambridge has this open studios programme which happens every summer and when I was into the fourth or fifth year of writing, we stumbled across Portia Rosenberg the illustrator, and she'd

done some illustrations for *Oliver Twist*, and some illustrations for *Cinderella*. I thought she was amazing because if you sort of cross-fertilised *Oliver Twist* and *Cinderella* you would almost get *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*. Her illustrations are very dark and atmospheric, and slightly unsettling. It just came into my head that she would make a great illustrator for the book. But I don't even think I told her I was writing a book at that time, because it just seemed so far off.

And then at a point where I had finished probably two-thirds and was working on the last part, and I had an agent who was bored with not sending it out who decided that he would send it out – because that's what he liked to do – and he said that maybe what we ought to do is get some illustrations to pique the interest of publishers. I said I think I know someone who would do this. Portia did five illustrations, which went out as a sort of package with the first two thirds of the book.

When I met the editor at Bloomsbury I said to her, so what about having the illustrations? She did the usual thing that publishers do and said that "I think the readers will want to imagine the characters for themselves". I said that it worked for Dickens. Dickens was always illustrated and no one complains that they can't imagine the characters. So, she just sort of said, "Hmmm, yes." I assumed that that meant we had dismissed that subject now, and we'd go onto something else, but a few weeks later it turned out that "Hmmm, yes" meant "Okay". Much to my surprise, Bloomsbury

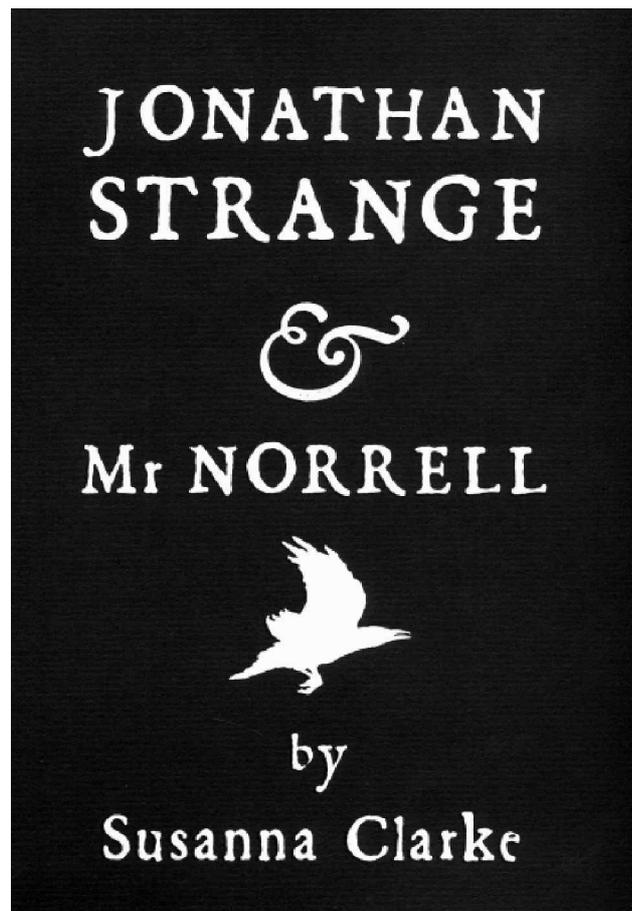
agreed to, I think, about twenty-seven illustrations. I thought, "How difficult do they want to make it for themselves? They're publishing this huge novel, which is part fantasy, part historical, part something else, by an unknown author, and they're going to put illustrations in." They couldn't make it more difficult for themselves if they tried.

GS: They seem to have done okay.

SC: They've done okay. I think they did make it look like a Nineteenth-Century novel, which was wonderful.

GS: If it is ever filmed it will be very interesting to see what sort of a visual look it will be given. You don't want it to be just perfect CGI magic.

SC: We met the film producer last week. One of the things I was saying, which I think is rather sad, is that you can now put on screen an almost perfect representation of Eddoras or Orthanc and you can make it look almost like the best artists have visualise it and it's wonderful. But what



you can't do is recreate 1807 London. You can't make it look like 1807 London would look because they will go to Prague or Budapest and film it there. While that cheaper option is open to them you will never see London. You can see something that never existed but you can't see how London was in the early Nineteenth Century. I have to resign myself to that, I'm afraid. I should be there saying the windows are the wrong shape or should be two inches taller.

GS: I suppose this is the point where I have to ask the obligatory sequel question, because John Clute said in his review that this is book one of a trilogy and I understand that this is not the case. Are you working on another book? Is it related to this?

SC: I didn't know it was a trilogy until John Clute told me. The truth is I don't really know what happens. When I was writing this book, I was working full-time, and I was writing in the early mornings before I went to work, and I was writing at weekends, so for ten years we didn't go out very much or anywhere at all. I knew I could not continue. So if Bloomsbury had not had this amazing faith in this book from the start, it probably would have been the only novel I would have written. I would have carried on doing short stories for Ellen Datlow and Patrick Nielsen Hayden, I hope, but I knew I couldn't face doing another big book. So naturally there wasn't a thought of a sequel because that was the rest of my life gone. But in about year eight of writing this novel an idea for a character popped into my head and would not let go. I knew that I wanted to write another book about this character. That's what I intend to do and it is set in the same world, so that extent it is a sequel, but it's more what happens to the world than what happens to *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*. Where it goes on from there I don't know.

GS: That's one of the senses you get as you finish the book, that structural changes are happening, things are skewing and it would be wonderful to find out more about that.

SC: Yes.

GS: Dot dot dot...

SC: And I would be interested in finding out the answer to some of those questions too. There's a lot more to the world than I put in the book, so some of it I know, but a lot of what I know is limited. I know about the medieval past or I know about the characters, so a lot of what happens in the immediate aftermath of this book is still for me to find out as well, which is interesting.

GS: That's one of the nice things about the use of footnotes in the book, you immediately get this sense that this story is nested in a set of others. You could for example go back and reconstruct the story of Martin Pale who was in that extract you read. There's a much larger frame to this story than all these pages tell us.

SC: Yes, that's true. The first idea was the chronology, and there was the medieval magician at one end and there were these two quarrelling guys at the other end, and at one point it was a toss up: I could have done the medieval story or I could do this later story. So there's a lot about the Raven King that I know, the other magicians that came in between like Martin Pale, and Bloodworth and Godbliss, they grew organically out of the book.

GS: Let's turn to the audience.

Audience: Did you write the footnotes as you went along,

or did you go back and put them in later?

SC: One of my early ideas was that this was going to be a novel of letters, an Eighteenth-Century novel of letters, as *Sense and Sensibility* was originally a novel of letters until Jane Austen changed it. I started writing letters from one character to another. But then I realised that this is a terribly slow and long-winded way to tell a story and I abandoned that to start telling the story in a more conventional way. I missed the freedom you got with letters. Because if you've got letters between characters they can talk about anything that occurs to them. I also had all this back-story, all this medieval history I wanted to get in. At one point I just tried a footnote and I realised I could get the history in, and I could wander off down any avenue I wanted to. I then started writing footnotes as they occurred to me. For a long time there were quite a lot of floating footnotes, which didn't really attach to any text but which I was sure I could get in somewhere or other eventually. And I think I did get them almost all in.

Audience: Can I ask you about your women characters? One of the interesting things about the book is the way that it portrays convincing period relationships between the men and the women, but did you know from the start that the women wouldn't be the main focus of the story?

SC: I was very keen to get the relations as you say, and the women's position as authentic as I could. I really hate novels where women in the Seventeenth Century or the early Nineteenth Century suddenly acquire Twentieth-Century attitudes for no reason whatsoever. I think the women of the early Nineteenth Century were really proud of having the domestic sphere as their sphere and being powerful within it, and of not really going beyond it. They felt that there was nothing wrong with this. It did mean that as the book progressed that there seemed to be less space on the page for the women and that was not something that I intended. I knew it was going to be a book primarily about these two men and their relationships. But the women were edged off the page rather than out of the story, because they are still there. Arabella and Lady Pole are still quite influential upon events, even though a lot of the time they are hidden. Some of this is my love of hidden characters. There was a short story that I wrote called 'Mrs Mabb' which I think appeared in *Starlight 2*, and my father read it and said, "But Mrs Mabb doesn't appear". I said, "Yes, that's the point." I do like characters who have a strong influence upon a story but who never appear very much. As it is with my first story where Mr Norrell doesn't appear much but is directing events. If the next book comes out as I intend it to, there will be more female characters and more for them to do. They will still be, I hope, accurate to how women were in those days.

Audience: How did you come up with the name Jonathan Strange?

SC: That was a long and tortured process. Originally I wanted to call him Jonathan Wild because I thought it was a really cool name, but then someone pointed out there really was a Jonathan Wild, and it was just too confusing. I'd sort of known, but was trying to ignore it. Then I went through a whole lot of names, and Childermass was one name at one point, but that would not have worked for a title. It had to be a name which went with Mr Norrell.

Audience: I'm interested in how you kept going over ten years and maintain a sense of continuity and unity. Did

you revise?

SC: I revised constantly but I begin writing almost in a stream of consciousness kind of way, so my first attempt at a scene or a chapter is barely even in sentences. And then I revise and I revise until I get sentences, paragraphs, and dialogue. Once I've finished a chapter that's pretty much it. Somehow the style got fixed in my head and I managed to, I hope, keep it steady, over those ten years. Some of the earliest bits are in the last third of the book.

Audience: I was talking to a publisher at Eastercon who said they were pleased and jealous that your novel had been published but didn't feel they themselves could have done it and make such a leftfield book a bestseller. Where were Bloomsbury coming from? How did they have so much faith?

SC: I was advised at the very beginning, at the workshop in Yorkshire with Colin Greenland and Geoff Ryman, to try and get it published with a literary publisher, because the fantasy fans who like it will find this sort of thing anyway, and you'll find some other readers who wouldn't normally look on a fantasy list as well. At the beginning we had this impossible aim of finding a mainstream publisher who would publish a book about magicians and fairies.

It all became considerably more likely when I got the agent I did, who was the late Giles Gordon. He had been at one time Michael Moorcock's agent but his range of interests was huge, he'd also been Peter Ayckroyd's agent for a time, and all sorts of other people's agents. The thing that Giles did, that he always did, was aim big. He didn't know any other way to do it. As far as he was concerned there were only ever three or four publishers in London that he was going to take this to. He took it to two of them and they looked quite appalled, I think, so he asked me what we should do. My only comment was that Bloomsbury, I assume, wouldn't be scared of magicians.

Giles never told me what he was doing and so I just got a phone call one day, saying that Bloomsbury had made an offer. At the beginning it was a very respectable offer, but it wasn't anything remarkable. What happened next was that the London Book Fair was just about to happen, and Bloomsbury decided they had to have World Rights, and they were sending it out to various people, and Doubleday got hold of it. Doubleday came in and made rather a large offer, at which point Bloomsbury said that Doubleday were never meant to have seen it in the first place, and we (Bloomsbury) want to publish it in America ourselves. They got more confidence because Doubleday were interested.

One of the things that helped the book was that in Britain Bloomsbury are a medium-sized company but have a large profile. A punchy company. In the States they are a small company. So for them they were determined to make a go of it, and they were able to concentrate on it in a way that a big company with lots and lots of books wouldn't have been able to do. The other good thing about Bloomsbury in the US is that they are in the same building as Tor, they have the same distribution as Tor and they are on very good terms with Tor. Some people from marketing in Tor went out to lunch with Bloomsbury and told them how to sell to science fiction and fantasy fans. Bloomsbury were open enough to listen and Tor were nice enough to talk to them.

GS: This year must have been an unusual year for you.

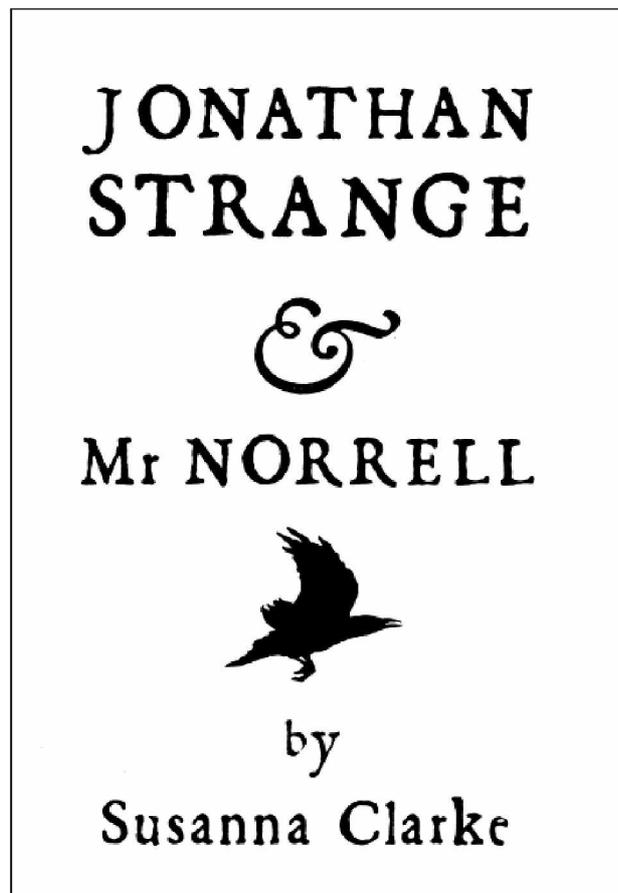
SC: It's been extraordinary. Last week we went to the British Book Awards and the chairman of Bloomsbury turned to me and said, "You must have a pretty strange idea of what it's like to publish a novel." And I said, "Yes, you just sell it to your publisher and then you turn up and get the awards." I know it's not like that, because I'm married to Colin Greenland and lots of my friends are writers, and this was not at all what we expected to happen with this book. Nobody expected this book to have the life it did, it has been extraordinary.

Yes, I do wake up in the morning and pinch myself.

GS: Susanna Clarke, thank you very much.

SC: Thank you very much, I enjoyed that.

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Graham Sleight writes regularly for the New York Review of Science Fiction and Foundation, and is Assistant Editor of Foundation. He has also

contributed to Interzone, SF Weekly, Science Fiction Studies, and infinityplus.co.uk. His essays appear in Snake's-Hands: The Fiction of John Crowley (eds. Alice K. Turner and Michael Andre-Driussi), Supernatural Fiction Writers, 2nd edition (ed. Richard Bleifer), Christopher Priest: The Interaction (ed. Andrew M. Butler), Parietal Games: Non-Fiction On and By M. John Harrison (eds. Mark Bould and Michelle Reid) and the forthcoming Polder: A Festschrift for John Clute and Judith Clute (ed. Farah Mendlesohn) — Eds.

ONE OF THE STAPLES OF THE FIRST FEW YEARS OF MY REGIME AT VECTOR WAS THE THEME ARTICLES WRITTEN BY PAUL KINCAID, WHICH MANAGED TO DISTIL A LOT OF KNOWLEDGE AND INSIGHT INTO A SHORT SPACE. A COUPLE WERE DRAFTED BUT NEVER USED, FOR REASONS WHICH ARE LOST TO ME NOW, BUT IT WAS ALWAYS ANTICIPATED THAT ADDITIONAL COLUMNS WOULD BE WRITTEN TO PRODUCE A BOOK. I STUMBLED ACROSS THE FILES A WHILE BACK, AND THOUGHT THAT THIS ONE WAS TOO APPROPRIATE TO LET GO

Cognitive Mapping: The End

by Paul Kincaid

"A woman is sitting alone in a house. She knows she is alone in the whole world: every other living thing is dead. The doorbell rings." This short short story, "A Woman Alone with her Soul" (1912) by Thomas Bailey Aldrich, is just one of many versions of this brief scenario, and its very ubiquity is an excellent illustration of science fiction's uneasy fascination with eschatology. We are drawn to notions of the end of the world, but find it difficult to confront the end of humankind. That final ring isn't just vaguely comic because of the domesticity of a doorbell, and vaguely disconcerting because we wonder what it might be; it betokens continuation, that life goes on beyond the catastrophe.

The Gothic imagination, with its romantic attraction to images of ruined castles and storm-blasted nature, was naturally drawn to notions of the end of things. As British science fiction grew out of the Gothic, therefore, writers such as Mary Shelley (*The Last Man* (1826)) and Richard Jeffries (*After London* (1885)) contemplated, with surprising equanimity, a time after our civilisation, one lone representative of our race approaching the wilderness with the sort of fortitude with which a contemporary would have approached a journey into the dark heart of Africa. So H. G. Wells' famous image of a black creature flopping across an empty beach under a final sunset in *The Time Machine* (1895) is unusual in drawing a line not only under humanity but under all life. Yet when Stephen Baxter continued the story in *The Time Ships* (1995) he went beyond the end of time into a new beginning. Even on such a cosmic scale it is easier to think that life, in whatever form humanity

might have adapted by then, will continue rather than that it will come to a complete stop.

Contemplating a time after the catastrophe wasn't just a prerogative of British scientific romance, Jack London presented a world in which a handful of survivors decline into barbarism in "The Scarlet Plague" (1912). But it was after two world wars, followed by the immediate possibility of global nuclear destruction, that the catastrophe became a universal theme. American writers from George R. Stewart in *Earth Abides* (1949) to

Stoddard and Arnold sat huddled together watching the groping figures grow dimmer and dimmer until the last ray of light was extinguished in the dense impenetrable blackness. But hours later they knew from the sound of voices and the pressure of hands and bodies, that thousands were still crouching in their seats waiting hopefully for the light that had always returned.

Arnold dozing against Stoddard's shoulder found himself repeating a phrase from Friedmann's last remark: "There is no hope — There is no hope —"

Philip Latham, 'The Xi Effect' (1950)

Edgar Pangborn in *Davy* (1964) competed with British science fiction from John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* (1951) to Keith Roberts's *The Chalk Giants* (1974) in presenting the results of nuclear catastrophe, either directly or through a fairly transparent metaphor. But in the main these are not stories of the catastrophe itself, but of humanity's survival afterwards. In the sort of rural idyll that Stewart presented in *Earth Abides*, for instance, the small body of survivors may face trials and threats but they are also rid of the sprawl and poverty of big cities, the pressures of urban life. The earth does abide, life does continue, we may see the loss of human civilisation, but that has not always been presented as an unalloyed virtue in science fiction and at least the

George looked at his daughter's empty suit. He thought of Job. Satan lacked imagination. To crack a man's faith, one need not resort to burning his flesh, ruining his finances, or any such obvious afflictions. One need only take a man's species away from him.

James Morrow, *This is the Way the World Ends* (1986)

chance to start again in the sort of close community that we haven't seen since the early days of the American West makes nuclear catastrophe almost attractive.

The British equivalent presents a revival of the Dunkirk Spirit as a small bunch of survivors has to pull together to survive the depredations of giant plants or giant wasps (in Keith Roberts's *The Furies* (1966)) in

order to restore a cosy suburban way of life.

Throughout the 1940s and '50s there was a spate of stories in which the last survivors of the catastrophe turned out to be Adam and Eve promising, with little genetic justification, the rebirth of humankind, the best of them being Alfred Bester's ironic variant on the theme, 'Adam and No Eve' (1941). Sometimes, of course, there are stories that suggest that human history on Earth has come to an end, as, for instance, in Clifford Simak's *City* (1952) where humanity abandons the planet. But here the dogs who step into the ecological niche we have vacated take on sufficiently human characteristics for us to identify with them: they are human in all but name. Or Isaac Asimov's stunningly doom-laden 'Nightfall' (1941), in which an advanced civilisation watches the inevitability of its own destruction and madness; though here, too, we are contemplating the end of civilisation, not of life, we already know they have climbed to this peak before and will probably do so again. The overwhelming message that came from the vast majority of science fiction that assumed the mantle of nuclear warnings in the 1950s and '60s was that the holocaust could be survived, and though it might be a bit difficult at times, man would come through and everything would get back to the way it used to be. (Occasionally, as in such varied stories as Piers Anthony's *Sos the Rope* (1968) or Lucius Shepard's 'Human History' (1996), this post-Holocaust idyll would contain within it a group of scientists in a redoubt who maintain all the old, bad medicine of nuclear physics and who must not be allowed out to despoil our world again. But even this mildly anti-scientific message tends to be ambiguous, in *Riddley Walker* (1980) by Russell Hoban, for instance, the rediscovery of gunpowder is a bad thing but also an inevitable process in the redevelopment of human civilisation.)

Of course, the archetypal central figure in science fiction is the competent man, and the idea of defeat, the idea that no solution can be found, runs directly counter to such competence. Which makes Philip Latham's 'The Xi Effect' so unusual for its period. Here the metaphor for nuclear disaster is a gradual but inexorable shortening of wavebands which steadily wipes out everything from radio to light. Latham's competent scientific heroes are allowed to explain the effect, but not to find a solution. The final statement of hopelessness must have been almost unique in sf of that era.

If science fiction's message of catastrophe was essentially palliative, it was left to writers outside the genre to be more honest and more despairing. Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957) denies any hope of survival, as does Peter George's *Dr Strangelove* (1963), while the film *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* (1961) left an ambiguous ending but little real sense of hope. Such negative messages were coming at a time when the science fiction of comic books was pretending that nuclear accidents might turn ordinary mortals into superheroes such as *Spiderman* (1962).

During the 1960s increased nuclear tension

triggered by events such as the Cuban Missile Crisis, increased public awareness of the effects of nuclear weapons, coupled with a mood of protest and alienation, allowed a new generation of science fiction writers to present a bleaker canvas, though the threat was more likely to take the form of ecological spoilage as in *Earthworks* (1965) by Brian Aldiss or loss of individual power, as in 'I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream' (1967) by Harlan Ellison. More recently, the renewed ecological threat of BSE and CJD has prompted a revision of Jeffries's notion of an Earth returning to natural fecundity in the absence of humanity in Ronald Wright's *A Scientific Romance* (1997), while one can only assume the approach of the millennium lay behind such apocalyptic visions as the total social and environmental breakdown portrayed in Elizabeth Hand's *Glimmering* (1997). Nevertheless, when incidents such as Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and the increasingly obvious instability of the Soviet Union revived nuclear fears in the West, it was again writers from outside the genre who presented the starkest pictures. In the TV films *Threads* (1984) and *The Day After* (1983); the graphic novel *When the Wind Blows* (1982) by Raymond Briggs and the novel *Golden Days* (1987) by Carolyn See we get a graphic representation of the sores, sickness and inevitable death that is the lot of those unfortunate enough to survive the initial blast.

Science fiction, meanwhile, was now happy to present the destruction of the Earth, either comically as in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1978) by Douglas Adams or more seriously and more uncomfortably in *The Forge of God* (1987) and *Arvil of Stars* (1992) by Greg Bear or the *Xenogenesis* trilogy (1987-1989) by Octavia Butler. Nevertheless, no matter how darkly and uncomfortably Bear and Butler and Hand presented the moment of catastrophe, such stories still presented survival, with the aid of aliens (or in Hand's case, ghosts or intruders from some otherwhere), as an option for their heroes, and through them for humanity.

Again it was a lone voice, James Morrow in his bleak novel *This is the Way the World Ends*, who, alone of science fiction writers, was prepared to follow the notion of destruction through to the obliteration of humanity. Science fiction has often claimed to think the unthinkable, but just as individual death is clouded with visions of immortality or rebirth, so it seems that humanity's death can only be presented in hopeful colours of survival or rescue.

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First Impressions

Book Reviews edited by Paul Billinger

☞ = eligible for the 2005 BSFA Award for Best Novel

✍ = contains stories eligible for the 2005 BSFA Award for Best Short Fiction

Gavriel D. Rosenfeld – *The World Hitler Never Made*

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005, 524pp, £30.00, ISBN 0-521-84706-0

Reviewed by L. J. Hurst

What do Philip K. Dick, C.S. Forester, Newt Gingrich, Philip Roth and Robert Harris have in common? Not just that they wrote alternate histories, but that they wrote alternate histories about Hitler. What, though, distinguishes a Dick from a Gingrich? Toleration according to Gavriel Rosenfeld: that is, the closer to War World Two an author wrote the more likely he or she was to regard Nazism as a total evil, and the later a work was published the more likely it has been to 'normalize' (Rosenfeld's term) the consequences of a Nazi victory. It seems a reasonable view, certainly Katharine Burdekin's *Swastika Night*, published as early as 1937, saw the dreadful consequences of Nazi philosophy (Reviewed *Vector* 129). During the war a small book such as H.V. Morton's *I, James Blunt* (1942), set in 1945 a year after a Nazi conquest, makes the consequences clear as miners are worked to death and children hand their parents to the Gestapo, as had Serpell and Brown's *If Hitler Comes* (1940/41) (See 'Anywhere But Stoke Poges' *Vector* 148).

Sarban's *The Sound of His Horn* (1952) was one Briton's post-war vision of the world if the Nazis

imposed their dream – men chased through hunting parks as living prey, and Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) was an American's – Africans kept as cannibal specimens in zoos. Then advance thirty years and in Harris's *Fatherland* (1992) consider that Liverpoolians are migrating to Hamburg to play beat music in the bars of the Reeperbahn – the Nazis might have won, but the victory of pop music seems inevitable. If The Beatles would always have appeared was there any point to the fight against Hitler?

Against this apparent stream of determinism, Rosenfeld recognises that there is a contrary stream of alternate history: Hitler was defeated, but he was not killed. From secret bases in South America, or villages in the Tyrol, or in laboratories scattered around the world, Hitler has been living on, like a virus threatening to break out into a new pandemic. The world only seems to have seen the end of Hitler.

Norman Spinrad's *Iron Dream* (1972) could imagine Adolf Hitler never becoming Fuehrer but migrating to the USA, working as a comic-book artist and fulfilling his fantasies in sword-and-sorcery. Did Spinrad perhaps normalize (that is, lessen) the horror

of Hitler by converting his victims into fictional characters?

The Alternate Worlds of Hitler stretch out not just through literature, films, radio and television but also into cartoon strips, comic sketches and musical theatre. Rosenfeld considers them all in varying depth, and not only British and US authors but German as well, pointing out how neo-Nazis can misread examination as propaganda.

Rosenfeld, according to his Introduction, was rather like Moliere's gentleman who found he was speaking prose without knowing it: it was only after he read *Fatherland, SS-GB* (1978) and remembered reading Dick among his sf, that he discovered he was reading Alternate History. He hadn't known that it existed. Double-checking, though, that is not surprising as it sounds – while there are many alternate histories, and sf fans know about them, there are few books about the subject; possibly none. Reading Brian Stableford's entry 'Alternate History' in the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, there are no studies listed, only theme collections. Rosenfeld's may be the first critical volume dedicated to Alternate History, though it restricts itself very self-consciously.

On the other hand Rosenfeld struggles to master his subject more than the size of this volume suggests. While he appears to give a near-complete coverage of the development of the literature (that movement towards 'normalization') he sometimes misses works, does not even refer to them to show that he is aware that they exist. Rosenfeld seems unaware of John Clute's 'Hitler Wins' entry in the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*.

According to Clute, a Hungarian, Laszlo Gaspar, published the first post-war Hitler-wins tale in 1945 itself, seven years before Sarban's *The Sound of His Horn*. Rosenfeld also ignores the Gregory Benford/Martin H. Greenberg-edited *Hitler Victorious* (1986) which collects many of the stories he covers and includes a third version of Brad Linaweaver's 'Moon of Ice', while Rosenfeld only mentions other re-workings. Paying much attention to the Holocaust and the anti-Semitism of the Nazis, Rosenfeld misses other elements of religion which would have completed the picture. All the Nazi leadership, with the exception of Alfred Rosenberg, were raised as Roman Catholics, and in Frederick Mullaly's *Hitler Has Won* (1975) Hitler makes himself Pope, but that is another work missing from *The World Hitler Never Made*.

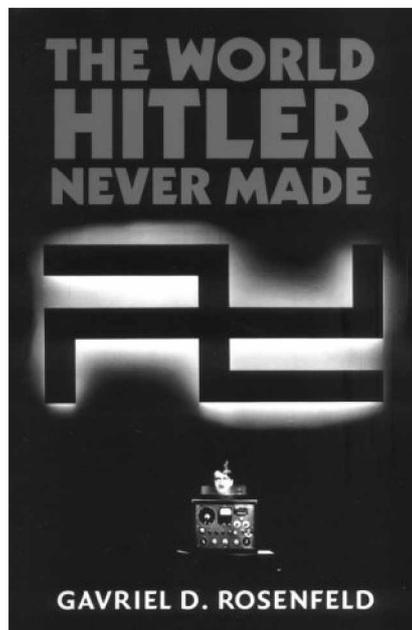
If there are works omitted, then the tables and percentages calculated by Rosenfeld in his Appendix are near worthless and his analysis of titles by period and tendency to normalization cannot be trusted. Cheekily, in an endnote he comments on his use of figures: "In calling these books bestsellers I do not adhere to a numerical standard of any kind".

While he studies the different themes (Hitler Lives, Hitler Wins, Hitler is never born) he mentions other common areas without interest, or even noticing their commonality. Why, for instance, are some stories cast as dreams, while others are not? C.M. Kornbluth's 'Two Dooms' (1958), is set around Los Alamos, but its action takes place in a mescaline dream, while Tom Shippey's 1986 story, 'Enemy Transmission' is set in a sleep laboratory at Oxford. Wartime stories are based on "documents" (James Blunt's diary, and a journalist's account in *If Hitler Comes*), while it is only the more recent works that use the detective story as their form. The police are co-opted by the Nazis, but Rosenfeld does not consider the difference between the political police such as French *Milice*, created by Vichy, and other officers. He could have pointed out how earlier works describe characters forced to become criminals (such as Morton's James Blunt), so that the historical movement is from criminal to policeman.

Being an American, Rosenfeld may not notice, either, how certain themes are played up in the British works. He mentions Humphrey Jennings's 1943 film *The Silent Village* that re-created the Lidice massacre in the fictional Welsh village of Cwmgiedd, but does not mention James Blunt's

correspondence with his daughter in south Wales and her account of the miners being worked to death. Clearly the Nazi threat to all parts of Britain was being emphasised, but Jennings and Morton had a very tight rope to walk – they had to emphasise the threat without recalling the police and army being sent into the Welsh valleys to force the miners underground before the First World War; forced into submission by Britain's then Home Secretary, Winston Churchill!

Although he does not use the phrase, Rosenfeld is critical of writers who lack high seriousness. They may have technical ability, but they write with an empty heart – this is his criticism of Martin Amis' *Time's Arrow* (1991) and Stephen Fry's *Making History* (1996) and perhaps also of Len Deighton. However, in his discussion of Deighton's *SS-GB*, his lack of reading shows itself again when he fails to



realise that the murder victim has a significant name – Spode. Spode, Roderick rather than Deighton’s William Spode, was P.G. Wodehouse’s send-up of Sir Oswald Mosley, Hitler’s British chum “that frightful ass Spode, swanking about” as he is described. No matter whether Britain could have fallen, Deighton introduced a subversive element into his fiction by re-using the name from Wodehouse’s earlier comedy, which Rosenfeld has failed to catch.

One of the strongest criticisms of Rosenfeld, though, must be his historicism, in which any change of decade becomes an epoch. On page 90 he actually attributes the burst of conservative re-appraisals of Nazism in the last ten years (by editors and authors such as Niall Ferguson and Andrew Roberts) to the “improvement in the national mood” engendered by the election of Tony Blair. There are strong arguments against a work exemplifying its period – as the biography of Morton published this year makes clear, *I, James Blunt* was commissioned by the Ministry of Information as a propaganda piece from Morton – it was his only work of fiction. Though free to use his invention he could not have written a work in

which Hitler won and everything was wonderful – it would technically have been defined as “spreading alarm and despondency”. On a near-similar basis people who repeated stories they heard from Lord Haw-Haw were prosecuted, frequently fined from 10/- to £2.00, and had the ignominy of seeing their names in the courts column of the local newspapers.

Considering that Hitler might not be born, and what the world might have been like, still appeals. Without ever mentioning him, it was the subject of the short play that ended ‘Woman’s Hour’ on BBC Radio 4 on Monday September 12th 2005, which questioned ‘should the Catholic Church allow cousins to marry?’. The question, though, should not be ‘should cousins marry’, but ‘does not reducing the implications of Hitler’s birth to a twist-in-the-tail entertainment also reduce the value of all the lives lost because of Hitler? When concern for that question shows itself in *The World Hitler Never Made*, as it sometimes does amidst all its other detail, it justifies itself.

Brian Aldiss – *Sanity and the Lady* 

Review by Gary Dalkin

PS Publishing, Hornsea, 2005, 218pp, £25.00, h/b, ISBN 1-904619-24-X

The only thing you can be sure of about a new Brian Aldiss novel is that you can’t be sure of anything; not subject matter, style, quality. I found *Cryptozoic* brilliant, but *Barefoot in the Head* made my head hurt, and *Helliconia Spring* bored me so much that I have read no other Aldiss novel until his latest arrived for review.

Sanity and the Lady (which sports a beautiful Pre-Raphaelite painting for its cover entirely irrelevant to the text) is a slight affair in which world-changing events happen almost entirely off-stage while the novel unfolds an knowingly ironic upper middle-class melodrama of deliberately distanced, theatrical, old-fashioned flavour. Aldiss has been publishing science fiction for 51 years (he turned 80 this year) and it is hard not to see his current novel as a mocking rebuttal to the British science fiction of the decade in which he began his career. In *Billion Year Spree*, Aldiss’ history of science fiction, he dismissed John Wyndham’s work as ‘cosy catastrophe’, and now we have, with tongue almost invisibly in cheek, Aldiss’ extremely cosy catastrophe novel, with due nods to Wyndham.

As in *The Day of The Triffids* and *The Kraken Wakes*, the aliens (variously dubbed The Emperors, Virus X, Functions or Autons) arrive amid lights in the sky, leaving a trail around the globe, though so far as we know none fall into the sea. As in *Chocky* the visitors make contact by entering the mind of our protagonist (Laura) as well as selected others around the world. We see the unfolding crisis mostly from Laura’s point of view, and to a lesser extent from that of several generations of her family. The

arrival of the aliens happens ‘off-stage’ before the first page, the violent American response is also reported after the fact, second-hand. Even technological attempts to remove the aliens from their hosts and experiment with them are barely described. This is a book about Laura, a middle-aged (she appears to be around 40, but her concert pianist grandfather is only in his sixties), upper-middle class lady novelist of some fame, the melodramas in her family and her attempts to understand and protect the alien visitors.

The family material is thinly sketched and deliberately flirts with soap opera cliché, albeit the clichés of an earlier generation. The date seems to be the present or the very near future, but no-one now lives as one big multi-generational family with a manservant who brings a nice cup of tea and macaroons, speaking as one of my generation imagines people did half a century ago:

“Yes. It’s wonderful. It’s science fiction! I’m terribly pleased. Aren’t you?”

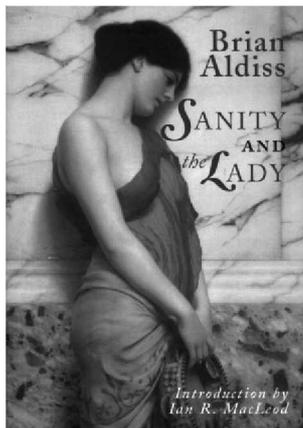
She could have hugged the young man. “Yes, yes, pleased as punch, to be honest.”

“I’m glad to hear it...”

“You know Freddie, one has visited me. That’s why I’m here.”

His mouth fell momentarily open. “You’ve met one? Wow!” (page 45)

Alongside the family saga Laura engages in a series of interior dialogues with the alien in her mind, and each



attempts to understand the other. Various eternal questions about the nature of God, life, the universe and everything are raised, but nothing considered with any depth, originality or insight. Meanwhile Laura becomes an advocate for the aliens and travels the world appearing on TV shows and before assorted governmental boards of enquiry. The resolution of Laura's personal life is laughably perfunctory and as unconvincing as anything in one of her own, evidentially mediocre, novels. There's some routine satire of American anti-terrorism policy, including a president whose name begins with B, but it's as easy as taking candy from a baby. There's also an extrapolation taking the opposite point of view.

Eventually the threadbare narrative takes a turn into pulp adventure fiction and an off-stage world-changing

finale, capped with a 'years after the event' epilogue and explanation. It's all so calculatedly retro, arch and knowing I was unable to escape the feeling the author was mocking not only his own tale, characters and handling of them, but also the genre and his readers too, and daring us to notice.

In that John Wyndham's novels were not cosy at all, Aldiss has written the most comfortable, middle-class, middle-of-the-road, Home Counties, whimsical and genteel cosy catastrophe novel I have ever read. And given that the author is far too experienced and intelligent not to have done this deliberately, I can in all fairness only conclude that was his intention all along. Why is an entirely separate question, the answer to which smacks most unpleasantly of biting the hand that reads.

Cory Doctorow – *Someone Comes To Town, Someone Leaves Town*

Tor, New York, 2005, 315pp, \$24.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-31278-6

Reviewed by Niall Harrison

There is an argument, voiced most recently by Judith Berman in the August 2005 issue of *Locus*, that fantasy is a tool for examining a person's interior non-realistic life, and science fiction is a tool for examining their exterior non-realistic life. Like all such arguments, it is sufficiently broad that counterexamples immediately suggest themselves; but in the case of Cory Doctorow's third novel, *Someone Comes To Town, Someone Leaves Town*, it seems more relevant than usual, because I find it very hard to think of another story that uses both tools in quite such a literal fashion. The result is a curious book, one that seems utterly indifferent to the way we expect fiction to work, one that is as much a failure as a success, and yet one that is filled with moments of unexpected beauty.

It is also a book blessed with a lackadaisical title and a gorgeous Dave McKean cover that do a better-than-average job of preparing you for its contents. It seems natural, not strange, when the narrative starts with a twenty-page description of a man buying a house in Toronto, lovingly renovating it, and filling it floor to ceiling with bookshelves and books. Doctorow's prose is, um, not beautiful – sentences are often overwritten or clumsy – but it is nonetheless effective, and it's only gradually that you realise the strangeness lying behind this endearing obsession: that the man has a mountain for a father and a washing machine for a mother. That he is mostly called Alan but sometimes Alvin, or Andrew, or Alex, and nobody bats an eyelid. That he's the firstborn of his family and his brothers follow in sequence through the alphabet, all blessed with a multiplicity of names – Billy (or Brad, or Bob) through George (or Gregory or Glenn). That he's the most normal of his brothers: that B is a seer, C an island, D a revenant, and E, F and G a living Russian Doll, one inside the other inside the other.

You realise all of this, and you accept it without quite knowing why. It would be misleading to say that there is anything so urgent as a plot in *Someone Comes To Town*;

rather the story simply ambles from point to point, from Alan's today to tomorrow to ten years in his past. There's no real sense of purpose – no chapters to give the text form, nothing so formal as a structure – but there are so many endearing distractions that that hardly matters. Gradually some things happen. One: Gregory goes missing, has perhaps been killed, and without him the triplets can't eat, can't function, will die. Two: Alan gets to know his neighbours, including the mysterious Mimi and her unnerving boyfriend Krishna. Three: Alan hooks up with a local anarchist nerdpunk, Kurt, who makes an improbable amount of money from craphounding and dumpster-diving and uses it to fund his pipe-dream scheme to throw a wireless network over the whole of Toronto.

The last of these happenings, in particular, is almost shamelessly idealistic. Doctorow's world is warm and optimistic, and Kurt is an energetic, messy enthusiast. At times (particularly when arguing with the Big Bad Telecomms Guys) he comes across like a mouthpiece for Doctorow (although to the book's credit, the Guys turn out to be less Bad than you might expect). At other times, he's more reminiscent of one of Stephen Baxter's slightly cracked scientists, someone like the Manifold trilogy's Cornelius Taine; not a scientist as hero, but a scientist as unpredictable advisor. Kurt's role never feels as mechanical as Taine's sometimes does, but both characters credibly bring an old-fashioned can-do feeling to the stories they inhabit.

Someone Comes To Town is not a safe book, and there are moments of alarming darkness. Alan's brothers keep on disappearing, in increasingly creepy circumstances, and things are not all better at the story's end. It is, however, a thoroughly modern book; its polished-up geek lives are instantly recognisable, and there is a strong sense that Doctorow is writing for a specific audience. There is also a sense that he has thought carefully about how to tell his stories. The book's lack of structure is revealed as a conscious design, an attempt to



describe the world as a set of interlocking tales. At one point, thinking about the network, Alan muses that 'it had no focus, it wasn't a complete narrative with a beginning, middle and end.' In the end, however, this doesn't matter, because what he and Kurt want is "to make the community a part of the network. Getting people energized about participating in the network is as important as providing the network itself—hell, the network is people." (273)

Perhaps it is overgenerous to call this part of the story

science fiction, but it is certainly an attempt to model Alan's world; and though Alan's nature is a peculiarly literal kind of fantasy it is fantasy nonetheless. Moreover, his narrative trajectory is as old-fashioned, in its way, as Kurt's. He has to discover who he is, and how to live, first alone, and later with Mimi. *Someone Comes To Town, Someone Leaves Town* is a parable of self-learning, and it rings true.

Jude Fisher – *Rose of the World*

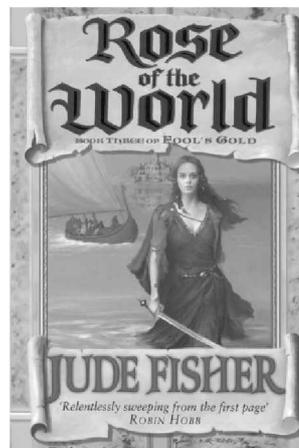
Simon & Schuster, London, 2005, 676pp, £11.99, t/p, ISBN 0-7432-5936

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

In this novel, third volume in the Fool's Gold trilogy, the various strands of the plot that have dispersed the many characters across the world of Elda begin to draw together. Readers of the earlier volumes in the series (*Sorcery Rising*, Vector 224, and *Wild Magic*, Vector 232) will recall that Elda has three deities, the Man, the Woman and the Beast, and that the Woman, the Rose of the World, had been abducted by a powerful magician, Rahe, and imprisoned in Sanctuary, his kingdom of ice in the far North.

The Rosa Eldi has now been returned to the world, has married Ravn, King of the northern Eyran Isles, and is beginning to regain her lost memories of her true identity. Lord Tycho Issian, Lord of Cantara in the south, who has been obsessed with the Rosa Eldi since he first saw her at the yearly gathering of the Allfair, prepares to make war upon the north to seize her for himself.

Meanwhile, the stories of the other characters whom the reader first encountered at the Allfair in *Wild Magic*, begin to converge. Aran Aransen, head of the northern Rockfall clan, has reached the fabled Sanctuary, but instead of discovering the riches he sought there, he finds himself doing the bidding of Rahe and heading south. Also in the south are Aran's daughter Katla, and the other women of Rockfall, abandoned when their men accompanied Aran on his voyage to Sanctuary, stolen from their home by



southern raiders, and sold as slaves. It is not giving away too much of the twists and turns of the plot to say that Katla once again meets with the southerner Saro Vingo, who saved her life at the Allfair, or that Saro is forced to confront the evil of his psychopath brother Tanto. Saro is determined to prevent the destructive power of the moodstone that he originally acquired at the Allfair being unleashed upon the world, and yet in order to do so he himself is forced to kill.

This is fantasy on an epic scale, with vivid descriptions of battles and quests, monsters rising from the sea, a multitude of characters, and a fast-paced, page-turning plot, that takes place in a well-realised world whose landscape of ice and snow in the north to the deserts of the south is as various as our own. However, as events unfold, with unexpected revelations about the identity of more than one of the characters, the trilogy proves to be more subtle than most, with the return of magic to the world having unforeseen, and often undesirable, consequences. Well-meaning actions do not always have the intended result, and characters are forced to face up to their faults. There is always a sense of how great, sweeping magical events impinge upon the people who have to live through them, which gives the *Rose of the World* a depth not often found in the genre. This novel, and indeed the Fool's Gold trilogy, are highly recommended.

Gary Gibson – *Against Gravity*

Tor, London, 2005, 378pp, £10.99, t/p, ISBN 1-4050-3446-7

Reviewed by Paul Bateman

In August this year Hurricane Katrina tore across the Southern States of the US. In the aftermath, law and order broke down. Looters, gangsters and gunmen plagued the streets of New Orleans. America was shown for what she truly is: selfish and self-righteous, blowing away the thin façade of democracy, liberty and equality. Everyone was for him or herself, a maelstrom of injustice and capitalism far removed from America's supposedly cherished civilisation. The irony was that in the heavy flooding in Mumbai a few months earlier in a Third World, and thus supposedly uncivilised, country the community held together.

The images were transmitted into our houses through our TVs, the internet and newspapers. These images were similar to those conjured up in *Against Gravity*. The only differences were that Gibson's latest book is set at the end

of this century, not the beginning. And I'd started the novel few days before the hurricane struck.

Such prophetic resonance has occurred with me before in Brian Aldiss's *Super-state*, in which a tidal wave struck Scotland. I read *Super-state* about a week before the Boxing Day tsunami struck in Aceh.

All this imagery, though, only forms the background and back-story to *Against Gravity*, when a religious civil war broke out in the USA following a nuclear explosion in Los Angeles. A number of suspected dissidents were rounded up and taken to the Maze, an underground prison camp and research facility in Venezuela, evoking recent images of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay. In the Maze, a number of people, nicknamed Labrats, were experimented on. They were treated with nanotech augmentations in an

attempt to create the perfect soldier. A number of prisoners, including Kendrick Gallmon, our protagonist, managed to escape.

We follow Kendrick a few years later in Edinburgh. Like many other surviving Labrats, his augmentations have gone rogue and are slowly disfiguring and killing him. He does not die when his heart stops forever, and he sees the ghost of a fellow prisoner urging him to return to the Maze. He and other Labrats are also plagued with images of the Bright, a powerful artificial intelligence programmed to find God. His search for the Bright, dogged by the opposing forces – a businessman and what remains of the zealous US Army – will lead him to an orbiting space station, the

Archimedes, for the final revelation.

In the final analysis, *Against Gravity* is very much a thesis on present day America wrapped around a strong plot and characters with a speculative twist. The acts of terrorism, an ultra-religious president, the rounding up of dissidents, interrogating and torturing them in camps outside of the US, the collapse of a fragile society, all point towards recent influences. And the timing of this book's publication makes it all the more topical and prophetic. Maybe Gibson's next book will be come out just before the impending revolution.

Jon Courtenay Grimwood – 9tail Fox  Gollancz, London, 2005, 326pp, £12.99, h/b (reviewed in proof), ISBN 0-575-07615-1
Reviewed by Paul N. Billinger



Sergeant Bobby Zha of the San Francisco Police Department needs to solve a murder: his own.

Which will immediately bring to mind (for some of us at least) the opening of the 1950's film noir classic *D.O.A.* which is also set in San Francisco and starts with small-town accountant Frank Bigelow reporting his own murder, by poison, giving him a few days to solve the crime. This association of Grimwood's ninth with the crime genre is entirely appropriate as, at its heart, *9tail Fox* is a crime novel with only minor sf elements. This, I should point out, is a Good Thing, as it's done with Grimwood's customary style and panache, melding all the elements – crime, sf and Chinese myth – into a brilliant character study. Grimwood's novels, especially the Arabesk sequence, have always had a strong crime element but here the sf elements move into the background, in a similar way to Paul McAuley's recent techno-thrillers, *White Devils* and *Mind's Eye*.

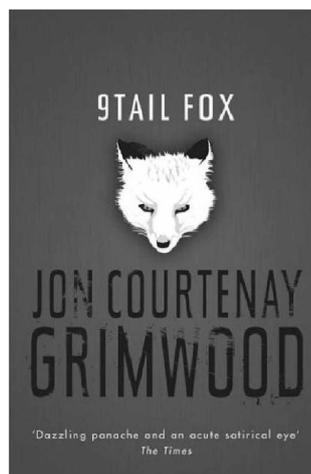
And this move away from the sf genre is not the only change. Whereas Grimwood is renowned for writing complex, interlocking, multi-streamed, narratives, for example in his last novel *Stamping Butterflies*, *9tail Fox* is (very nearly) a linear, single stranded work centred (almost) entirely on Bobby Zha. Okay, so we do have a flashback to 1942 and some sinister and morally dubious scientific experiments in Stalingrad, but most of the novel follows Bobby in present day San Francisco. Clearly, the novel will succeed or fail on the believability of this central view-point character and how the reader empathises with his decisions, his actions and emotions: a challenge that Grimwood surpasses with (apparent) ease. For all the convoluted structure and exotic locations of his Arabesk sequence it is the people – Raf, Hani, Zara – that make the books work, so the simpler structure of *9tail Fox* allows this to shine (although modern-day San Francisco is as convincing and well realised as El Iskandryia).

Bobby starts out as a none-too-successful or well-liked person, failing in both his career and his family, having more sympathy and understanding for Chinatown's street-people than for his wife, daughter or colleagues. It is only after his death – and unlike in *D.O.A.* he *is* dead, having been shot and had his head stoved in with a blunt instrument – that we start to learn the truth about what people really thought of Bobby. And as a consequence of the search for his killer Bobby is given a possibility for redemption and the chance to correct some of his mistakes. Bobby Zha is a classic Grimwood leading man: mysterious, tortured... and with a liking for dark Armani suits, very much of the lineage of Ashraf Bey. The complex family relationships around Bobby, and the skilful way in which Grimwood reveals them, brings to mind Ian Rankin's Edinburgh-set crime books featuring DI John Rebus. That Grimwood's characterisation and plotting can be compared to Rankin is serious praise, showing just how far Grimwood has come since his debut novel, *neoAddix*, in 1997.

I've deliberately said little about the plot – which is complex, intricate and successful – as you should discovered this for yourself, but it does involve the eponymous celestial fox (just what is the author's fascination with foxes?), the Russian mafia, a girl and a gun (well, if it was good enough for Jean-Luc Godard...?), a fifteenth century icon and a pile of rotting, dead babies (just as unpleasant, but not as simple, as it sounds). Added to which are the already mentioned medical experiments in Stalingrad, which give a very satisfying and well-resolved modern thriller. And, despite this being a crime

novel, it can't exist without the sf twist (well, Bobby *is* dead – he knows, he saw his body being buried), just don't expect it to be the one you think it is (and it is very, very far removed from the real-world simplicity of *D.O.A.*'s poisoning).

Quite possibly Grimwood's most well-realised and successful novel to date, and one which, with its accessibility, characterisation and plotting, could well be a mainstream success.



Guy Gavriel Kay – *The Last Light of the Sun*

Pocket Books, London, 2005, 501pp, £7.99, p/b, ISBN 0-7434-8423-1

Reviewed by Penny Hill



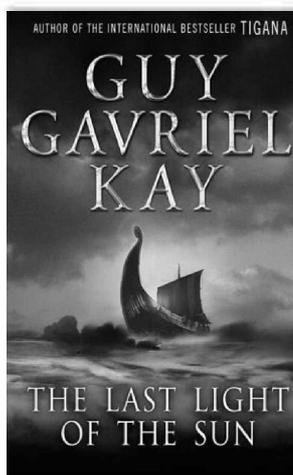
Guy Gavriel Kay is one of my favourite authors and a new work by him is always a joy. He writes thoughtful fantasy, often set in the history of a world very similar to our own, but sufficiently different to make magic a possibility. For me it was a joy to re-

read this story in the paperback edition.

The story charts events in an approximation to the time of the Anglo-Saxons and King Alfred – here represented by Aeldred, a civilised leader trying to introduce literacy and other educational survival traits to his people, while keeping his kingdom intact through a mixture of warfare, treaty and strategic marriages. This is a world where there are two moons – a blue and a white – which can shine together or separately. Fairies are real and derive their power from the earth but are still mourning the loss of their wings. Other spirit creatures are glimpsed, including the mysterious Spruauhs who later can be seen to be the result of some of the collisions between the magical and human worlds. The traditional mystical powers respectively of iron and silver are upheld.

Thematically, this is a novel about the world changing and becoming less magical as belief in Jad (an early form of Christianity) takes hold and spreads. One of the after-effects of the action of this story is that seeing people survive travelling through the spirit wood leads local inhabitants to treat the wood with less fear and reverence, leading eventually to its use as a mundane resource. Kay explicitly tells us “Actions ripple, in so many ways, and for so long” (p417)

We are presented with overlapping narrative strands from the viewpoints of a varied group of characters holding different positions within the 3 main cultures – Cyngael, (alias Welsh) anglcyn, (alias Anglo-Saxon) Erling (alias Viking). Although these characters and their cultures are necessarily in conflict with each other, we are able to



sympathise with them and feel relieved when each character receives their resolution at the end of the novel. Whilst most of these are satisfactory, there is a suggestion that one potential romance may not be expedient, preventing too facile a sense of achievement.

As well as weaving the main threads, Kay lets us see the impact of the events on other minor characters, in the form of shorter threads woven into and out of the tapestry of the main tale. Some affect events and are directly affected by them: Meirion, whose sister was casually killed by raiding Erlings at the beginning of the tale, takes her chance to avenge the death by warning the villagers of the returning raiders. Others are more tangential like the blacksmith who makes and loses a fortune, and the woodcutter who loses a hand and therefore his fiancée.

One of the major pitfalls when writing a historical novel is to avoid the extremes of either imposing modern cultural values or writing characters so fixed in their time that modern readers cannot sympathise with them. Kay successfully avoids this and it is especially noticeable in his depiction of women and attitudes towards them. There is a good balance between male and female characters and a variety of attitudes held by them, encapsulated in the argument and eventual resolution between Rhiannon and Alun illustrating their viewpoints and changing understanding of each other. On the whole the women can influence and change events but mainly by acting as catalysts rather than as primary movers. The afterword indicates how much work went into carefully researching this area.

The whole novel has a depth and resonance that comes from a sympathetic blending of our history and our myths with an intelligent and absorbing plot. There is a mature sympathy for all cultures and most of the characters, even when they oppose each other – down to the moral marital conflict between Aeldred and Elswith.

Nautical fantasy... the next big thing?**Paul Kearney – *The Mark of Ran***

Bantam, London, 2005, 400pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-553-81374-9

Reviewed by Estelle Roberts

This is very much a nautical fantasy, reading almost like a collaboration between Anne McCaffrey and Patrick O'Brian, and, as far as this goes, it is reasonably well done.

The eponymous Ran is a young man whose family scrape a living on the edges of a closed island society and have a close relationship with the sea. Not surprisingly, Ran is able to sail almost before he can walk, a skill which serves him well later in the novel. His story really begins, however, when the family are attacked without warning. His grandfather, left for dead, tells him to sail for a faraway city, there to find someone named Michael Psellos, who

may help him. On reaching this city he does find a home of sorts with Psellos and is trained in the art of fighting and killing, falling in love with the dangerous but very damaged Rowan. He also tries to find answers to the mysteries that surround his ancestry.

The actions of Ran and Rowan cause events to go violently and disastrously wrong and Ran decides to flee alone. Taking ship, his true nautical adventure now starts in earnest, as he sets off as part of a motley crew of free sailors and prisoners, temporarily released to make up the numbers. These men, of course, do not want to return to jail and following a storm, the decision is taken by the survivors to try to find a semi-mythical pirate city, an apparent haven for the desperate and the dispossessed. This they do, after an arduous overland journey, although the

term city seems to be a misnomer for what is little more than a hide-out in an ancient cave system. Ran, it appears, is destined to be its reluctant, almost accidental, saviour from the powers that would destroy it.

The characters, while not always arousing sympathy, are well-drawn and usually have understandable motives and desires. Ran is obviously desperate to learn of his origins and it is this, as well as his deep love for Rowan, that keeps him with Psellos, whose power has caused him to develop an almost intolerable level of arrogance and an amazing ability to use people. Rowan is perhaps the most sympathetic and interesting character although years of use and abuse by Psellos and others, to whom he gives her regularly, have left her emotionally crippled and very defensive. Her external persona is initially coldly violent and unpleasant, but this is later seen to be more than justified. The scenes on board ship ring true and are well described, as is the journey across harsh desert landscape to reach the Hidden City and the interactions of the men forced to brave such conditions.

This novel could well be described as a cross-genre work, and, therefore, its appeal is likely to be reasonably wide. It is page-turning and entertaining, and also exciting at points, and, while it is not a particularly outstanding piece of work, it, and the proposed sequels, are sure to be popular.

Naomi Novik – *Temeraire*

HarperCollins, London, 2006, 330pp, £12.99, t/p, ISBN 0-00-721909-1

Reviewed by Sue Thomason

Stephen King describes this book as “a cross between Susanna Clarke and Patrick O’Brian”; I’d look slightly further back for literary ancestors and, in horse-breeding terminology, call it a work “by C.S. Forester out of Anne McCaffrey”. In other words, we begin in Hornblower territory, on board His Majesty’s naval vessel *Reliant*, on detached duty under Captain Laurence, who has just captured a French frigate. The frigate is discovered to be carrying a dragon’s egg, on the point of hatching. As England is facing imminent invasion by Napoleon, and is woefully short of dragons compared to the massed forces of the Grand Army,

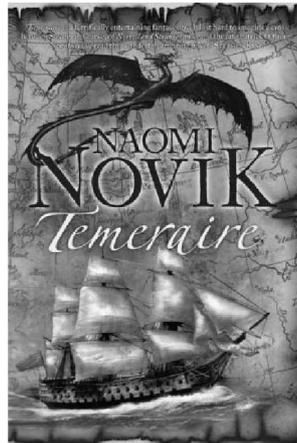


Laurence feels it is his duty to attempt to ‘harness’ (i.e. impress, in McCaffreyspeak) the emerging dragonet, although the situation is most irregular. He succeeds, and leaves the Navy, joining the privileged but unconventional (and hence excluded from Society) corps of aviators at their training cover by Loch Laggan.

The emotional core of the book is a love story; the story of the growing love and understanding between Laurence, initially a reserved and conventional man, and Temeraire, who turns out to be a most unconventional dragon. As Laurence learns more about his new vocation, he grows as a person, developing empathy, tolerance, and warmth. The plot thickens in a variety of directions, the period detail is both delightful and convincing, and the writing is delicate, observant, and assured.

I do have some faint reservations. One subplot appears to exist solely as an excuse for a tearjerker manipulation of the reader’s emotions, another subplot has a less than logical denouement, and there are subtle but unremarked differences in the history, ecology, and settlement patterns of *Temeraire*’s Britain and our own. However the story we are given is both satisfyingly complete, and a basis for several possible follow-on novels -- for example, the final climax is going to lead to some very interesting diplomatic exchanges between England and China. The issue of human-dragon relationships is very well-handled, with most civilians clearly regarding dragons as animals, albeit talking animals, whereas the aviators treat their partners as beings of equal, if not superior, intelligence (though dragons don’t seem to be tool-using), and there is at least one opening for a future exploration of human/animal/sentient being rights in a further book. (*Temeraire* is not recommended for cow-lovers.)

In short; I loved it! Total immersion in a unique and original world made up of familiar elements combined in novel but logical ways. If Novik goes on to write more books set in the same world (and I hope she does), I only hope that she continues to respect one of the prime duties of fantasy (duty is a major underlying theme in *Temeraire*); presenting ethics in palatable form. I admire *Temeraire*’s combination of ‘difficult questions’ with (apparently) easy emotional warmth; one without the other would make a much less interesting book.



Koji Suzuki – *Spiral* ☐

HarperCollins, London, 2005, 460pp, £6.99, ISBN 0-00-717907-3

Reviewed by Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc

Right, paying attention? Suzuki Koji’s novel *Ring* was a global phenomena that, in the space of less than a decade has been made into three separate film versions (in Japan, Korea and US), a manga, two film sequels (Japan and US – both confusingly directed by the same man but totally different), a prequel (*Ring 0: Birthday*, not to be confused with the book *Ring 4: Birthday*) and all manner of spin-off merchandise including a rather groovy sticker set and a

novelty mug. Now comes *Spiral*, another Japanese horror (not to be confused with the Japanese horror film/book/manga *Spiral...*), the sequel to *Ring*, but which is nothing like the two film sequels. There is a sense that Suzuki would enjoy the way that his work has been mutated, reproduced and evolved in different media, for this is the central theme of *Spiral* – the survival of a psychologically manifested virus through adaptation.

Ando, racked with guilt at the death of his son, finds cold solace in the bodies he dissects every day for a living. The mysterious death of Takayama Ryuji, a fellow pathologist with a passion for codes, leads Ando on a journey to discover the cause of a series of linked fatalities, partly by cracking a substitution code poking from the newly stitched-up cavity in Takayama. The trail leads to the earlier ring case where watchers of a video died precisely a week after viewing unless they duplicated the tape and made someone else watch it. But how is this all related to the apparent re-emergence of a mutated strain of smallpox and the repetition of DNA strands that seem to provide a biologically-produced code from beyond the grave? And what of the beautiful Mai, Takayama's student and lover, missing after apparently watching a doctored version of the ring tape? As Ando begins unravelling the disparate pieces of the puzzle through petri dishes, cadavers, old disks, videos, research papers and chance encounters with apparently supernatural entities it soon becomes clear that the virus has found a new way to propagate. Just how?

The matter-of-fact descriptions, the constant foetid air and the necessary absence of humour provide a tense read



here. Linking modern science with the supernatural is a common theme in Japanese horror and any sense of the possibly preposterous nature of the plot is nipped well in the bud by the earnest tone and belief in spirits of the dead that shapes part of the Shinto religion. Much of Ando's deliberations on the codes lies in the shadows of dying trees on the edge of Tokyo's Meiji shrine. The slow unravelling of the virus and its mutations, along with the possibility of the dead somehow contacting the living through biological codes reads like a horror version of *Enigma*. This may sound sordid or depressing but the economic sentences and non-exploitative, even clinical, imagery make for a chilling time – in lesser hands this could have descended

into visceral gross-out, but Suzuki's writing matches the detachment his protagonist has for his daily job making the whole experience linger rather than shock.

For those after a ghost story with a modern twist *Spiral* delivers. For followers of the many incarnations of the *Ring* this is another parallel universe from the original, mutated as the author intended for maximum reproduction and survival.

David Langford – *The SEX Column and Other Misprints*

Cosmos Books, Rockville, 2005, 243pp, \$17.95, t/p, ISBN 1-930997-78-7

Reviewed by Chris Hill

There are many positive things you can say about *SFX* magazine. It is nicely produced, it has a sense of humour, the film and television coverage is pretty good: there are a number of enjoyable programmes (*Buffy*, *Farscape*, *The Dead Zone*, etc) that it would not have occurred to me to give a try if it were not for the push they were given by *SFX*.

However, even the most fair-minded fan would have to admit that the coverage of written sf and fantasy is often less than good. In particular, with the exception of a few 'star' reviewers like Jon Courtenay Grimwood, their reviews show little depth of knowledge of the genre (it could be argued that this is not necessarily a problem, given that most of the readership seems to display little depth of knowledge of the genre, as evidenced by the annual readers' poll which seems to vote for the same writers year in, year out)

Thank goodness, then, for David Langford's regular column, present since the first issue and now gathered together in another nicely produced collection from Cosmos Books. The book shows Langford's usual eclecticism, bringing together articles on, among other things, writing – both good and bad – awards, censorship, electronic publishing and fandom plus obituaries, convention reports and so on. In fact, for the casual reader not already mired deeply in that world, this book forms an excellent overview of the full range of

interests of fandom, written with Langford's traditional wit and style.

In his introduction, Langford advises that this is a book to dip into rather than to read from cover to cover (a luxury the reviewer, alas, does not have) and there are good reasons for this. There are various points where information and comments are repeated, something that would be less likely to be noticed when the original articles were published but rather obvious when read in quick succession. Even so, with the individual articles being fairly short, I imagine most readers finding themselves thinking 'just one more article and then I'll put it aside' until, suddenly, they find they have almost finished the book!

One thing to bear in mind is that the readership of the book is likely to have little overlap with the readership of the original columns. So for the established fan there is a certain amount of familiar material here, ideas that Langford has written about in other places. But there is also much that is new, even for the most avid fan.

I do not know if *SFX* themselves plan to give this book any sort of publicity; let us hope so. If some of the more insular readers seek out Cosmos Books for this, maybe it will lead them to try other things as well (Langford's other collections for a start) and maybe open up a new world for them.



Tanith Lee – *Here in Cold Hell* 

Tor, London, 2005, 418pp, £10.99, t/p, ISBN 1-4050-0635-8

Reviewed by Penny Hill

This is the second volume of the Lionwolf Trilogy and explores very different ground from the usual middle volume fare. Where the first volume, *Cast a Bright Shadow* (Vector 237), was concerned with the lives of the principal characters, this volume focuses extensively on the consequences of those lives and the restitution that needs to be made during and after death. Lionwolf spends the book working his way through various hells, trying to make sense of what has happened to him and to work out what needs to happen next, while the characters who remain alive continue in the background with what would normally be the main narrative.

Although the title is *Here in Cold Hell*, the setting feels more like purgatory – with the importance of reparation before moving on from this transitional place. If volume one was life then volume two is death and consequences, ending with rebirth – presumably leading to resolution in volume three.

Unfortunately, Lionwolf's trials feel distanced from us because we are told explicitly that nothing in hell has any impact or lasting effect – and we see this in the repetitive meaningless slaughter that rarely ends in true death.

Perhaps because of the more contemplative tone, this volume is less brutal than the first – the characters are not so unremittingly awful to each other and there is a genuine sense of fondness between the various couples depicted. We see more convincing male/female relationships in this volume than the previous persistent misery.

Just as the coupling of the lion with the wolf provided the main disbelief-straining mythic image for the first volume, so in this volume Chillel's ability to pass on her

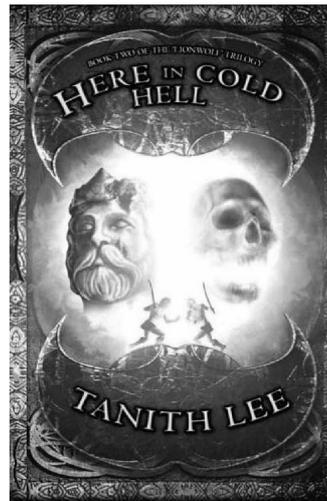
unborn children via men to other women has mythic resonances that sit uncomfortably with my expectations of a fantasy world. This theme also builds on the uncomfortable image of sex with Chillel as protection from the fantasy equivalent of a thermonuclear device (presented in the first volume).

A recurring motif across the narrative threads is that of Chillel's children, who grow up at an even more vastly accelerated rate than Lionwolf did. In *Cast a Bright Shadow* he felt immature as a consequence, which was possibly an explanation for his harsh behaviour. Here the accelerated children are beneficent, a blessing to the tribes that shelter them.

This contrasts with the other main theme – the impact of the gods on the people around them and the conflicts the gods cause. By now most of the major characters have died, come back to life, gained incredible powers and/or become gods – not necessarily in that order. The pre-existing gods seem petty and ineffectual despite their alleged power – the ludicrously named Zeth Zezeth, in particular, seems one-dimensional with little motivation for his continuing anger against his sons Lionwolf and Brightshade. Of course after *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* no self-respecting sf reader could take Brightshade seriously, as he is

an unfeasibly large, semi-sentient whale.

While it is good to see the new gods and magicians taking responsibility for their power, this prevalence of super-abilities does reduce ordinary people to the status of pawns. This is another indication of the improvement from the first volume – and a sign of how far it still falls short of what I look for in an adult fantasy series.

**James Lovegrove – *Provender Gleed* **

Gollancz, 2005, 331pp, £18.99, h/b, (reviewed in proof), ISBN 0-575-07683-6

Reviewed by Peter Young



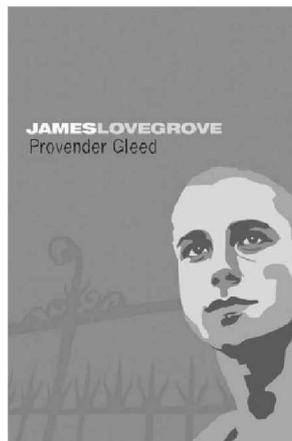
Evidently being a man with far too much time on his hands, I expect James Lovegrove's day consists of sitting around doing cryptic crosswords all morning, then in the afternoon he might mess about with words for a couple more hours before catching up on the

TV soaps (required viewing for some writers of science fiction), after which he will eventually sit down to do some actual work by pouring all this necessary research into a clever new book the result being his admirable new novel *Provender Gleed*. In truth I expect the creation of this novel was probably far more tortuous than that, but somehow Lovegrove makes it all seem so very easy, which is the way it should be for the gestation and creation of a very clever book such as this.

What we have is a 'bildungsroman', the moral awakening of the well-to-do protagonist Provender Gleed,

told through the story of his kidnapping. Set in an alternate present, the world is divided into spheres of influence of Families, in whose name all commerce is made, wars fought and governments run, like Royal Families without the 'Royal', and all from a history that diverged from ours when the Borgia and de'Medici families merged in the 17th century. The top British family is the Gleeds, whose home deep in the Berkshire countryside is the setting for the kidnapping of Provender, a young man with hidden depths and an unease with the disparity of wealth that the world's Families thrive on. Who are the people behind Provender's kidnapping, why, and where is he being held? Is it the result of inter-Family rivalry, and does Europe need to go to war over this? Called on to solve the case are two humble 'anagrammatic detectives', Milner and Moore, who attempt to solve crimes by uncovering the anagrammatic truths hidden in people's names, and they are both better at their job than one might think.

Lovegrove gives us the kind of society that lends itself to plenty of satire and this book has a very strong opening, the tone of which is noticeably cynical and sharp, mocking of the cult of celebrity beneath which the rest of us live and labour. While we can't help but dislike the Gleeds and all they stand for from the outset, they still have inner lives (well, most of them) which Lovegrove has the necessary good manners to elaborate on, such that they become characters we quickly know, understand, and recognise as if from before. Their inner motivations provide possible directions the book might take: they are Britain's most powerful Family, after all, and ought to be masters of their own destiny (at least in their own book), though it's their very names that constrain them into particular behaviour patterns which give Lovegrove (and us) the last laugh.



This is a book that needs to be recognized for much more than its soap opera premise allows for. To give it its proper due, there is more going on inside *Provender Gleed* than any brief review could convey, and like Provender himself this is a book with undercurrents, where at times the satire will become more shallow as something more subtle takes place beneath, and one prominent subtextual premise of the story surfaces in a particularly satisfying way. It's also a very self-contained story, necessarily. Where Lovegrove excels is the cleverness of his wordplay, which he seems to have gone to enormous lengths to get right, and around which the entire plot is cleverly interwoven. *Provender Gleed* is a 'must read' on that score alone, easily displaying why Lovegrove has the exceptionally good habit of writing books that stay with you.

Ken Macleod – *Learning the World*

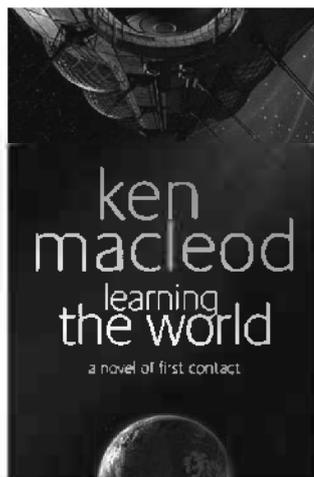
Orbit, London, 2005, 388pp, £17.99, h/b, ISBN 1-84149-343-0

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

The theme of *First Contact* is one of the perennial tropes of science fiction, and one wide enough to spawn sub-genres of its own. At one end of the scale (almost literally) is humanity's encounter with a mysterious and enigmatic Big Dumb Object, whose origin and purpose remain stubbornly unknown and ultimately unknowable (Clarke's *Rama*, Banks' *Excession* or, in planetary form, Lem's *Solaris*), and whose exploration can only evince a sense of awe and glimpse of the Sublime that has become enshrined as the final 'sense of wonder' (and which has led Farah Mendlesohn to describe sf as the last bastion of Romantic Literature). At the other end are alien invasion scare stories, from Wells' *War of the Worlds* to the rash of Cold War paranoia movies of the 1950s, although the theme of an implacable force inimical to life still resurfaces in more recent sf space opera such as the Inhibitors of Alastair Reynolds's *Revelation Space* universe.

Between them come a compass of stories in which contact with the alien serves as a mirror for humanity itself, the best of which (Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Blish's *A Case of Conscience*, Russell's *The Sparrow*) ask important and sometimes awkward questions about our relations with ourselves and others, in terms of psychology, politics, gender, and religious beliefs.

And so *Learning the World*, which is both the title of the new, and stand-alone, novel from Ken Macleod (subtitled 'a novel of first contact') and also that of the journal of the splendidly-named Atomic Discourse Gale, colonist-in-training on the great sunliner world-ship *But the Sky, My Lady! The Sky!* as it approaches the system known as Destiny II. Gale is second generation, shipborn, on a voyage that has lasted some four hundred years. Both colonists and crew are long-lived, if not quite immortal, though none as old as crew leader Constantine, who signs himself 'the Oldest Man'.



It is Constantine who takes Gale to see the huge reaction engines in the cones and admits that he gave the ship its name, in a moment of romanticism, millennia ago.

The Sky is a wonderful sf construct: more than a ship, slightly less than a world. Its central cylinder, kilometres across, houses entire towns and farms, even its own clouds and climate, illuminated by an axial sunline.

As Gale begins her journal it is a time of change. As a child of a mere 400 years, and since her adult implants to the ship's infospace haven't fully grown in yet, she elects to post her journal as somewhat archaic written text. The internal landscape of the ship is being transformed as towns and buildings are demolished to feed mass into the reaction engines for the deceleration into the Destiny system.

That flare of ionised matter, though, is detected by Darwin, an astronomer in the Faculty of Impractical Sciences in Seloh's Reach on the world Ground, as he searches exposure plates for evidence of the seventh planet. Initially he takes it for a new comet, and tracks progress. However, it becomes evident that this is a comet with highly unusual properties, in a massively decelerating orbit, and when he and his friend Orro calculate it following an orbital insertion path, Darwin and Orro find their work classified as a military secret and themselves pressed into the employment of the secret service.

Almost simultaneously, the ship's probes detect evidence of non-natural electromagnetic radiation from one of Destiny's worlds. When Constantine and certain members of the crew attempt an unauthorised, unorthodox, not to say morally dubious, attempt to decode the alien transmissions – one that amounts to cultural intervention – and release the results to the ship's net, it forces a crisis in the ship's mission. Gale's journal becomes a focal point for discussion argument, agitation, and even hate mail ("hey, don't shoot me. I'm only the messenger!") as the possibility

that the colonisation projects Gale's generation have trained for and invested in may have to be delayed or curtailed. Disenchantment turns to revolt and eventually a mutiny of sorts, abetted by the low-g adapted crew, who mainly want to dump their cargo of 'flatfoot' proto-colonists and re-jig the ship to travel on to the next system.

When second contact is eventually made, a surprise is in store for the humans, who come with all the prejudices

of a technologically advanced civilisation encountering one at a lower level. The inhabitants of Ground (bat-like bipeds, fully engaged in their own scientific and industrial revolution) seem strangely unimpressed. The answer, as Gale works it out in the last pages of her journal, as the ship departs, leaving them behind, is humbling and a little scary.

Juliet E. McKenna – *Western Shore*

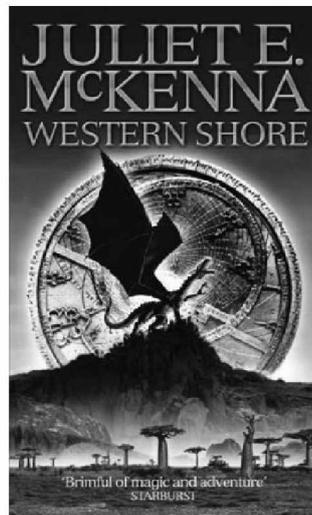
Orbit, London, 2005, 584pp, £7.99, p/b, ISBN 1-84149-376-7

Reviewed by Andrew A. Adams

This is the third and, I assume, penultimate, book in McKenna's Aldabreshin Compass series, a follow-up to her debut Tales of Einarinn series. While sufficient reminders are present at the start for those reading this without catching up on the previous instalment of a year ago, you really need to read the full sequence of the Compass to follow what's going on. I criticised the first

in this sequence (*Southern Fire*, Vector 234) for a lack of sympathetic characters and McKenna improved upon this in book two (*Northern Storm*, Vector 239) and has improved again in this one. Kheda, the principal viewpoint character is now much more acceptable in those elements of his attitudes that are reported in the first person slices: these are now much more about explaining his actions in terms of the plot than explaining his attitudes as a brutal barbarian (albeit less brutal than most of his contemporaries). Having subjected Kheda's lands to the ravages of invaders in *Southern Fire* and *Northern Storm*, *Western Shore* takes us to the source of these invaders and explains how and why they came to the Aldabreshin Archipelago. As with the barbarian invaders in her Tales of Einarinn, it is clear that McKenna had precisely worked out the justifications and pressures for her invaders before starting on the series. This is a refreshing change from what often happens in such tales where the origins of invaders are either glossed over or, when explained, do not fit with the culture they exhibit in the invaded land.

In a move somewhat reminiscent of Golding's *The*



Inheritors, occasional chapters of *Western Shore* are told from the viewpoint of one of the savages: an old woman. Our introduction to her world starts before she encounters Kheda and his companions and follows through her interactions with them. This is an important supporting thread since, for once, the language and cultural barrier

between the main viewpoint characters and the invaders is a significant element of the plot, and its consequences believable and compelling. As always, in fact, McKenna's strength is in the unity and cohesion of her vision and story-telling. Her characters remain believable and human, described sparingly but sufficiently to breathe life into them. One instance of this is the thread of continuing 'religious' debate between Kheda and his paramour Risala over the Aldabreshin belief in fortune-telling by astrology and physical occurrences in the world. This is well-developed and Kheda's internal struggle against his upbringing and his experiences mirrors the verbal debate taking place. A nice piece of character development and explication – showing

not just telling his changes of heart and exploring the potential consequences for his love-life in abandoning his faith.

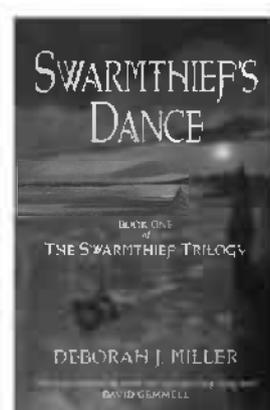
While still pretty much a complete plot within the greater whole of the sequence, the ending is perhaps more of a cliff-hanger than the first two, and I'm now eagerly awaiting the final instalment, *Eastern Tide*, due next year.

Deborah J. Miller – *Swarmthief's Dance*

Tor, London, 2005, 314pp, £10.99, t/b, ISBN 1-4050-5074-8

Reviewed by Susan Peak

This story starts with an egg being born to a Swarm. A boy, Snoot, sees this, and also hears the Swarm speaking in his mind, but the egg is regarded as heresy and he is punished by the priests. (No-one takes the obvious step of actually looking.) The Swarm itself is a collection of insects that, when clustered, form a huge dragonfly that can be flown. The story then switches to an incident among the Gods of this world, where one God, Rann, loves and wants Aria, a spirit. She refuses Rann, because she loves a mortal, and she and her five sisters are destroyed by Herrukal, another of the Gods.



In fact, as it emerges during the story, the six sisters, Nulefi, are in some strange way being reborn through the Swarms.

The boy Snoot is now in another part of the world, adopted into a family, and named Vivrecki. Much of the book is his story, remembering who he was, finding other eggs. This story is woven with the stories of two others: Asoori, an ambitious female soldier of common birth, and Achios, a priest, who is also Asoori's uncle. It is the priests who ride the dragonflies that are formed in the Swarms. There are other links between the two stories, as a priest who works for Achios is also the

lover of Kilmer, an aristocrat who makes a marriage of convenience with Asoori, to hide his homosexuality. All the characters, one way and another, get pulled into searching for, or hiding, the eggs.

The book is written reasonably well. Words are invented for the world, but only the minimum necessary so there is no sense of bits of language being created just for the story. The characters are distinct, and the dialogue also well-handled. However, the characters are in some ways rather unengaging, they seem to be there for the plot, rather than to have separate existence. I found it hard to care what happened to them with the only interesting one being Kalia, who plays no specific role in the story and who is a spoilt and selfish young woman. Partly, this is because the

Cods are quite active in the story, which gives a sense of the characters being puppets rather than having individual lives and choices of their own.

Swarmthief's Dance is the first volume in The Swarmthief Trilogy but it is also hard to tell what the story is that will continue into the next book. It will presumably concern the Swarm, and the Nulefi, but this story seems rather thin. In one respect, this first volume is unusual, in that many of the leading characters are killed at the end of it, although the incident that causes this seems somewhat arbitrary. What is disappointing is that I found it hard to care that they had been killed, or to feel any interest in what would happen next.

China Miéville – *Iron Council*

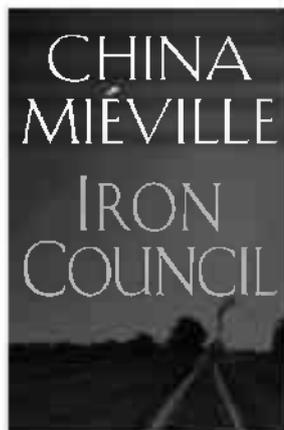
Reviewed by Chris Amies

Pan Macmillan, London, 2005, 614pp, £7.99, p/b, ISBN 0-330-49252-7

This is the third novel that Miéville has published set in the world of Bas-Lag, centred on the city-state of New Crobuzon, a city of dreadful night in the mould of Viriconium or Dickensian London, a place of contending political groups and many alien races.

Although the stories' gravitic centre is New Crobuzon, the second novel (*The Scar*) took the reader away to sea, and *Iron Council* involves a number of journeys, aligning itself with the Western at times as here we have a railway being built. It is a huge undertaking whose purpose is to further political and economic change. But far away from the city and the militia, a rebellion happens. The railway workers turn against their masters, free the Remade (prisoners who have had strange and capricious things done to their anatomies as a punishment) and take over the train which they name the Iron Council. Chief among the characters in this part of the story is a golemist, one whose power – learnt among a swamp-dwelling humanoid race that the train is later to destroy – is to animate dead matter and make it walk. Miéville gives him the name Judah Low, like the Prague rabbi who legendarily made a man of clay and animated it with a written word in its mouth. The Iron Councillors have to come up from scratch with a world which they themselves control, though there is still work to be done and platelayers still lay plates. (The whores seem to stop being whores though, so maybe free love has broken out).

Another string of the story involves the rebellion in New Crobuzon itself, where Ori, a disaffected youth, joins an underground newspaper called Runagate Rampant. Inspired by the legendary rebel and martyr Jack Half-a-Prayer, he seeks more direct action and may be led to it by



a mysterious old man who draws spirals on the walls and tells him, "Less yammer, more hammer". To him and his comrades, the Iron Council becomes another legend, and the dream is that when they rise up against the rulers of New Crobuzon, the train will return home, presumably something like Lenin arriving at the Finland Station at the start of the Russian Revolution. While this is happening, though, the city is under attack from outside as well as from within, and although the rebels don't want to be conquered by the alien Tesh they also don't want their city-state to win. It is a revolution, not The Revolution in which many believe, like fundamentalists believing in The Rapture, but a revolution still.

While all this is going on, and the politics does tend to assume centre stage at times, Miéville's imagination is in full cry, with a panoply of aliens ('xenians' is the term used here), some of which we have seen before and others less so. The garuda, who were significant in *Perdido Street Station*, are all but absent here, but the humanoid/insectile Khepri, the cactus-like Cacatacae and the amphibious human-descended Vodyanoi make an appearance. As does a Weaver; but it is now no longer a truly vast creature living in a parallel world into which it abducts people. Less than it was, a giant telepathic spider, but still pretty rare – not something that most people would expect to encounter in a lifetime, it is very nearly a god. There are flying men and handliners and places where the land itself has gone bad and sprouts monsters, and other strange and wonderful things many of which, when the Iron Council arrives among them, have already been killed off by the Militia who are hunting them down.

It is a fearsome thing, to have an imagination like that.

Simon Morden – *Another War*

Review by Gary Dalkin

Telos, Tolworth, 2005, 131pp, £7.99, p/b, ISBN 1-903889-93-6

Another War is the latest novel from the BSFA's very own editor of *Focus*, Simon Morden. The unsettling cover art suggests some sort of Lovecraftian horror, while the blurb seems to indicate a novel in the vein of William Hope

Hodgson's *The House on the Borderland*:

"It starts with a mystery: an old manor house is surrounded by an impenetrable bubble, and all that lives within it seems to wither and die.

Investigating, the Army find two men inside the house: men who vanished some 100 years ago but who have now reappeared, and as young as the day they disappeared.

There are rumours of a machine which could puncture the dimensions, allowing man to travel beyond the bounds of the Earth ... and for other things to travel here."

And there are echoes of Lovecraft and Hodgson in this tale of Henbury Hall, which vanished from the Oxfordshire countryside one August morning in 1919. Now it has returned as mysteriously as it vanished, and in doing so brought an American airliner down with it. Major Thacker is assigned to investigate, along with an agent from MI5, Dickson. Thacker breaches the force field which surrounds the house, finds Robert Henbury and George Adams unaged but half crazed with fear, and soon finds himself leading the army against octopus-like invaders whose very touch means instant death. There is a greater threat yet to be faced, the resolution of which will require an eerie journey to another dimension, and a final apocalyptic battle in Banbury.

Another War moves at breakneck pace and delivers a mix of tension and action thoroughly familiar to anyone who knows the first three *Alien* films. Dickson essentially plays the role of the obligatory traitor from the *Alien* movies, the character prepared to sacrifice those around him to secure



otherworldly technology. The reader might well also be reminded of various *Quatermass* stories, as ancient alien forces bring psychic mayhem to British streets, and some may be reminded of Kim Newman's novel *Jago* in the final unfolding danger in *Another War*. Given that publishers, Telos, are so associated with Doctor Who related books, *Another War* could almost be seen as a UNIT adventure.

Characterisation is basic, especially with Henbury and Adams making unlikely rapid adaptations to the year 1999. But that is beside the point. *Another War* is a compulsively readable thrill-ride which slips by in a couple of hours, its influences clear for all to see, but adding to the fun for fans of ghastly adventure horror. The real drawback is a plot which leaves too many questions unanswered, from what followed when five miles of English countryside vanished in 1919, to a whole raft of puzzles regarding the origin of the dimension-puncturing machine and the reason behind the fate of Jack Henbury. There is a better novel twice the length waiting to get out, one which answers its questions and makes better use of the creepy Henbury Hall and the only briefly-glimpsed alien world beyond. A breathless blast of a read, with the promise of something much more detailed and substantial lurking within the covers.

Paul Park – *A Princess of Roumania*

Reviewed by Tanya Brown

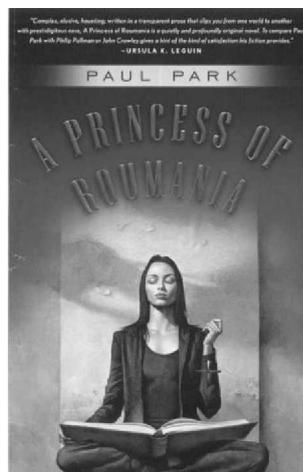
Tor, New York, 2005, 365pp, £17.99, h/b, ISBN 0-765-31096-1

"I used to love those stories where the girl feels she doesn't belong, and she's having some kind of problems, and she wakes up in a different country – just like this. ... This isn't that kind of story."

This *isn't* that kind of story: but at first you might think that it is. *A Princess of Roumania* introduces Miranda, a teenage girl living in small-town Massachussetts, who's haunted by memories of her early childhood. She has been told that she was adopted from an orphanage in Romania at the age of three, after her parents disappeared during the uprising against Ceaucescu. She remembers playing on a beach, and travelling on a train, and a cottage in a forest; and these vividly visual memories, together with a bundle of keepsakes (a bracelet, some antique coins, a book – *The Essential History* – in a language she can't read), are all that she has of her parents and her origins.

These mementos, these symbolic quest-objects, draw the reader's attention. It's simple to construct a plot around them: a tale of a princess snatched from her home to be reared by common folk until she is adult enough to claim her inheritance, right wrongs, overthrow the oppressor and free her country. It's easy to think that we're reading that story, and Park knows it, is complicit in it.

But the tale is not entirely Miranda's. The Baroness



Nicola Ceaucescu sits in a tall house in Bucharest, in (we are told) 'a different time'. She has sent her servants, spirit-children under her magical control, after Miranda. She sits reading the *other* copy – there are only two in all of time and space – of *The Essential History*, and marvelling at the convoluted history (Hitler, Stalin, Communism) of the world it describes. "Such a tangle of invention, and for what?" This is not her world. The Baroness's world is at the centre of a pre-Copernican universe, the planets turning around it in concentric spheres. In her world England was destroyed by a tidal wave in the 17th century: some of the survivors fled to the Continent. (Newton was made welcome in Berlin.) In her world, Massachussetts is a wilderness.

Opposing the Baroness is the Princess Aegypta Schenk von Schenk, author of *The Essential History*: nobility reduced to poverty by the machinations of the Empress Valeria and her party. Aegypta is Miranda's aunt, and it is she who arranged for the infant Miranda to be hidden in a place of safety. The Baroness, though, has discovered that safe place, and Miranda is being drawn back to her homeland.

Miranda does not come willingly, or alone. She is accompanied by Peter Gross, a one-armed boy to whom she's drawn despite her thoughtless rejection of anyone who isn't clever and popular, and by her best friend Andromeda, who is smart and tough and feisty. But when

Charles Stross – *Accelerando* 

Orbit, London, 2005, 433pp, £16.99, h/b, ISBN 1-84149-390-2

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

Welcome to the science fiction of the twenty first century. On the whole it's pretty much like the science fiction of the twentieth century, there's an alien encounter, the end of the world, and even posthumanity has been around for twenty years at least. But where Charles Stross invests his novel with a gloss of hypermodernity it's catching the wave of the zeitgeist in at least two places.

The first is what I shall call the paradigm of humanity. We have always constructed our images of who and what we are according to our models of prevailing technology. In a Newtonian universe, we saw the human being as a machine, a mechanistic model that held sway, with refinements, from the seventeenth century to the Second World War. Post-War, that model became the computer and then, as our understanding of computers became more sophisticated, the software. All of these are unitary models, but the paradigm that Stross has made his own in this novel is the internet. What this does is allow for a dispersed humanity, there is no one focus of consciousness but rather it is spread among however many instances of 'I' there might be. Greg Egan and, more recently, Cory Doctorow, have been building towards this paradigm of humanity for some time now, but in this novel I think Stross gives it its finest expression.

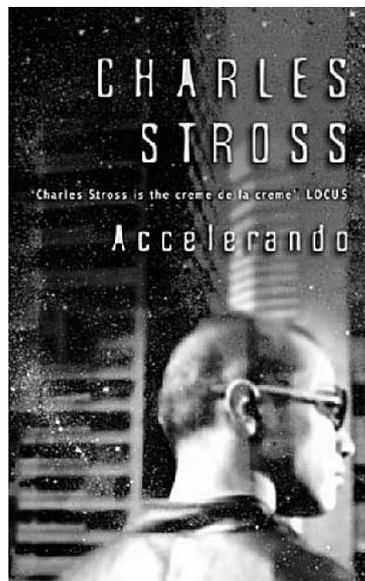
The second novelty which makes this book feel fresh is what I suppose you might call the operating system of civilisation. Again we always use metaphor for this, and again it is usually drawn from technology. In science fiction, at least, the system has almost always been cast in terms of the sciences, most often physics though with a fair smattering of chemistry and, over the last couple of decades, ecology. For Stross the system is economics. This is not Marxist economics, although there is a measure of historical determinism according to which the fate of entire solar systems is played out, but neither is it straight capitalism. (Actually, in economic terms it doesn't make a great deal of sense: Manfred Macx's money-free lifestyle, presented as an ideal in the early stories, can only work if everyone around him is busy earning money in order to support him.) Again this is not an entirely original way of presenting how the world turns, Neal Stephenson, for instance, has just spent three rather large volumes exploring a rather more sophisticated understanding of the economic model of the world. Nevertheless, in terms of hard sf, which is what this novel essentially is, it opens startlingly fresh vistas.

I keep talking about *Accelerando* as a novel when in fact it is that rather old-fashioned science fiction staple,

the fix-up, a sequence of linked stories brought together, given a quick polish to ensure they join together smoothly, and presented as a disunified whole. Given the inconvenient shortness of the human span, it is a convenient way of carrying a story across long sweeps of time or space or, as here, both. We begin with Manfred Macx in the very near future, already wired up to be in constant contact with the rest of the world. The first three stories explore the gradual growth of digital technology, and the resultant spread of information, in economic, geopolitical and personal terms (in one story, where Macx's digital connections are stolen, it is as if part of his mind is wiped away: he becomes autistic). In the next three stories we follow Macx's daughter as she travels first to the orbit of Jupiter, then, in digitised form (authors of posthuman fictions are always convinced that our humanity resides solely in our thoughts and not at all in our bodies), to a 'router' discovered orbiting a distant star. The final set of three stories bring Amber back to Saturn where she encounters the son she never knew she had, and finds herself caught up in a struggle for what we might call the soul of humankind. It should be noted that the choice presented here seems to be between enclosing the sun in successive dyson spheres to give ourselves unlimited bandwidth, where we will stagnate in digital plenty; or travelling to other stars in digital form. The human body seems to be a decidedly short-term option in this view of the future.

It is a world where digital manipulation allows beings to take on any form, to become larger or smaller at will. To give him credit, Stross recognises that there is a long extant science fictional model for just such a world, and he acknowledges this by making the Cheshire Cat one of his prime characters. He also loads the book up with off-hand references to a host of other texts: keep score while you are reading it, see how many other science fiction works you can spot! The most curious thing about these stories, however, is that Stross repeatedly stops the action for incredibly long info-dumps, and these perennial irritants of science fiction are actually the main charm of this book. His plotting is rudimentary at best, dramatic situations are always being resolved by unlikely authorial fiat which pays no regard whatsoever to dramatic logic or what characterisation we have. You do not read this novel for story. What you read it for is the world, which is hip, glossy, startling, ludicrous and convincing, and that is mainly contained within the info-dumps.

Welcome to science fiction of the twenty first century. It is much like the science fiction of the twentieth century, but with rather less story.



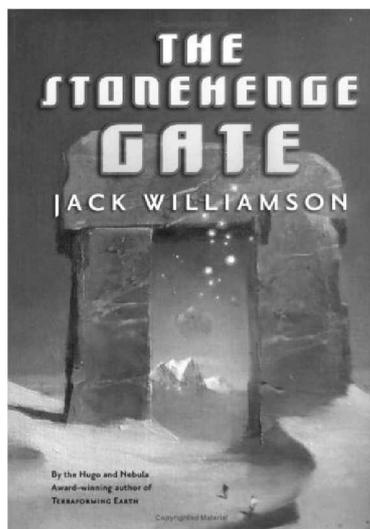
Jack Williamson – *The Stonehenge Gate*

Tor, New York, 2005, 313pp, \$24.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-30897-9

Reviewed by Dave M. Roberts

Jack Williamson has been publishing science fiction for the best part of eighty years, and in that time he has written his fair share of classics. His new novel, *The Stonehenge Gate*, has the definite feel of old school, adventure-driven sf. Four academics from various fields meet regularly for a poker school. At one of these evenings one of them produces some sonar scans taken in the Sahara. They decide to go on an archaeological expedition to look into it. The object in question is a huge trilithon, and, to cut a long story short, it turns out to be a gateway to another planet. The gateway is clearly well guarded, as one of their number is snatched away. The remaining three decide to try and follow, and the adventure takes them to various planets, on which they have various adventures.

This is selling it a little short, but it does have to be said that the more interesting elements of the book are all hung on this fairly clunky framework. The story is narrated by Will Stone, an English lecturer, whose main role appears to be to observe the story and relate it back to us. Of much more interest is Ram, a man with a very mixed ethnic background and a strange birthmark on his forehead. His great-grandmother, who came from the Saharan region, related tales of her origin as having come through heaven and hell to get to this world. The implication is clear from early on that she had, in the past, come from one of the worlds and through the gate.



When the protagonists arrive on the world from which his great-grandmother came his story starts to take centre stage. The political situation is that there is an affluent people who live in the cities, but their wealth is based upon slavery of the race from which Ram and his ancestors come. Given their somewhat precipitous arrival, and Ram's now glowing birthmark, it is assumed by both sides that he

is the semi-mythical leader who will lead his people out of slavery. What makes this stand out is the way that everybody reacts to this. Those in power see him as a dangerous political threat. The slave race are divided about how to respond, having had past experience of people falsely presenting themselves as the great hero and Ram, of course, just wants to go home. When the story settles down into dealing with this situation and the motivations and issues of the various characters, it does become a much better book, tackling reasonably effectively the role of the reluctant leader and the power of a focal point for a rebellion. It almost feels like the section on Ram's world comes from a completely different story. The rest of the book only

really serves to get the characters to and from that world, with a sizable chunk of good old fashioned adventuring involved in the process. Reading this, I really couldn't get over the feeling I was reading something that could have been written 50-odd years ago.



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*.

Stephen Baxter – *Exultant*

Gollancz, London, 2005, 520pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07655-0

Exultant is the second part of Baxter's *Destiny's Children* series and was a *Vector* Recommended Read when reviewed by Gary Dalkin in *Vector* 240. The book is hard sf space opera set some 20,000 years from now but, surprisingly for a series book, it can be read on its own. In very simple terms this is the story of a pilot, Piriux, who goes on a journey of discovery from the heart of the galaxy to the inner and outer reaches of the solar system and back, becomes a leader, builds a new squadron, overcomes technological challenges, and eventually leads his crews in a bold assault on the enemy's ultimate stronghold. But what makes the book is the story-telling verve and range of invention on offer. Strongly recommended.

Ramsey Campbell – *Alone with the Horrors*

Tor, New York, 2005, 464pp, \$15.95, p/b, ISBN 0-765-30768-5

Paperback edition of this collection of the author's 'great short fiction', which equates to forty pieces originally published between 1961 and 1991, chosen by the author, and including an extensive author introduction. Reviewed by Mark Greener in *Vector* 237 who found this an excellent introduction to the author showing just why he is one of the masters of dark fantasy, and helping to dispel the myth that the horror

genre is lacking in literary verve. Mark concluded that "Campbell's stories are more disturbing than most gore-fests because they creep up on you on a psychological rather than visceral level".

Arthur C. Clarke – *The Ghost from the Grand Banks*

Gollancz, London, 2005, 274pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07624-0

Back into print for Sir Arthur's 1990 novel about the sinking of the Titanic, or rather the race between two corporations to raise the ship in time for the centenary of the sinking. But all is not as expected when they find the perfectly preserved body of a girl who is not on any passenger manifest...

Hal Clement – *Mission of Gravity*

Gollancz, London, 2005, 203pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07708-5

Somewhat surprising that the Science Fiction Masterworks series has had to reach 62 before *Mission of Gravity* is included (but this does show the strength of the genre). As the title implies (rather strongly) this a mission to the planet Mesklin which has a gravity 700 times greater than Earth (as well as liquid methane oceans) and a journey with the tiny natives. Originally published in 1954 this truly is one of our classics.

Michael Gerber – Barry Trotter and the Dead Horse

Gollancz, London, 2005, 306pp, £5.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07692-5

That's as in 'flogging a' for anyone tempted to read this type of book (and something of a theme for this edition of the column: see Turtledove, Lumley, Yarbro, Herbert x2 (but for obvious reasons one of them can't be blamed), Anderson... and of course the wonderful Roberts (the A. R. R. one that is)). Quite why we have this when the 'real' series that it's suppose to be parodying (clue: it's got 'Harry' in the title) has turned into a parody of itself (well, no one can take books of that length seriously can they?). This one is shorter and comes with a set of book group questions (which, surprisingly, don't include ones along the lines of 'parodies: what's the bloody point?').

Jim Grimsley – The Ordinary

Tor, New York, 2005, 368, \$14.95, p/b, ISBN 0-765-30529-1

Paperback edition of this science fiction novel (well, science fantasy sounds closer but why worry about labels?) from an author who was first known for mainstream tales in 'the lush atmosphere of the South'. The Ordinary is the story of two societies which co-exist either side of The Twil Gate, one high tech, the other a land of myth and feudalism formerly ruled by powerful wizards. Reviewed in the hardback edition in Vector 238 by Kev McVeigh who found the book not without problems (principally that the high tech world is neglected) but concluded that it was "an interesting read, thoughtful and mostly well-written, that many will find enjoyable on its own terms". Worth a try?

Jon Courtenay Grimwood – Stamping Butterflies

Gollancz, London, 2005, 425pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07650-X

Paperback edition of this 2004 BSFA Best Novel short-listed book which is Grimwood's most complex and political work so far (and given the complexity and politicisation of most of his others that is some statement). The novel interweaves three timelines – past, present(ish) and far, far future – around an assassination attempt on the US President on a visit to Morocco (the location is important) with an Emperor in the future awaiting his own assassin. I reviewed this in Vector 238 when, regular readers will not be surprised to find, I liked it a lot. An awful lot. It is not, however, always an easy read – it is partly a discussion of the implications of Guantanamo Bay so it's not meant to be a light read – but it is a fascinating and absorbing one. One of the best constructed novels of recent years and highly recommended, although if you are new to Grimwood's work then his latest novel, 9tail Fox, is probably a better place to start (9tail Fox is reviewed in this issue's main column).

Frank Herbert, Brian Herbert and Kevin J. Anderson – The Road to Dune

Hodder & Stoughton, London, 2005, 494, £11.99, t/p, ISBN 0-340-83745-4
Tor, New York, 2005, 432pp, \$25.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-3125-6

Strong contender for the oddity-of-the-month award with the simultaneous US and UK publication of this volume collecting the sweepings from the floor pieces that give an 'extended insight' into the original Dune sequence (of which only the first, Dune, was of any real interest). What this means is that we get a longish novella 'Spice Planet' by Brian Herbert and Kevin J. Anderson based on an original outline from Frank Herbert. The book then turns into a literary equivalent of a DVD with numerous deleted scenes (from the original series) plus four related short stories from Brian Herbert and Kevin J. Anderson. Why?

James Herbert – Nobody True

Tor, New York, 2005, 400pp, \$25.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-31212-3

Originally published in Britain in 2003 we follow James True, the novel's lead, who is a ghost, wandering the Earth after his murder, watching the lives of his loved ones left behind. But as James came back from an out of body experience to find himself murdered he does not know who his killer is, forcing him into a quest to track down the murderer. Interesting.

Walter H. Hunt – The Dark Crusade

Tor, New York, 2005, 320pp, \$25.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-31117-8

Third and concluding novel in this military sf series, following The Dark Wing and The Dark Path, which is apparently influenced by Buddhist philosophy (military sf? Buddhist philosophy? Something not quite right here?). Sounds entirely predictable with 'armadas clashing' 'outposts falling' and a final confrontation that will 'forever alter the fate of sentient life of the galaxy' (which is on the dust-jacket and does kind of predict the end).

Robert Jordan – Knife of Dreams

Orbit, London, 2005, 784pp, £20.00, h/b, ISBN 1-84149-163-2

Volume 11 of the Wheel of Time traditional fantasy series. Volume 11? Surely not even dedicated fans can still be interested by now? Just sounds like more of the same (but what do I know?).

Dean Koontz and Ed Gorman – City of Night

HarperCollins, London, 2005, 474pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-00-720312-8

Book two of Dean Koontz's Frankenstein (yes that's what the series is called, so I somehow think that it's Mr Gorman who has done the bulk of the work). The 'Frankenstein monsters' here are genetically enhanced super-humans – faster, stronger, [thicker], etc – and the story follows an ex-Frankenstein monster (huh?) and his human partners as they track engineered killers let loose on a killing spree in modern-day New Orleans (hope they can all swim?). And we have an 'ultimate confrontation between a damned creature and his mad creator' (but I bet it doesn't happen yet as, remember, this is only book two of a series). All this sounds quite fun in a don't-take-this-seriously-just-enjoy-the-ride kind of way.

James Lovegrove – Worldstorm

Gollancz, London, 2005, 453pp, £7.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07656-9

Worldstorm: a world routinely devastated by a huge, permanent storm. Elder Ayn can see the future, but only his own, which includes his murder. But he can also see himself on a quest which he believes may see the end of the Worldstorm. Leaving his home he sets off to find the two people he needs to put his plan into action. This may sound like a generic quest fantasy but, as Chris Hill found when he reviewed the book in Vector 239, this presumption would do Worldstorm a great disservice. Chris concluded that it is "extremely readable and offers a different sort of story from the standard". It also has a striking cover design (again not following the truly awful fantasy art tradition), a style that has been maintained for Lovegrove's latest book Provender Gleed (reviewed in this issue's main column).

Brian Lumley – Harry Keogh: Necroscope & Other Weird Heroes

Tor, New York, 2005, 320pp, \$14.95, t/p, ISBN 0-765-31060-0

Brian Lumley – The House of Cthulhu

Tor, New York, 2005, 256pp, \$23.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-31073-2

More from the prolific pen of Mr Lumley. The first (Harry Keogh: Necroscope) is a collected edition of some of the short fiction starring his various ongoing characters (Titus Crow, David Hare and, unsurprisingly, Harry Keogh). The second (The House of Cthulhu) is the start of a new series, Tales of the Primal Lands, which is described as being 'a classic of Lovecraftian horror' (with a title like that I'd never have guessed) and that the island setting is where 'brave men die terrifying deaths, awe-inspiring sorcerers hurl powerful magic at each other, and monsters abound'. Sounds utterly dire.

Juliet Marillier – The Dark Mirror

Tor, New York, 2005, 512pp, \$27.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-30995-5

Start of a new series, the Bride Chronicles, this is a fantasy (or magical history if you prefer) set in Scotland of the far past. Sounds very routine but when reviewed by Pamela Stuart in Vector 240 (in the British edition) she found it "impossible to put it down until sleep-deprivation sets in". Well, the British paperback is out which may be worth a try.

Julian May – Ironcrown Moon

Voyager, London, 2005, 502pp, £7.99, p/b, ISBN 0-00-712323-X

Second volume of May's Boreal Moon Tale series, following Conqueror's Moon, both of which were reviewed in Vector 239 by Andrew A. Adams, who observed that the series is heavily influenced by the concepts of Scandinavian myth. Andrew found them to be "a cut above the normal fantasy in inventiveness" and that May's writing is "rich and readable". He did find, though, that a "bit of humour to lighten the mood occasionally" would have been appreciated.

Tim Powers – The Anubis Gates

Gollancz, London, 2005, 464pp, £7.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07725-5

I suppose I really should include a health warning here: this short review is going to be very biased indeed as The Anubis Gates is one of the first truly great genre novels I read, and today remains one of my favourite books. Originally published in 1983 it is brought back into print as Fantasy Masterwork 47. It is the story of Brendan Doyle, a present-day specialist in the obscure early-nineteenth century poet William Ashbless (but he doesn't realise just what type of specialist he is). Contracted to lead a party back to 1810 to see a lecture by Samuel Taylor Coleridge he becomes stranded and must use his knowledge to survive and try and return to the present. Which may sound tricky but that's just the start as Doyle comes to realise quite how his present and past (future?) are connected. Into this Power's throws in just about anything, Egyptian sorcerers, Dog-Faced Joe, the Spoonsized Boys, Horrabbin the beggar-king (on stilts) and William Ashbless, and manages to get away with it. Writing this has just made me want to go back and read it again. Now. I even have The William Ashbless Memorial Cookbook which just goes to show how influential The Anubis Gates has been. If you haven't read this book then do so. Now.

Andy Remic – Warhead

Orbit, London, 2005, 560pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 1-84149-174-8

This big techno-thriller follows on from last year's *Quake*, which clearly didn't end well as the Earth has now been devastated by a nuclear holocaust and is controlled by a new world government. Our hero, Carter, works for SPIRAL against the might of the military to stop an enemy who is prepared to destroy what's left of the planet to get what they want. Fun for fourteen year old boys?

A.R.R.R. Roberts – The Sellamillion

Gollancz, London, 2005, 283pp, £5.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07707-7

It wouldn't be a real column without at least one of Mr (or should it be 'Dr' for this personality?) Roberts witty little ditties making money from poking gentle fun at some of our best loved institutions. So here we have a paperback edition based on Tolkien's history book which can't have lived up to its title (except that it probably has). But it does have a wonderful (?) map with a place called 'Oircroydon' down in the evil south (which as some of us will know is not entirely wrong).

Adam Roberts – Snow

Gollancz, London, 2005, 360pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07651-8

One of the Author's 'proper' novels (as opposed to the one above) this is the paperback edition of his 2004 novel. A snow storm started on the sixth of September... and did not stop, resulting in six billion dead and the survivors trying to organise and discover the truth behind the snow. Niall Harrison reviewed this in Vector 238 finding it probably Robert's best work so far (but still expecting even better from him) with the lead character being perhaps his most sympathetic protagonist, making the book more accessible to a wider audience than his earlier works. The *Snow* becomes a powerful general commentary on humanity's obsession with hierarchy and authority and is strongly recommended.

Geoff Ryman – The Child Garden

Gollancz, London, 2005, 388pp, £7.99, p/b, ISBN 0-575-07690-9

In complete contrast to Science Fiction Masterwork 62, Hal Clement's *Mission of Gravity* (see above), number 61 is this 1989 novel from one of our best current writers (see for example the review of his latest novel, *Air*, in Vector 242). This novel, which won the Arthur C. Clarke Award, is set in a future London with a semi-tropical climate and surrounded by paddy-fields. The young are educated in information, culture, law, politics, etc. by tailored viruses but Milena is resistant to them – and is capable of changing the world. If you have not tried Ryman before then this is an excellent and recommended opportunity to do so.

Harry Turtledove – Out of the Darkness

Pocket Books, London, 2005, 655pp, £6.99, p/b, ISBN 07434-6849-X

Harry Turtledove – Drive to the East

Hodder & Stoughton, London, 2005, 594pp, £18.99, h/b, ISBN 0-340-82687-8

Harry Turtledove – Homeward Bound

Hodder & Stoughton, London, 2005, 597pp, £7.99, p/b, ISBN 0-340-73483-3

More from Turtledove's various on-going, interrelated, alternate-history series, two of which, *Homeward Bound* and *Out of the Darkness*, are the concluding parts (of the *Worldwar* and *Darkness* series respectively). But fear not as *Drive to the East* continues the *Settling Accounts* series, an alternate version of the Second World War with the Confederate States of America fighting the United States of America (with the Japanese fighting both). The first part of this series, *Return Engagements*, was reviewed by Colin Bird in Vector 239 finding it just what's expected from the author: epic alternative history seen through the eyes of a huge cast of disparate characters, meticulously researched and scrupulously fair to all sides of the conflict – but completely unengaging.

Harry Turtledove and Noreen Doyle (eds) – The First Heroes

Tor, New York, 2005, 368pp, \$14.95, t/p, ISBN 0-765-30287-X

Trade paperback edition of this original anthology, subtitled 'New Tales of the Bronze Age', and including stories from the likes of Poul Anderson, Gene Wolfe, Judith Tarr etc (and both the editors which is a little worrying). Reviewed by Lesley Hatch in Vector 238 she found this a very successful collection, entertaining and educational, with only Gregory Feeley's story 'Giliad' failing to work.

Chelsea Quinn Yarbro – States of Grace

Tor, New York, 2005, 336pp, \$25.95, h/b, ISBN 0-765-31390-1

Chelsea Quinn Yarbro – Dark of the Sun

Tor, New York, 2005, 464pp, \$15.95, t/p, ISBN 0-765-31103-8

Two more novels of this long running, loosely connected historical series starring the 'sophisticated and honourable' vampire Count Saint Germain. *Dark of the Sun* is set in sixth century China and was reviewed by Dave M. Roberts in Vector 241 who found the setting good but the novel unengaging. The latest, *States of Grace* (probably the eighteenth in the series), is set in Venice at the time of the Reformation. I've read a fair bit of vampire fiction (not obsessively, mind) but this series has never appealed.

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