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# Vector

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The Critical  
Journal of  
the BSFA



# Vector

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THE CRITICAL JOURNAL OF THE BSFA

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**Cover:** A Detail from Giotto de Bodone's *Banquet of Herod*, used in the cover of the America edition of Mary Doria Russell's *Children of God*.

## VECTOR

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## Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial

Writing this I feel like I should be saying something special, marking a momentous occasion. Yet in most respects, it's business as usual, racing to beat the deadline which always seems so far away for so long, and then is suddenly just around the corner. However, this is a special issue of *Vector*. For not only is it the 200<sup>th</sup> issue of the best SF magazine in the world [SFx tried to claim the title with their first issue], but its publication coincides with the 40<sup>th</sup> birthday of the BSFA. We have therefore tried to gather together as many articles as we can which reflect the histories of *Vector*, the BSFA and of British SF over the last 40 years.

Thus we have recollections from past editors, together with pieces of relevance to this and bygone decades: an interview with Norman Spinrad, whose *Bug Jack Barron* resulted in WH Smith banning *New Worlds* in the 1960's, Brian Stableford on what went wrong with UK SF in the 1970's, and K.V. Bailey with an overview of David Wingrove's recently concluded *Chung Kuo* sequence, which caused great controversy in *Vector* in the 1980's. Coming up-to-date, Andrew M. Butler has interviewed the most rapidly rising new SF star of the 1990's, Mary Doria Russell. Her debut novel, *The Sparrow*, has now achieved the remarkable feat of winning both the BSFA Award for best novel of the year, and The Arthur C. Clarke Award. Stephen Baxter, undoubtedly one of the very top writers of Hard SF, contributes an article on our often overlooked neighbour, the Moon. Finally we have two articles inspired by the seemingly endless proliferation of media related novels this decade – and there may even be one or two more pieces squeezed in at the last minute.

Relating to the debate between Proper SF and Media Sci-Fi, the bottom of every page lists the title of an SF book from one of the last 40 years. The titles were chosen by my co-editor, Andrew Butler, though I would have chosen many of the same titles, and virtually all the same authors, if sometimes represented by different books. They are not meant to be the best books of those years, but to paint a broad portrait of the diversity and quality of British SF over four decades. Inevitably some exceptional books, and authors, just couldn't be juggled into place. At the top of each page you will find a TV show from one of those same years. Compare and contrast and draw your own conclusions. I chose these, and what strikes me is just how much material there was in the early days, and then how little there has been until very recently. I was rather startled to realise that up to the mid-1960's ITV used to make serious SF plays on a fairly regular basis, and that the BBC continued to do so until the end of that decade. So crowded were the schedules that it wasn't possible to list *The Avengers* in the year it started, because of the classic serial, *A For Andromeda*. Thirty years later there was very little to choose from – I was unable to find any noteworthy new SF or fantasy for 1994 – while much of the best genre programming has long been made for children's TV.

At least there are British SF programs been made for adults now, but none of the recent shows – *Bugs*, *The Vanishing Man*, *Crime Traveller*, *Oktober*, *The Uninvited*, *Invasion: Earth* – have managed, at best, to be any more than polished, formula entertainment. That books spun-off from such shows, and more pertinently, from *Dr Who* and various American shows, which generally do TV sci-fi with

far more sophistication than the BBC or ITV are ever likely to muster, have become such a powerful market force is at the heart of the debate in this current issue. [See the articles by Andrew M. Butler and Daniel Mahoney]. I personally have no objection to the existence of wookiee books, but it does concern me when they grow to the extent that they drive Proper SF off the shelves of the bookshops, that there are people who read nothing but wookiee books, who perhaps even look down on Proper SF because it's not good enough to be on TV, and when wookiee books outsell books of infinitely greater merit so that some of our finest authors have to write down to a level of mass-market mediocrity increasingly defined by a global TV culture. Inevitably, the vastly more influential medium of TV is redefining SF.

Apparently only 11% of the British adult population regularly reads fiction. A considerably lower figure must read SF. An oft quoted statistic is that the average British household contains only 5 books. Given that it's not particularly unusual for me, or several people I know, to buy five [or more] books at a time, there must be an awful lot of book-free homes. Yet there are very few TV-free homes. In fact there must be a large number of homes with more televisions than books. And almost everybody must watch some form of sci-fi at some point, even if they don't realise it, or acknowledge it.

Given such a situation, it is amazing that Proper SF is as healthy as it is. In my review of *The White Abacus* in this issue I write that it reflects badly upon UK publishing that Damien Broderick's book is only available as an import in this country. On second thoughts I think I may have been unfair to the publishers. It is not that we have a shortage of good writers, or good books, but a shortage of good readers. That is, we need more people with the judgement to buy and read the best in genre publishing, because excellent books are being published, and just as quickly remaindered, because not enough people are purchasing them. We can't blame the publishers for taking the easy and profitable option if a brilliant original Hard SF title sells 3000 copies and a piece of unimaginative hackwork spun-off from a TV show shifts 30 000.

For this very reason I believe *Vector* is more important now than ever, providing as it does one of the few sources of information and discussion for good readers. Those of us who are members of the BSFA because we care about Proper SF, not sci-fi. And while we might sometimes enjoy the media version in its proper context, on TV or in the cinema, we can tell the difference and know that the pure, undiluted, uncompromised real thing can only be found between the pages of a book which defines its own terms.

I've enjoyed working on these 16 issues I've helped to produce so far, though every one makes me want to go back and do things better, and I'm glad that enough people seem to like them to let me carry on. Orson Welles famously said that being in charge of a film set is the best toy a boy can have. Well, like nearly everybody else, I've always wanted to be a film director. While that doesn't seem very likely, I can tell you that having a magazine to play with is also jolly good fun. Here's to the next 200. I'll let Andrew do the editorial for Christmas 2031.

©Gary Dalkin 1998.

# An A to Z of British Science Fiction, 1958-1998

Compiled by Andrew M. Butler

**A** is for *Anorak*, *Addiction* and *Amis père and fils...*  
Kingsley Amis called science fiction fans junkies, Martin Amis called them trainspotters. And Martin showed stunning originality in his backwards chronology of *worrA s'emiT* and claimed to be the first to write about the atomic bomb in *Einstein's Monsters*. Perhaps he should have read his father's *New Maps of Hell* first...

**B** is for *Billion Year Spree...*  
Or Brian Aldiss's groundbreaking history of the field, later revised with David Wingrove as *Trillion Year Spree*. Whilst something of a roller-coaster ride through the great names of the field – the history after Shelley and Wells and their ilk – every self-respecting fan should have a copy on their shelves.

**C** is for John Clute...  
Whether reviewing for *New Worlds* or *Interzone*, surely the leading critic today: if nothing else you'll learn some new words which won't come up in Scrabble. Backbone of both the second edition of *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* and the recent *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, he always provides food for thought.

**D** is for *Doctor Who...*  
Viewed for generations from behind the sofa, perhaps the sf that most people think of when you mention you're a fan (alongside *Star Trek*). A perfect formula for new characters, new settings, new ideas, and legend has it that the effects inspired some of Kubrick's in 2001: *A Space Odyssey*.

**E** is for *Encyclopedias of Science Fiction and Fantasy...*  
Even the fading orange first edition remains useful; the second edition the first port of call for any sf inquiry. The Fantasy volume, coming some twenty years behind the SF, has rather eccentric coverage, but there's little doubting its judgements as it attempts to map and define the indefinitely unmapped.

**F** is for *Foundation...*  
Sometimes a journal, sometimes a pressure group, sometimes a library ten minutes beyond Barking, now living safely in the shadow of Liverpool's Cathedrals. Under the expert guidance of Professor Edward James, it remains the most accessible and interesting of the three academic journals, catering for fans, researchers and authors alike.

**G** is for Granada and Grafton, Panther as was, and HarperCollins/Voyager today – Plus Gollancz...  
And a bibliographer's nightmare, as spine, cover and copyright pages often offer at least three different versions of the imprint's title. For decades the leading paperback sf imprint, they've published the greats from Asimov to Gibson to Robinson. For decades the leading hardback sf imprint has been, of course, Gollancz.

**H** is for Hugos...  
Of course these tend to go to North Americans, but the occasional award makes it across the water to Blighty: notably to David Langford for Best Fan Writer and to David Pringle's *Interzone*. But then even British Awards like the BSFA Award and the Arthur C. Clarke Award go to North Americans.

**I** is for *Interzone...*  
At times the only professional British sf fiction magazine, steered between controversy and awards by David Pringle, the sole remaining member of the editorial cabal which launched it. Pringle is one of the reasons that British sf is as healthy as it is, after the doldrums of the late seventies.

**J** is for Jones – Gwyneth and Diana Wynne...  
Writers who produce books both for adults and young adults. Gwyneth has won the Tiptree Award and is a formidable critic; her Aleutian trilogy rewrites our understanding of gender. Diana Wynne rewrites the rulebooks keeping fantasy and science fiction distinct, and now has a whole fanzine devoted to her.

**K** is for Paul Kincaid...  
One of the leading British sf critics – we would say that – involved in *Vector* for twenty years, plus Friends of Foundation, the Mexicons and British worldcons, current administrator of the Arthur C. Clarke Award and, occasionally, he has turned out works of fiction and been nominated for the BSFA Award.

**L** is for David Langford...  
Author, critic, Hugo-winner, newsletter editor – Langford's critical acumen is exceeded only by his sense of humour in a unique blend of wit and crit and science. *Anisble* is two sides of A4, cramped with tiny print, and is essential reading each month; in somewhat condensed form it also graces *Interzone*.

**M** is for Menzies  
The name of a bookshop which seems often only to exist at train stations, elsewhere eclipsed by Waterstone's, Ottakar's and the specialist stores. Also the middle name of Iain M. Banks, the well-known and bestselling Scottish sf writer who is thought to write the odd serious novel under a pseudonym.

**N** is for *New Wave* and *New Worlds...*  
In the 1960s Michael Moorcock turned Britain's oldest sf magazine into a hive of experiment – publishing Ballard, Aldiss, Sladek, Disch and himself, before finances ground the project to a halt. With Moorcock's blessing, David Garnett revived the title as an original anthology. The latest volume was published only in America.

**O** is for Original Anthologies  
A series of short-lived anthologies have pushed short fiction in Britain: *Stars of Albion*, *Other Edens*, *Zenith*, *Orbit Yearbooks* and even the 1990s Gollancz incarnation of *New Worlds* have come and gone. But in the age of triple-decker breeze-blocks (and Penguin Sixties) short stories just don't seem to sell.

**P** is for Terry Pratchett...  
After three books in twenty years, Pratchett transformed himself into a writer who produces a minimum of one best-selling novel each year: the Discworld series is arguably the series which has best maintained standards. Recently he's moved his hardbacks from Gollancz to Doubleday and is being frequently accused of literature.



**Q** is for Quatermass...

Nigel Kneale's scientist saved the world in grainy black-and-white, or in best forgotten Hammer reworkings. In an age of CGI, animatronics and morphing we'd do well to look back and remember how less was more: the monster is only frightening until you see it is really a rubber suit.

**R** is for Radio...

From *Journey into Space* to *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, via *Superman* and *Star Wars*, and a myriad afternoon plays, radio has been home to some of the best special effects and discussions of science. Under James Boyle, children's broadcasts have ended, thus stopping one outlet for sf.

**S** is for Small Press...

Outside of the conglomerates, even more precarious operations gamble life savings to distribute the cutting edge of sf, fantasy and slipstream. Chris Reed, editor of *BBR*, established NSFA and *The BBR Directory* to bring much small press material to us from all over the world. More power to his elbow!

**T** is for J R R Tolkien...

a one man publishing industry: from the trenches of *World War One* to the blank pages of exam scripts, the invented world grew onto the page and into the record books, as a seemingly unquenchable appetite is fed every last draft of the work in progress or long abandoned.

**U** is for Unsung Heroes...

The writers of articles, the reviewers, the proofreaders, the production assistants, the artists, the photographers, the muses, the letter writers, the printers, the distributors, the authors who inspire or frustrate, the bringers of cups of coffee, yea even the editors themselves, without whom, none of this...

**V** is for Vector...

The magazine you're holding now, subtitled *The Critical Journal of the BSFA*, has followed the bimonthly course of sf for the last forty years under a variety of distinguished editors. With the newszine *Matrix* and the writers' magazine *Focus*, it aims to promote sf in all forms in Britain.

**W** is for John Wyndham...

Often dismissed as the originator of the *Cosy Catastrophe*, where the end of the world means the papers are late, but in fact a much more sinister examiner of the forces of evolution and the impact of mutants. Sssh – don't tell anyone, or they'll stop teaching it to our kids.

**X** is for xyster, which may be used to scrape barrels as well as bones, and for xenogamy (crossfertilisation)...

A clumsy way of noting how the world of British sf is in many ways a small one, with reviewers appearing in several magazines or organisers on different committees, and a number of authors collaborating on work. British sf could become stagnant, but for now it's a hive of action.

**Y** is for Yellow Spines...

Which those of A Certain Age used to seek out in libraries when looking for science fiction. Sometimes you would get crime or a thriller by mistake, but most of the time it was your guarantee of a good time. Curiously enough, also the colour of Badger Books, and Fanthorpe.

**Z** is for M. H. Zool...

A pseudonymous collective who produced *The Bloomsbury Good Reading Guide to Science Fiction*. Now Waterstone's have produced a guide to sf, fantasy and horror, which offers another useful place to start. Or, of course, there's *Vector*, which in articles and reviews and letters has surveyed sf for forty years.

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## Vector 1958-1998

### Cytricon IV, 4-7 April 1958, George Hotel, Kettering:

'This meeting proposes that a national science fiction society should be formed, whose aims and objectives will be the encouragement of readership of science fiction and liaison and general social and literary contact between SF readers, and that the persons present in this room shall, when called upon to do so, fork out a sum of money (to be later agreed) to set up a capital fund for the formation of this society'

### SUMMER 1958: FIRST VECTOR APPEARS – SUMMER 1998: TWO HUNDREDTH VECTOR APPEARS

#### The Editors:

1	Ted Tubbs	8-15, 18	Jim Groves	48-49	Tony Sudbury and Vic Hallett
2-4	Terry Jeeves	16-17	Ella Parker	50-55	Michael Kenward
5	Roberta Wild [Also credited: Michael Moorcock, Sandra Hall and George Lock]	19-25	Archie Mercer	56-58	Bob Parkinson
		26-39	Rog Peyton	59-68	Malcolm Edwards
		40	Steve Oakey	69-83	Chris Fowler
6	Roberta Gray and Michael Moorcock [Also credited: Sandra Hall and John Phillifent]	41-42	Ken Slater and Doreen Parker	84-94	David Wingrove
		43	Doreen Parker	95-97	Mike Dickinson
		44-46	Darroll Pardoe	98	Alan Dorey, Eve Harvey, Joseph Nicholas and Kevin Smith
7	Roberta Gray and Michael Moorcock	45	Phil Muldowney	99-106	Kevin Smith; Reviews Joseph
		47	Tony Sudbury		

	Nicholas; Features: Paul Kincaid		Kev McVeigh; Hardback Reviews: Chris Amies; Paperback Reviews: Stephen Payne; Magazine Reviews, Maureen Speller		Kincaid; Production: Tony Cullen
107	Alan Dorey; Reviews Joseph Nicholas; Features: Paul Kincaid			186-7	Managing editor and magazine reviews: Maureen Speller; Features Editors: Andrew M. Butler and Gary Dalkin; Hardback Reviews: Paul Kincaid; Paperback Reviews: Tanya Brown; Production: Tony Cullen
108-123	Geoff Rippington; Reviews Joseph Nicholas; Features: Paul Kincaid	172	Catie Cary; Contributing Editor: Kev McVeigh; Paperback Reviews: Stephen Payne; Magazine Reviews, Maureen Speller		
124/5	Paul Kincaid	173-181	Catie Cary; Paperback Reviews: Stephen Payne; Magazine Reviews, Maureen Speller	188-192	Production and General Editorial: Tony Cullen; Features Editors: Andrew M. Butler and Gary Dalkin; Hardback Reviews: Paul Kincaid; Paperback Reviews: Tanya Brown
126-150	David V. Barrett; Hardback Reviews: Paul Kincaid	182-184	Catie Cary; Paperback Reviews: Stephen Payne; Magazine Reviews, Maureen Speller; Hardback Reviews: Paul Kincaid	193-	Production and General Editorial: Tony Cullen; Features Editors: Andrew M. Butler and Gary Dalkin; Reviews: Paul Kincaid
151-157	Boyd Parkinson and Kev McVeigh; Hardback Reviews: Paul Kincaid				
158-160	Boyd Parkinson and Kev McVeigh; Hardback Reviews: Chris Amies				
161-165	Kev McVeigh and Catie Cary; Hardback Reviews: Chris Amies	185	Managing editor and magazine reviews: Maureen Speller; Features Editors: Andrew M. Butler and Gary Dalkin; Paperback Reviews: Stephen Payne; Hardback Reviews: Paul		
166-168	Catie Cary; Contributing Editor: Kev McVeigh; Hardback Reviews: Chris Amies				
169-171	Catie Cary; Contributing Editor:				

### David V. Barrett, Editorial Vector 150, June/July 1989:

(Note to the Editor of V200: start work on this at least six months beforehand)

'October 1997: THE OZONE LAYER HAS ALMOST GONE, THE TEMPERATURE and the seas have risen, the clouds have thickened; Mrs Thatcher, surrounded by Riot Police and Thought Police steps down as Britain's Prime Minister [...] Vector, now a proscribed publication distributed in dark alleyways, reaches issue 200.'

The 150<sup>th</sup> issue contained reviews by Ken Lake, Martin Waller, Martyn Taylor, Terry Broome, K V Bailey, Alex Stewart, Martin Brice, John Gribbin, Cecil Nurse, John Newsinger, Neale Vickery, Barbara Davies, Darroll Pardoe, Jessica Yates, David V Barrett, Helen McNabb, Paul Kincaid and Maureen Porter, on books such as *Storeys from the Old Hotel*, *The Toybee Convactor*, *Neverness*, *Stark* and *Millennium* [sic]. On top of contributions from Arthur C. Clarke ('I'm still an unreconstructed fan'), E. C. Tubb ('for me, sf has become less and less enticing'), Terry Jeeves ('I hope it [the BSFA] is still well and bringing new lambs to the fold'), Archie Mercer ('Some time during the late 1960s the BSFA died'), Keith Freeman, Dennis Tucker, Maxim Jakubowski, David Wingrove ('I'm sick of Ballard and *New Worlds* and smallness'), Joseph Nicholas, Kevin Smith ('As Vector editor I felt it was important not have my prejudices confused by the facts') Alan Dorey, Paul Kincaid and David V. Barrett, there was an interview with Neil Gaiman. The cover price was 95p, and the magazine twenty-eight pages in length.)

Compiled by Andrew M. Butler. Sources: Vector 150, checked against issues 106-150; subsequent details taken from issues 151-198; cross-checked with <http://www.mjckeh.demon.co.uk/topbsfa>. Corrections and clarifications welcome. Acknowledgements to David V. Barrett, Mike Cross, Carol Ann Kerry-Green.

## Regrettably... Ken F. Slater (Editor, with Doreen Parker, Vector 41-42)

Edited, I think, two issues of Vector. I am not proud of either, and when copies come my way I frequently dustbinize them. I no longer recall the dates or numbers (and you need not write and tell me, I have no need of the information). I am reasonably pleased that I did make the effort to afford continuity to the publication, and thus help preserve the organisation.

Perhaps a little background might be useful – not factual, but as I recall it, which means it will vary from other accounts of the time. I was rather notorious in the late 1940s and early 1950s for proselytising for an organised British fandom. I had even devoted an entire leave from Germany to travelling around and trying to convince some known groups to forsake their anarchistic ways and form a national organisation. The Science Fantasy Society

with Vin Clarke and Ken Bulmer at its head resulted. See Bob Hanson's *Then* for further information, and note that it lasted but a short space of time.

Still I muttered and chuntered in odd moments about the advantages of centralised information, contacts libraries... Sow and ye shall reap. Or something. Weep, maybe... Then after some convention I missed (maybe 1958) I had a letter from (I think) E. C. 'Ted' Tubb advising me that the British Science Fiction Association had been formed, I was member number six, would I send in my subscription, and would I please shut up about organisations. Or something along those lines. All well and good; I had no great desire to take an active part; just wanted to sit on the side lines and cheer or boo, as appropriate.

I can recall at some time I had to exert myself to help out – was that when the library got destroyed in a fire? – but mainly I co-existed with the BSFA. Then came the advert and publicity in *New English Library's Science Fiction Monthly*, which apparently resulted in so much mail (reports varied from 'several sacks' to 'van loads') that the (volunteer) secretarial staff collapsed under the weight. Urgent conferences, phone calls, letters, and what not ensued. The general conclusion was that, although the BSFA was a ghod thing (the 'h' does belong in there; right vintage, as in 'ghu', 'bheer', and the like), it couldn't be left in the haphazard volunteer 'do it when I get time' situation in which it had survived (just) for nearly two decades. The decision was taken to turn it into a legal entity.

I no longer recall the names and suggestions and actions involved in the process; I know that Doreen Rogers (who was then a legal secretary) took a large part. Michael Rosenblum guided

administrative details in setting up the organisation; almost everyone who was 'active' in fandom and pro-BSFA played a rôle of some kind, ranging from executive to consultant, at some stage in the conversion of the 'BSFA' to the 'BSFA Ltd'. Personally, apart from an odd meeting or two, I tried to maintain a tenuous contact with the membership by duplicating on an elderly and overworked Roneo the stencils that came my way (or which I cut on an equally elderly and overworked typewriter). On paper which, mostly, I scrounged.

Finally, the British Science Fiction Association, Limited was born. An editor proper (not me) was appointed, along with umpteen other officers. As I said at the time, I've helped hoist this thing back on its feet, grabbing it by the collar, twice. Now I'm retiring. Next thing I know, they made me Life Member No.4. To quote: 'There is no escape...' You have been warned.

© Ken F. Slater 1998

## A Memoir of *Paperback Inferno* – Joseph Nicholas (Reviews editor Vector)

I edited *Paperback Inferno* for six years, from August 1979 to June 1985: thirty-six issues of what I like to think was reasonably solid and entertaining and sometimes memorable criticism, written by people who thought that if science fiction stood any hope of being treated as literature then it had better be subjected to some real literary criticism, to see how well it stood up.

All too often, of course, it barely stood up at all, and great were the howls of rage, in the early days, from readers who seemed to have some inexplicable aversion to seeing their idols exposed as having not only feet of clay, but brains of sawdust as well. 'This man has won six Hugos!' they cried. 'So damn what?' we snarled. 'Does that make his junk any more acceptable?'

I can't say that I exactly pioneered this approach – Damon Knight and James Blish got there four or five decades ago – but for a time, in the early 1980s, the magazine collected about it a group of people who arrived at roughly the same time, and who might have disagreed on the fine details but shared a drive to Make The Stuff Better, to junk all the shibboleths, to forget the received wisdom, to sneer at the special pleading advanced by those reluctant to leave the ghetto, and to ask themselves one simple question: 'Is this book any good?' And then to tell us, in detail, why (or more often, alas) why not.

It was fun for a time, even occasionally exhilarating – to pool ideas and sharpen skills and judgement in a common project always is – but after a time it became too much. Six years is probably two years too long to run anything at the same pitch of

intensity and, despite a steady influx of new people to replace those who dropped out and a mid-term redesign of the whole magazine, I had begun to go stale well before the end. There's only so much you can say at any one time before you start repeating yourself; the last few reviews I wrote were just going through the motions. Then, too, science fiction itself had become rather boring, and though there were signs from across the Atlantic that it was about to become exciting once again, my own persistent attempts to relate it to the real world – not just of criticism, but of political and social issues – had only made the real world more interesting. So it was with a great sign of relief that I eventually handed *Paperback Inferno* over to Andy Sawyer and went off to fight the good fight against Thatcherism.

Was it worth it, in retrospect? Echo answers: 'Don't know. Because the editor is never in the best position to judge.' In retrospect, I wish I could have found some way to recharge my creative drive and stay on for another couple of years: because, although it wasn't obvious at the time, the cyberpunk wave that was about to break over Britain would have fulfilled a great many of the critical tenets that we'd been dealing in for the previous six years – if only because cyberpunk related more closely to the real world than much other sf, and it would have been fun to talk about it from that perspective.

'But would you do it again?' someone asks. Well, probably, I reply – although I'd probably do it all a bit differently.

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Joseph Nicholas was editor of *Paperback Inferno* 1979-1985 and reviews editor for Vector 1979-1982, and is credited with jointly editing Vector 98 with Alan Dorey, Eve Harvey and Kevin Smith. This retrospective appeared, in a slightly different form, in the earlier celebratory issue, Vector 150 – Eds.

## Vector 69–82 by Chris Fowler

I'm Chris Fowler – not the younger and taller one who wrote *Roofworld*, *Spanky* etc., but the one my wife calls 'The Original Chris Fowler' (being older, I had the name first). I edited Vector 69-82, though the first issue was the work of Malcolm Edwards, which I prepared for press. That's fourteen 'numbers', though less in actual issues, as some were doubles – they got so big. It was a period of about two and half years, from mid-1975 to November 1977.

To some of you with long memories, I'm probably infamous for some controversies over material I published, or for overspending the budget. Well, it's true, and I plead guilty – I did overspend the budget, almost entirely on print bills. After that last

issue – a bit late because my health collapsed before I could get it finished – there was a deficit I can't remember if it was £1200 or £1400, though £400 of that was supposed to be covered by advertising income), which made things difficult for my successor, David Wingrove. David overcame that problem, did a great job, and as we all know, went on to fame as a fiction writer. Since some of David's earliest work was published in the later issues I edited, I played my own small part in starting his career, by providing a forum for him.

Those other controversies? Well, one issue had a cover by Dave Griffiths, a sort of fantasy with some sexual content, which was condemned as 'pornographic' by the wife of a prominent

BSFA member. I was nearly unseated as editor, but Bob Shaw came to my aid with a stout defence of editorial freedom. You don't need me to tell you Bob Shaw was one of the best, but I'll tell you anyway.

I also ran artwork by John Watson, which some people hated. They said it was disgusting, badly drawn – and, worst of all, it wasn't even science fiction. Well, I liked it – it was surreal, it was scary, it was funny, and I'd publish it now if I had to do it over.

Another thing people didn't like was the very small print used so as to cram in a big book review section, as I tried to cover everything possible. Why, it was reliably reported that some BSFA members went blind trying to read it – or was that the effect of that Dave Griffiths cover?

Against this – most of which has faded into the mists of history or legend – I managed to get serious critical work by Ian Watson, Brian Stableford and John Clute, among others, ran interviews with Robert Silverberg, J. G. Ballard and Harlan Ellison, and generally managed a lively mix of articles, reviews and artwork. I did my best to make the journal look as good as possible, which was hard work. In the days before word processors, it all had to be typed on an electric typewriter in galleys, then pasted up. I think some issues involved about fifty or sixty thousand words of typing. Look at those issues, and you can spot the typos – and see some of the joins in my less successful paste-ups.

It was the attempt to make *Vector* as attractive and as full a package as possible that led to that over-spending. The money went on more pages and higher quality cover printing. I believed

that if we could make the publications in the bi-monthly mailings as good as possible, it would help to keep members, attract new people, and make the BSFA a more influential and effective organisation. I wanted that, because I thought it would help promote the field. I loved science fiction, I loved literature, and I believed that science fiction was literature. I wanted the writers to be respected and accepted alongside other fiction writers. I still believe all of that – even more so now I have the good fortune to be married to an award-winning writer – and if I had *Vector* editing to do over again, I'd do the same thing. But, with the wisdom of the years, I'd be more careful with budgets.

This is the first time I've written about my editorship of *Vector*. For some reason, I've not been invited before. I seem to have been edited out of *Vector* history by some people – even the revised *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* missed me out (John Clute was mystified when I pointed it out, and promptly hand-wrote me back in). However, in recent years I've been accepted back, and the current BSFA people have been wonderfully welcoming and kind. My wife, Pat Cadigan, and I have been very grateful for the warmth with which the BSFA has drawn her into its activities, especially in London.

Editing *Vector* was exciting, it was stimulating, and it was enjoyable. Of course, it was also hard work, and I was fairly well burnt out at the end of it. But at least I can say that I did my bit to keep alive (and, I hope, thriving) a vital and essential British sf journal.

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## David V Barrett (*Vector* 126-150, 1985-89)

In the celebratory *Vector* 150, begloomed by the seemingly endless realm of the Mad Thatch, I prophesied (only half in jest) that by issue 200 *Vector* would be 'a proscribed publication distributed in dark alleyways'. I'm glad to have been proven wrong – but the Thought Police are still with us, and *Vector* still has a critical (in all senses of the word) rôle to play in promoting the subversive genre of sf.

I never asked to edit *Vector*, I actually applied for *Paperback Inferno*. That job had just been given to Andy Sawyer; would I take on *Vector* instead? So, despite my having told the Powers-That-Be who then ruled the BSFA (yes, there were Old Gods in those ancient days BM – Before Maureen) that I didn't feel qualified to edit *Vector*, I found myself doing so for twenty five issues over the next four years. (I had high hopes that Catie Cary would beat this record, but it was not to be.)

Then, as presumably now, the main problems I had to face were:

- a) time – editing *Vector* takes a lot of time; my life was governed by it for over four years;
- b) finance – we didn't have Maureen and her assertive fund-raising: I'd plead for twenty-eight-page issues, and be told that my normal twenty-four would have to be cut to twenty;
- c) apathy – the ninety five per cent of members whom I never heard from; I found myself writing controversial editorials to try to provoke at least one or two of them into responding in the letter column; sometimes it worked.

Was it worth all the hassle, the panics, the late nights hunched over my trusty Amstrad PCW? Without any doubt at all, yes. I had a great team. Paul Kincaid was (and still is) an excellent Reviews Editor, whose views were sufficiently similar to mine that we didn't fall out too often, and sufficiently different that he introduced authors, books and styles of criticism that were quite new to me. Mine were the last pre-DTP issues; we were working with what now seems quite primitive technology. My three very hard-working Production Editors – Hussain R Mohamed, Si

Nicholson and Harriet Monkhouse – performed wonders designing, laying out and pasting up the issues from my often sketchy ideas and always last-minute copy. Looking through those twenty-five issues now, I'm proud – and pretty amazed – at what we achieved.

Directly through *Vector*, I got to know as friends numerous people whom I had previously only known as Great Authors. I was privileged to run special issues and articles on some of them. (Sadly, some are no longer with us; I mourn them). *Vector* led me into both semi-prodrom and fandom; I started going to 'Tuns and cons and gained a lot more good friends, including (sequentially!) two longterm lovers; so *Vector* had quite an effect on my personal life as well. When I started I was on the fringes of the Leeds Mafia; now I'm on the fringes of the Croydon Mafia. *Plus ça change...*

And professionally? Where do former *Vector* editors go? In the nine years since, with a huge sigh of relief and a tinge of sadness, I handed over the reins of *Vector*, I've done eighteen books, some dull, some fun, some serious. Without the experience of writing and editing, the discipline of meeting inflexible deadlines, the battle against constant impossibilities of producing *Vector* every two months, I don't think I'd have been able to do that. All those reviews I wrote for *Vector* taught me some valuable skills, so that I now seem to spend half my time reviewing for everyone from *The Independent* to *New Scientist* to *The Catholic Herald*. And last autumn I became a student again at the age of forty-five, pursuing a PhD on the influence of sf on new religious movements; *Vector* gets at least some of the credit for giving me the self-confidence to do that.

When Paul and I started with issue 126, we agreed to keep going, if we could, till issue 150. I bowed out after that celebratory issue; he, a glutton for punishment, is still here. I look at *Vector* now and enormously impressed by its quality, partly because I know just how much sheer hard grind goes into it. I hope the current editors are getting as much satisfaction out of it (to balance the hassle and heartache) as I did. Congratulations on issue 200!

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A long time ago, in a magazine called *Vector*, the publication of a first novel resulted in two reviews. One was of the publicity material, and using it in an attempt to demolish the novel. The novelist had been involved in editing or co-writing two of the half dozen or so crucial works of reference in the field, and now was producing what was announced as a seven novel series for what seemed a large advance at the time. The novelist – ironically himself a former editor of *Vector* – objected to his treatment in the review pages. But this was nothing compared to the storm that raged when the third volume was dismissed as pornographic in a review, backed up by an editorial which suggested much the same. The author wrote to a proportion of the BSFA membership, defending himself, and the argument raged on the letter columns until it burnt out.

But the author continued to write the novels, which finally totalled eight in number, and *Vector* continued publishing, reviewing most of the novels as they came out, some positively, some negatively. The other reviewer of the first volume was K. V. Bailey, who now offers an overview of the whole sequence.

Given that this is a look at an entire series, it necessarily gives away details of the books, perhaps even the ending and might thus 'spoil' the sequence for a new reader. Reader beware...

## Chung Kuo: An Overview by K.V.Bailey

The upper trigram is *Chien*, Heaven,  
the lower is *K'an*, Water.  
The hexagram is *S'ung*, Conflict.'

– The diviner's reading of yarrow stalks in *The Tree of Heaven*.

There is an opinion, attributed to Samuel Delany, that in a science-fiction novel, the background is the most important character. If David Wingrove's *Chung Kuo*, its eighth and final volume at last published, is to be considered as one gargantuan novel (which the author intends), the generalisation seems to fit.

To say so may seem perverse in view of the effort put into delineating its double score of main characters, not to speak of the many carefully sketched and meticulously catalogued supporting ones, whose lives, motivations and deaths occupy the story. Nevertheless, their significance is only fully realised through their relationship to a politico-spatial-temporal environment, the creation of which is a quite remarkable science-fictional achievement. That environment, focused on a future Chinese inter-continental imperium, is in turn the arena in which certain concepts find expressions, each concept signalled by a specific emblem.

The first of these concepts is the Wheel of Change. At the twenty-second century outset of Wingrove's epic, the Wheel is in stasis. The Council of the Seven, comprising the continental overlords, maintains a global rule, ruthlessly stifling any move towards change. In book one, *The Middle Kingdom*, this rule is symbolically represented by a ceremonial wheel in which the snouts of seven dragons meet at the hub, while its rim is formed by their intertwined tales. It is a motionless wheel. The title of book two, *The Broken Wheel*, speaks of the action of forces which, through successive volumes, will work to release the Wheel from stasis. These forces are powered by internal stresses resulting from rivalries and betrayals, by the activities of the anti-imperial Levellers, and by the beliefs and ambitions of the trans-planetary Disruptionists, all, as we shall see later, further manipulated by an extraneous principle of evil embodied in the person of the Council's great opponent, De Vore.

The second constantly occurring emblem is that of the spider, a creature able to climb a thread taking it from darkness towards the light. Concretely, in the novels, this means ascent from the depths of a multi-tiered imperial city towards its upper layers; and beyond that to the spaces beyond the planet's surface. The theme, as will be detailed later, has its focal expression in the career of the character Kim Ward.

A third emblem is the game of *Wei Chi*, the 'surrounding game' in which the skills of patiently and strategically deployed pieces (stones) psychologically bind together its two opposed players as they strive towards a conclusion. In the novels the

placing, exchange or presenting of stones can mark a threat or a challenge. As a symbol of polarities to be resolved in the conjunction of opposites, the game engages archetypal figures of good and evil in *The Marriage of the Living Dark*, the epic's final volume.

One further emblem, one subtly related to that of *Wei Chi*, embraces and subsumes all of those just described. This is the complementarily divided Yin-Yang circle, the *T'ai Chi* diagram, the purport of which is that in all that which is characterised as light/masculine/rational, there is an element of the dark/feminine/intuitive – and the reverse. While the expansion of one aspect may involve the diminution of the other, fulfilment of the Way (the Tao) works towards the polarities ultimately comprising a unity.

The material manifestation of the Wheel of Change in stasis, arrested in an intensified yang (predominantly masculine) phase, is the blanketing of continental areas by the vast city constructions – City Europe, City Asia and so on – erected generations earlier after the Chinese, dominating the globe, had eradicated all other races save the white race (the Hung Mao) and, on Mars, a refugee black remnant, the Osu. This eradication is complemented by an ideological refusal to permit general knowledge of any civilisation prior to the Chinese, even though (or strategically because) the technology of *Chung Kuo* is an inheritance from the ancient West.

*Chung Kuo*'s cities are, in fact, the apotheosis of western technology, and Wingrove's invention of them is an augmentation of the monstrous and enclosed cities of Wells's *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899), Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926) and Asimov's *The Caves of Steel* (1954). In City Europe, three hundred levels, built of the porcelain-like plastic known as 'ice', rise above the squalor and criminality of the 'Net' level, below which, again, is the planet's abandoned surface, the dark wasteland of 'the Clay', with its population of outcast mutants. Artificial light floods the rising tiers. In contrast, the Imperial Solarium built into the city's roof has access to the light of sun and stars, as has the Imperial Winter Palace, placed in geostationary orbit at eighty thousand kilometres. Thus components of the City, as imagined, are the polarities of light and darkness.

The spidery nature of the novels' evolutionary paradigmatic character, Kim Ward, partakes of both light and dark. Born in the Clay, bastard of a transient from the high levels, Kim, as boy and man, is a being of double nature, the brightest of scientific intellects alternating with a primal darkness. His vision/ambition is to ascend into the light, his subconscious self-image being that of the web-climbing spider. His life as creative scientist in the high city levels, his love of Jelka, who lives in the out-city natural enclave of Kalevala, and his eventual role in leading humankind into distant space, to an Earth-like planet of the star (epsilon?) Eridani, are all aspects of this ascent. The iconic spider is doubly featured in the quasi-metaphysical climax of the eighth book

when, in the presence of a reincarnated/reconstituted Kim, the two great archetypal opponents, the sage Tuan Ti Fo and the monster of evil De Vore, are not only revealed to be elemental twins, but appear in their true alien arachnoid forms. The yin-yang dichotomy/complementarity is thus shown to be operative in other spheres than that of humanity. Those aliens, as further symbolically identified by their contention in the game of *Wei Chi*, have involved themselves in human affairs. These affairs are in a state of schism, a condition which would not be healed until Tuan places 'the final stone' – a fatally conclusive act removing both him and De Vore from the human scene.

This, however, is to jump ahead of the unfolding narrative. The events leading to that eighth book's climax fill the epic's later volumes, taking place on a ruined Earth and in space. In the sixth volume, *White Moon, Red Dragon*, a fundamental shift of direction is initiated. Lin Yuan, the T'ang of City Europe, is the only one of the Seven of the Council to survive a global internecine strife powered by De Vore's manipulations of the various disruptive pressures for change which have been at work in books two through five. De Vore's invasive army of self-clones is forced to retire after the intervention of the black Osu from Mars; but the price of Lin Yuan's survival is an obligation to dismantle the multi-level city structures.

So, in the seventh book, *Days of Bitter Strength*, landscapes and background have changed. The reactionary Empress, Pei K'ung, works, disastrously, to move Europe back to the darkness of its past. The 'Shell' philosophy and virtual reality artefacts of the artist-inventor Ben Shepherd also contribute to the perpetuation of an 'interiorisation' ethos, one of the 'Two Directions' open to humankind. It is, however, the other, 'dispersionist', direction, focused upon the 'Web' philosophy of Kim Ward, that the author depicts as the vector of evolutionary advance. Kim's vision, the vision of the spider boy from the Clay, is of building a 'web of light', a bridge to the stars, and his base of operations is Jupiter's satellite Ganymede, which is itself, along with other of the Jovian moons, eventually launched on its voyage to the Eridanian planet.

The last chapter of the last volume has the title 'Last Quarters'. It is the name given to the star's fourth planet, the planet of settlement, where Wingrove gathers those characters who will be able to start afresh, aided by Tuan's self sacrifice when he eliminates the overpowering evil of his De Vore twin. Tuan's last message is that there could be no entire Eden, no escape from some duality, but that humankind can now enjoy an environment, as he puts it, 'less hilly'. Wingrove elaborates the theme in what is effectively a coda:

[T]hey worked to make themselves new creatures, adapting themselves to suit this Eden of a planet and not the other way about', and, by a practice of not allowing inevitable human weaknesses to fester, 'to build a society free of levels and hierarchies, free of greed and corruption and all the shades of human pettiness that feed upon the soul.

In this resolution of his epic, Wingrove may seem to be moving rather facilely into a utopian romanticism, but the hope of this Eridian harmony has surely to be viewed in the light of the huge struggle gone through before a new order becomes possible. Moreover, the Way (the Tao), and the embracing yin-yang harmony contained within the Tai Chai symbol, remain germane to his evolutionary concept.

In an interview (conducted by Vance Anderson for *Science Fiction Eye* # 10), David Wingrove said that an influence upon his structuring of Chung Kuo had been his reading of Shakespeare's history plays. In his book *Shakespeare's History Plays*, the critic E. M. W. Tillyard wrote of the historical schema underlying and reflected in them as being one 'which in its general outline, consisted of the distortion of nature's course by a crime and its restoration through a long series of sufferings and struggles' and of 'the larger principle of order' which both opposes and complements the disorders of history. With such structures, Chung

Kuo has a certain kinship, and its conclusion in an atmosphere of providential harmony, reinforced by the reunion of Jelko and Kim – redivivus, and celebrated by a symphony of joyful music, has something in common with the concord emerging at the end of many of Shakespeare's plays – *The Winter's Tale*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Tempest* and, indeed, the history play *Henry V*, where the 'dear conjunction' of marriage tokens the reconciling of opposites.

Looking back over the mammoth sequence, I find that much that is 'political', and which dramatically held the attention at the first time of reading – the assassinations, the massacres, the betrayals and heroisms, tends to merge into patternings within the overall mosaic. So do the many dramas of personal relationships – between Lin Yuan and his successive wives; between Jelka and her conservative father, the veteran Marshal Tolonen; between Kim Ward and members of the Shepherd family. The incidence of evil, the dynamic of which is accelerated by De Vore, is a painful element in the narrative, characterised often by sadistic physical and sexual brutality. Some readers have found descriptions of this distasteful, but Wingrove has always judged them to be essential to what comprises his totality; and it is true that at the other pole there are episodes of great tenderness, trust and enjoyment.

There are also scenes where the involvement of one character with some sector or aspect of the larger environment provides a microcosmic sketch through which the macrocosmic background can be experienced by the reader in a specially significant way, and I have found that these stand out in memory as clues to, or even miniatures of the total work. I haven't, in a necessarily condensed overview, found much space for quotations, but two here are necessary to demonstrate my meaning and must do duty for many others. The first is from *The Broken Wheel*. It occurs at a juncture where Meg Shepherd, for long accustomed to the out-of-city naturalness of Kalevala, returns to the claustrophobic confines of City Europe:

The air was still, like the air inside a sealed box. [...] There was [...] no rustling of leaves, no hum of insects. Instead, small boys went between the flower boxes with spray cans, pollinating the flowers [...] They went up fifty levels to the college grounds. This was what they termed an 'open deck' and there was a sense of space and openness. Here there were no tight warrens of corridors, no ceiling within touch wherever you went; even so, Meg felt stifled. [...] Here the eyes met walls with every movement. She had forgotten how awful it was. Like being in a cage. (pp. 408-9, ellipses mine)

In part contrast, part complement, is the following from *The Stone Within*. Kim, having flown (under contractual compulsion) to work at an Ocean City, a mid-Atlantic industrial complex anchored to the sea-bed, is looking out at night from a viewing gallery. Now he sees not a sky-dome simulation, but the light of the stars in a clear atmosphere. Then, looking into the black ocean depths, he muses on 'Darkness and Light. As in the great Tao':

Yet at the safety gate he stopped, looking down into the brightly lit heart of the Ocean City. [...] From above it had seemed like a bright and gaudy brooch cast thoughtlessly upon the dark of the waters, but from where he stood it was more like a vast cat's cradle, the silvered walkways like the threads of a giant spider's web. [...] He realised suddenly that what they had purchased was but a part of him, and that that same unknown, uncharted darkness that lay beneath this great man-made artefact lay beneath all things, large and small alike... (p. 289, ellipses mine)

Those two quotations lead me to restate the tentative assertion with which I began this appraisal – that Chung Kuo's background may be its most important character. Now, however, I would re-emphasise that it is through the experiences, perceptions and reactions to it of those who are that world's creations, and in diverse ways its creators (both roles are played by Kim and Jelka) that the sweep of David Wingrove's construct is continually

impressed on the imaginations and memories of his readers. And it is when the whole pattern has been apprehended that it is most particularly rewarding to take a volume from the shelf and read again a chapter or a cameo which acquires fuller meaning in the perspective of the whole, and which in turn seems

microcosmically to embody some aspect, or even the entirety of the whole.

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K. V. Bailey is a regular reviewer in *Vector*, and reviewed the first volume of *Chung Kuo* in *Vector*.

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- 5: *Beneath the Tree of Heaven* (London: NEL, 1994)  
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- 6: *White Moon, Red Dragon* (London: NEL, 1994)  
[Not reviewed?]
- 7: *Days of Bitter Strength* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995)  
Reviewed in *Vector* 186, December 1995 by Barbara Davies  
Reviewed in *Vector* 190, November / December 1996 by K. V. Bailey
- 8: *The Marriage of the Living Dark* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997)  
[Not reviewed?]

## First Contact: An Interview with Mary Doria Russell

The winners of the 1996 James Tiptree Jr Award were veteran writer Ursula Le Guin for 'Mountain Ways' and newcomer Mary Doria Russell for *The Sparrow*, a complex and emotional account of first contact and the Jesuit-sponsored quest to locate the aliens. The narrative alternates between the mission itself and the treatment of Emilio Sandoz on his return to Earth. Following the novel's release in Britain (London: Black Swan, 1997), it has also won the 1997 BSFA and Arthur C. Clarke Awards.

Andrew M. Butler spoke to Mary Doria Russell for *Vector*.

**Andrew M. Butler:** I have to say that the buzz surrounding your novel has been pretty high – I can't think of an sf debut since Jeff Noon's *Vurt* which has caused such excitement and discussion. How much of a background do you have in reading sf?

**Mary Doria Russell:** It was my genre of choice for about twenty-five years. The first present my future husband gave me was a copy of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, back when Don and I were still in high school. I have read my share of *Star Trek* books – they were particularly good when I was a new mother and too damned tired even to learn the names of new characters. But the books that stand out are *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (which I think of every time I write something on a grocery list), *The Left Hand of Darkness* (my favorite and one used consciously as a benchmark while writing *The Sparrow*), *Dune* (I loved the notion of an Islamic spacefaring culture – it's a nice historical reference to Moslem exploration, plus an interesting departure from the assumption that America would dominate space), and *Neuromancer* (which I admired very much for the sheer inventiveness of Gibson's language and future society).

**AMB:** You mention Dorothy Dunnett as an influence upon your writing. How would you describe her work to anyone who had not come across it?

**MDR:** Dorothy Dunnett is a Scottish historical novelist. I consider her books to be postgraduate courses in complex plot and layered character development. She has a great gift for phrasing things so that you are constantly tempted to read passages aloud. This can cause marital strife if you're reading in bed and your spouse is already asleep.

**AMB:** Your professional background is in anthropology, with papers such as 'Bone Breakage in the Krapina Hominid

Collection' –

**MDR:** Yeah, that was one of my big sellers... I got nearly thirty reprint requests for that one.

**AMB:** – and 'Browridge Development as a Function of Bending Stress in the Supraorbital Region' to your credit.

**MDR:** An engineering analysis of the facial skeleton! Another big hit.

**AMB:** How has your field of study contributed to your fiction?

**MDR:** I have degrees in cultural, social and biological anthro, and all three of those contributed to the background of the story. I drew on linguistics, geology, paleontology, ethnography, statistics, comparative anatomy, comparative religions, genetics, economics, you name it. Anthro is the ideal version of a liberal education for a scientist. And of course, the central tenet of the science is that you must try to see things from inside and outside, simultaneously. Nothing human should be alien to an anthropologist. It was pretty easy to expand that to, 'Nothing alien should be alien to an anthropologist!'

**AMB:** Is this the first fiction you've written?

**MDR:** Yes, unless you count grant proposals submitted to the National Science Foundation.

**AMB:** In many ways I think that sf is a form of religious fiction, in terms of the huge questions it can pose, in its attempt to place humanity in the context of the universe. Sooner or later you have to run into God or his absence.

**MDR:** I agree entirely.

As Stanley Schmidt pointed out, humans have always told stories about aliens, but in the past we called them elves and fairies and goblins or angels and demons and gods. Science fiction is part of a long tradition of literature that asks, 'What does it

mean to be human?"

**AMB:** What came first for you in developing the novel: the Jesuit background or the idea of contact with an alien species?

**MDR:** The ideas came within about thirty seconds of one another. In 1992, on the five hundredth anniversary of the landing of Columbus in the Americas, the Arecibo radio telescope began a formal SETI. I had already been thinking about the historical revisionism that condemned Columbus and all the early explorers and missionaries as vicious, exploitative and deliberately evil, and thought that it was unfair to subject men who'd been dead for four hundred and seventy years to standards of cultural sensitivity and respect for diversity that we only pay lipservice to now. (And only because we've already got pretty much everything wrong stealing from the Indians – it's easy to be moral in hindsight, when you've simply inherited the stolen goods...) So I asked myself, 'What if SETI actually turned something up? What if we actually got incontestable evidence of a civilization elsewhere, and it could be reached within a single human lifespan? Who would go? And how much better would we be at First Contact, given that we've got five hundred years of hindsight now?'

The Jesuits were already on my mind, because I had been doing some reading about the early missionary work in New France, and they just popped up as the obvious logical choice as an interesting group to send into space on another 'mission'. And this time, they would try to do it right.

**AMB:** The celibacy follows naturally from your choice of Jesuits as central characters, but it is still a rare subject to deal with in fiction.

**MDR:** And usually it's only a cheap set up for the love story. Having a priest character betray his vows is, if you will pardon the expression, a fucking cliché. I think it's a failure on the part of most writers to be able to imagine a life that is founded on such different principles – but imagining others' motives and emotions is our job!

**AMB:** There's plenty of sf without sex, and plenty where you'd rather the sex had been left out, but celibacy makes sexuality an issue.

**MDR:** Sex is a powerful and fundamental element in all cultures, and much of anthropology is involved with understanding how people regulate and channel that drive. What cannot be controlled is often made sacred, for example. It seemed natural to me that sexuality would be a part of this story. Eight humans crowded together on a small vessel; years of isolation; the normal lives of the VaRakhati going on around them. Sexuality, if not sex, is part of everyone's life.

I write about food a lot, too, and that's as important a theme in the book as sex, and just as misunderstood culturally, but nobody seems to mention that...

**AMB:** In the age of HIV and within certain religious circles – there's the pledge that many teenagers are signing to say they'll wait until they're married to have sex, for example – celibacy does seem to be a lifestyle which is coming back in some kind of fashion after what might be seen as the excesses of the 1960s and 1970s.

**MDR:** And it's worth observing that I myself was a virgin bride and I have been a faithful wife for twenty-seven years. It's not that I haven't noticed a few attractive alternatives along the way, but I have never been willing to trade integrity for anecdote, personally. I am getting laid a whole lot more often than your average celibate, so I don't pretend that my experience in any way approximates that of a priest or nun, but I do know what it's like to take a vow and keep it, to feel attraction and not act on it, and to convert that attraction to friendship. It is not only possible but also fun – I do a little flirting now and then, but from the safety of a solid and satisfying marriage. I am still crazy about my husband after all these years, but that doesn't mean I'm blind to other possibilities!

**AMB:** I think you strike a fine balance: you highlight it as an issue – for all the characters, as well as the priests – during the mission, but manage to avoid the kind of miniseries melodrama

that you might have fallen into.

**MDR:** Thank you very much.

**AMB:** H'mm, I hope I didn't damn you with faint praise there! But we're obsessed with the sex lives of our secular and temporal leaders. Perhaps it's tabloid newspapers who are to blame in the UK – with their salacious details of affairs, underage sex and so on involving priests from across Christian denominations.

**MDR:** Yes, I'm glad you added that last phrase. Pedophilia is found in equal proportions across the sociological spectrum. Vows of celibacy are no more associated with perversion than getting a Ph.D. or a law degree. There is a perception that Catholic priests are statistically (or psychologically) more likely to be guilty of such things, but it simply isn't so. Methodist ministers are equally likely to be guilty of such things, and so are owners of shoe shops and bricklayers and any other professional group you can think of.

**AMB:** You've said in a couple of places that the response from Jesuits to the novel has been largely positive.

**MDR:** Yeah – to the best of my knowledge only one Jesuit was less than happy with what I wrote. Maybe there are others but they haven't bothered to write and tell me the book sucked!

I was invited to stay at the Oregon novitiate last fall when I was touring to support the paperback edition here in the US, and when I left I was presented with a necklace with the St. Ignatius medal that was given to Jesuit priests on the day they took their final vows. I was very touched. Over and over, I've been told, 'You got us right.' Basically it's a bunch of guys, right? So you've got all the crudity and hormonal combativeness of a locker room, but it's mixed up with corporate and academic politics, and they have to live together, too! Gads.

**AMB:** But I'm sure there are those who might argue that you've been too kind to the Catholic church – by showing their treatment of Emilio to be largely justified in that it does establish some semblance of the truth.

**MDR:** I said very little about the Catholic Church, actually. I wrote about a dozen Jesuit priests. All individuals. I was kind to Vince Giuliani, not the Church. And if you read carefully, you'll notice that Giuliani was wrong about what he thought, even though he was right to believe that this man Sandoz had to be brought to the moment when he could at least name what happened. In the sequel, Giuliani is guilty of an act of utter ethical bankruptcy. Things turn out for the best, but he couldn't have known that, and he remains guilty despite his good intentions and the ultimate outcome. Nasty means may lead to a desirable end, but that doesn't excuse the nastiness.

**AMB:** We ought to mention your own religious beliefs. I gather you've converted to Judaism?

**MDR:** Yes, My Catholic upbringing was not devout. My father was a nonpracticing Catholic and my mother was a nonpracticing Congregationalist (the religious descendants of the Puritans who came to Massachusetts in 1620). I've never seen either one of them in a church, aside from weddings and funerals. I was sent to Catholic school between 1959 and 1964 more or less by accident. My younger brother had a thirty per cent hearing loss that went undiscovered until he was seven. They'd been assuming that he was retarded, but it turned out that he simply hadn't heard much of what the teachers had been saying. The public school [American usage] wasn't willing to let him repeat the grade, but the nuns at Sacred Heart felt it was better to put him back a year and let him catch up. I went along, because it would have been awkward to explain why only one child was being sent to Catholic school.

I left the Church at fifteen. For twenty-five years, I was a contented atheist. I retained the Roman aspects of Roman Catholicism. I believed, as the Stoics did, that virtue is its own reward and that one should try to live a decent, honorable life without fear of divine punishment and without hope of divine reward. I shifted paradigms, replacing the broad understanding of the human soul offered by the Church with the broad understanding of the human species offered by anthropology.

When I became a mother in 1986, I realized that the ethics



and values that I wanted to pass on to my son were rooted in religion, but I was unwilling to bribe my child into being good with promises of heaven or scare him into being good with threats of hell. Ultimately, I realized that I simply had to follow the roots of my ethics back juuuuuust a little bit further than Christianity... In 1993, I made a formal conversion to Judaism. My husband supports my making a Jewish home for our family, but has not converted himself.

**AMB:** You say that the origin of the novel lay in a recurring vision you had of tortured hands – would you care to describe this a little?

**MDR:** Um. I'm a little reluctant, because this is so odd. Okay. I am almost blind mentally. Until I was thirty or so, I had no idea that other people could picture things in their minds and then turn the image around and look at it from a different perspective. So when I began 'seeing' a hand that had the muscles of its palm dissected away, it was very uncharacteristic, and a little spooky. Being a clinical anatomist, I looked up the hand and started thinking about what sort of functional effect the severance of those muscles between the metacarpals would have. I honestly have no idea where this image came from, but it was persistent, and it was partly to work through the meaning of it that I started writing *The Sparrow*.

**AMB:** Without giving anything away, the altered hands and their symbolism do seem to be central to the novel.

**MDR:** Priests have reacted very strongly to the image, because their hands are consecrated at ordination. If a priest's hands are injured, he must obtain a papal dispensation to say Mass again. I didn't know that when I was writing the book.

**AMB:** They come to represent the idea of being dependent upon another: the weak people dependent upon the strong, arguably like the priest is dependent upon God, the Catholic believer upon the priest, and so on.

**MDR:** That's an excellent interpretation, but not something I did consciously. I simply wanted a 'outward and visible sign,' as the Catholics say, of an inward spiritual state. I wanted Emilio to elicit 'both pity and disgust,' as Janet Baron's review put it. Dependence is a state that is both reviled and catered to. For a Latino male whose sin is pride, to be dependent is humiliating beyond articulation, and that is partly why Emilio is so silent and resentful about being helped. At the same time, I wanted to make it clear that 'the hands are nothing.' There was something else far more devastating that this man was not willing to speak of.

**AMB:** From my reading of novels by Catholic writers, pride is the sin which comes up as the ultimate transgression – equivalent to setting yourself up as God. In Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* Satan's sin is pride, and the hero follows suit.

**MDR:** Yes – pride is Satan's sin. It is also a Spanish trait, and Puerto Rico is very Spanish in this regard.

**AMB:** I wonder how far we should push this metaphor of the mutilated hands: Emilio sees it as being like ivy or some other creeper plant, entwined around another plant. From my hazy knowledge of gardening, I seem to recall that the ivy ends up killing its host. Emilio doesn't quite seem up to that – or should I just watch this space?

**MDR:** You're pushing the metaphor way too far. The mutilation of his hands was simply a legal procedure, done to establish custody of and responsibility for a dependent. It makes more sense if you are a *Jana'ata*, and it is far less destructive to their hands – it's a simple slit of the webbing between their short, muscular digits. It weakens the claws and ensures that they won't become poachers. The sponsor accepts financial responsibility for feeding and housing the *hasta'akala* afterward, so that the state loses interest in prosecution. Emilio was being fit into an alien society in the only way that Supari could figure out, under the circumstances.

That's explained in the sequel, but I knew from the beginning that the maiming wasn't symbolic of anything – it was very prosaic, really. I was kind of startled that so much more was read into it. Certainly never meant it to be interpreted as a stigmata, as some people have done!

**AMB:** Yet you do skip over the crucial sequence of the operation. (After the left hand, it's darkness...). The operation is almost literally obscene – off stage. Why did you take this route?

**MDR:** A certain delicacy of sensibilities, I suppose, but also a willingness to let the reader imagine the horror. There are scenes that I imply: the deaths of characters, the mutilation of the hands, the assaults. I think it is more effective to be very dry, very distanced from such scenes, rather than literal. Think of how much less frightening movies like *Alien* and *Jaws* become the moment you actually see the monster in pursuit. What you imagined is much, much scarier than what you are shown. I was willing to trust my readers to see something awful in their own minds.

What I did not flinch from is the brutality of the effects on Emilio. I keep him at a certain distance from you a lot of the time, but you see directly into his soul when he is hammered by the aftereffects of these incidents.

For me, much of the story is a meditation on empathy and the lack of it. I believed I had an obligation to imagine in full the results of those events for the reader. That was very hard work, and not something that readers should be expected to do on their own. It's my job to make you feel the full impact of the emotional devastation.

**AMB:** I suspect half the battle in writing *sf* is knowing what to leave out, and what to labour – as I suspect you found out when you dropped the footnotes from your earlier drafts. But sometimes it's possible to leave out too much. One reviewer has objected that the move from receiving the message to obtaining the spaceship is too glib, too 'let's build a spaceship in our backyard': 'The journey to another planet takes place with all the ramshackled impatience of an old-fashioned back-yard spaceship'.

**MDR:** Yes! That was in Paul Kincaid's review, which he just sent to me a couple of days ago. Lovely review, in the main! I was very grateful.

**AMB:** I wonder if the problem is that this is the first mention of space flight in the novel, and that the reader hasn't quite been prepared enough?

**MDR:** Well, you've known since the first page that they went to another planet – I didn't exactly spring that on readers!

**AMB:** I guess I meant in terms of the chronology of your invented future – but I take your point

**MDR:** And really, they didn't build a spaceship in the backyard (although I love that phrase and told Mr. Kincaid so). I posited a fairly new but reasonably sophisticated Japanese industry that would exploit the mineral wealth to be found in asteroids. I think there's a fair amount of logic in grafting engines and crew quarters onto an asteroid, since materials for the hull would already be in space. It makes very little sense economically for a country like Japan to have to import minerals, hoist them up into space and make a ship there, when the goal of the enterprise is to get minerals that their island lacks in the first place.

I did a fair amount of research on this (Japan's Shimatzu Corp. really is planning on opening a micro-gravity hotel in orbit in 2020, for example) and apparently everyone considering industrial exploitation of space is planning on using materials already up there. It's horrendously expensive to lift things out of the gravity well. And if you want shielding, you need mass, and asteroids would do that job more cheaply than anything we could fire into space from Earth.

But Mr. Kincaid had the larger issue right. In the first draft, there was a great deal more about the spaceship and Japanese industry and the voyage itself, but the novel was simply too long, and the spaceship was not the point, so I cut it. Mark Twain doesn't stop in the middle of *The Adventures of Huck Finn* and write two chapters about paddlewheel boats and water flow rates on the Mississippi during different seasons, thank God. I saw no reason to give a lot of details about what was essentially a bus. The point is First Contact. So go! Get there! Do it!

And anyway, my solution to the technical problem of

traversing the vastness of space is less dumb than Frank Herbert having his navigators eat 'spice' and then 'bend space with their minds.' So there!

**AMB:** I have to say I thoroughly enjoyed rereading the novel – despite how harrowing I found the last quarter. There's a real lump in the throat at times.

**MDR:** I'm so pleased. I meant for the book to reward rereading. I wanted you to finish it, and then to go back to the first page and start over, knowing now what happened. I played fair. I never lied or misled you but I did take advantage of what you would probably assume. Whether you believed Emilio guilty as sin or innocent and unfairly accused, you were wrong in your assumptions.

And once you know the truth, Emilio is screaming to you – I think that accounts for the emotional impact when you reread. His silence and shame make sense once you realize that he feels that some of what happened to him is none of your goddamned business. His guilt and self-loathing make sense as well, because he really did do some of what he's been accused of.

Worse yet, he is only responsible, not culpable. The Talmud says that when we cause harm inadvertently and unintentionally, it's far more difficult to forgive ourselves. We have all kinds of rationales for causing intentional harm (he made me do it, she deserves it, I had no other choice). But when we do something irreversibly awful by accident, there's a sense of helpless regret that is very difficult to live with. This is why the 'sin offerings' for inadvertent harm are far more expensive and elaborate than those sacrificed after intentional sin. We need more help to get over what we've done.

**AMB:** I have to say that my first thought on hearing that you had written a sequel to *The Sparrow* was disappointment. The novel seems so self-contained in telling Emilio Sandoz's story.

**MDR:** I know. That's been a frequent comment, while people were waiting for the sequel to come out. I am very much relieved to tell you that reviewers like John Clute feel the sequel is not only

required to extend and resolve the first story, but also a better book in some ways. Sequels are a real high wire act, and I have been dreading the review that starts out, 'What a disappointment after such a promising debut.' Fortunately, all the early reactions have echoed Mr. Clute's. So far, Rog Peyton and I seem to be the only ones who actually like the first book better than the sequel.

**AMB:** On re-reading *The Sparrow*, I did realise you have yet to really deal with the musicians, and there's the missing second mission as well as the planned third mission. When did you decide to write the follow up and what can you give away about its contents?

**MDR:** Well, I had no intention of writing a novel in the first place, so I certainly had no intention of writing a sequel. No one is more surprised than I about these two books!

But after I finished *The Sparrow*, I was inside Emilio Sandoz's head, and that was a very bad place to be. I simply couldn't leave him in that state. Like the Father General, I felt compelled to bring Emilio to some sort of resolution. And I knew why Supaari had done what he did, and how the Reshtar came to be what he was. I wanted to tell their side of things. So about a month after I finished *The Sparrow*, I began writing the second book.

I would like to say that I did not write a sequel cynically. I wasn't doing this to cash in on the commercial success of the first book, because there was no indication at all that *The Sparrow* would ever be published. The manuscript was turned down thirty-one times. I had fifteen chapters of *Children of God* written before I had an agent for the first book. I wrote both of these novels because I fell in love with my characters and because I wanted to spend time thinking very hard about some very difficult theological and cultural problems.

**AMB:** Mary Doria Russell, thank you very much indeed.

**MDR:** Thanks for the opportunity to do this. I'm glad you asked!

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## Exotic Luna: Alien Moons in Science Fiction, by Stephen Baxter

There is an alien planet in orbit around the Earth.

We don't think of the Moon that way, but it's true. Somehow the Moon is too close and familiar for us to take it seriously. The fact that its surface is so unchanging, airless and self-evidently dead doesn't help, of course.

Nevertheless, in some corners of the snail forest, exotic Moons lurk.

Sometimes the Moon harbours life of its own. More often alien footprints are to be found in the lunar dust. And sometimes, the Moon itself is strange beyond imagining.

To early observers – especially pre-telescopic – it seemed possible that the Moon might be a world like our own, with air, oceans, and life.

The Greeks understood that the Moon is, at least to some extent, a world like the Earth. They believed that the dark areas were seas and the bright regions land; this belief has echoes today in the nomenclature of the Moon. Plutarch, of the first century AD, even believed that the Moon was inhabited by people.<sup>1</sup>

Serious interest in the Moon as an abode of life began with *Somnium* (1634) by Johannes Kepler. Kepler's influence on astronomy is well known. *Somnium* was a meditation on the then-newly rediscovered sun-centred theory of the Solar System. Kepler speculated on how the heavens would appear from the Moon, and on an ecology for the Moon.<sup>2</sup>

Speculations on life on the Moon continued through the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. As late as 1835 Richard Adams Locke was able to cause a sensation with his infamous 'Moon Hoax' in the New

York Observer, purporting to describe the inhabitants of the Moon as observed by astronomer Sir John Herschel with a new southern hemisphere telescope.<sup>3</sup>

But by the time lunar voyages began to become a matter of engineering rather than fantasy, the Moon had already been extensively explored, telescopically, and the prospect of life, at least on the surface of the Moon, was beyond credibility. Jules Verne's circumlunar travellers in *Around The Moon* (1870) observed only traces of life in deep craters on the far side of the satellite.

H. G. Wells got around the deadness of the surface by imagining a lunar society within the body of the Moon, in *The First Men in the Moon* (1901).<sup>4</sup> But Wells's Selenites, though strongly resonant within the narrative terms of Wells's tale, were rather shallowly conceived; there was little evidence of a lunar ecology to support them. Later pulp-era writers like Burroughs<sup>5</sup> would invest the Moon with life, sometimes exotic and extravagant, often hidden beneath the surface or on the far side.

But even as Wells wrote, the Moon had become embedded in our consciousness as a symbol of desolation, disappointment and loss. For example in George Griffith's *A Honeymoon in Space* (1900)<sup>6</sup> the Moon is a stark place where life is extinct, and in scenes suffused with nostalgic tragedy the romancing interplanetary travellers find the ruins of long-dead civilisations.

The Moon would never be taken seriously as an abode of native life in the modern era; it would never have a Stanley Weinbaum to undertake a 'Lunar Odyssey'.

But if the Moon could not harbour its own life, perhaps it could be visited.

Charles Chilton's *Journey Into Space* (1954)<sup>7</sup> was a BBC radio serial which, over 1953-55, won record listening figures, and was novelised by Chilton as a juvenile, along with two sequels. In 1965 a privately-funded British-made nuclear rocketship, *Luna*, blasts off from the Australian desert for the Moon. The crew raise a flag on the Moon and observe that 'no wind or rain would ever rub ... out [our footprints]' (Chapter 6). The Moon is expected to have great stores of radioactive and other materials, to aid the expansion of human civilisation.

But then the astronauts encounter enigmatic farside aliens who drag them across space and time, and prove determined to contain aggressive humanity on Earth: '[Are you to be allowed] to conquer space before you have even conquered yourselves?' (Chapter 13) – a phrase which must have electrified the fireside audiences.

German space opera hero Perry Rhodan<sup>8</sup> also found non-native aliens on the Moon in his very first adventure, in 1961. Major Rhodan – test pilot, nuclear physicist and ace astronaut of the US Space Force – sets off from a Cold War Earth to lead the first expedition to the Moon in the *Stardust* (one of a fleet of giant nuclear vessels departing for the satellite at that time in the pages of *sf*). On the Moon Rhodan encounters a crashed alien spacecraft containing stranded representatives of a decadent galactic Imperium. Rhodan returns to Earth – specifically, to a remote site in northern China – with an ailing alien; he leverages the situation to establish a new political entity of his own, called the Third Power. This would – over the course of the next three decades of publishing history – develop into a solar empire.

The Rhodan series was criticised in its early days for its fascistic overtones, and there is no doubt that Perry himself, with his 'firm hand and iron will' (p. 47) fits the mould of the strong leader. Single-handed (and not in the slightest bit democratic) he takes key decisions that will shape Earth, indeed galactic, history. But the tale as a whole, though obviously of pulpish origins, is better told than might be expected.

Sometimes the lunar aliens came but have long gone, leaving behind artefacts of varying degrees of enigma.

The most famous lunar visitors, of course, are Arthur C. Clarke's, who came to uplift and tantalise us. Clarke's early story 'The Sentinel'<sup>9</sup> was the seed of the project that would become the film and book 2001: *A Space Odyssey*<sup>10</sup> and its sequels; as novels spun out of the story, the best-known lunar artefact of all transmuted from a pyramid on a mountain to a monolith, buried millions of years ago beneath the Tycho dust.

In the film version of 2001, Stanley Kubrick strips Arthur Clarke's Moon down to its mythic essentials. The Moon, cinematically, is silent, rough and still, a place of craggy ramps and broken ground. At Clavius Crater, in a huge, lavishly equipped, largely uninhabited underground base of unspecified purpose, the scientists debate the public's need to know about the strange discovery at Tycho. And at last, in blue Earthlight, Dr Heywood Floyd descends into the pit, where the monolith awaits.

In 2001: *The Final Odyssey*,<sup>11</sup> the story comes full circle. Clarke returns to the Moon – specifically, to a vault a kilometre beneath the surface of Mare Imbrium – not to find another wonderful artefact, but to retrieve a cached weapon. In this ultimate expression of Clarke's vision, man – caught between ape and stardust – at last raises his fist to his unwelcome patrons.

One of the most chilling of all lunar artefacts is found in Algis Budrys's *Rogue Moon* (1960).<sup>12</sup> In 1959, a Cold War US sends a probe to the Moon, where awaits a giant artefact – enigmatic, a million years old. The US Navy takes over a nascent teleportation project, and volunteers are sent to the Moon to penetrate the artefact – and are instantly killed, for such errors as the wrong posture or writing the word 'yes'. This is 'Alice in Wonderland with teeth' (p. 97). But because the teleporter is essentially a copier, the volunteers nevertheless to survive to be sent in again, penetrate a little further, and die again – but they are sent rapidly crazy by a telepathic link between themselves and their lunar

copies.

The book has the trappings of hard *sf*, with much exploration of the paradoxes associated with the teleport. But the true function of the lunar artefact is left as a mystery; this is a novel of psychology rather than hardware. Much praised and analysed in its time, *Rogue Moon* prefigured the New Wave which would follow, and still has the power to chill. But perhaps it has not dated well. The narrative style seems rather overwrought, the 1959 teleport device – an affair of 'plugs and wires and little ceramic widgets' (p. 47) – is unbelievable, and the artefact itself with its random deaths and puzzles is reminiscent, today, of nothing so much as a giant computer game.

But, ultimately, the artefact serves as a symbol of death: hard-faced, indifferent, uncaring, the final conqueror of us all – 'an ignorant enemy, who doesn't just spit on banners but who doesn't even know what banners are' (p. 113). And the Moon, the death world, is the perfect setting for such a timeless monstrosity.

William Barton's *The Transmigration of Souls* (1996)<sup>13</sup> features one of the wildest lunar artefacts. A near-future America returns to the Moon, intending to bootstrap, in time-honoured fashion, an expansion into space. But they encounter a mysterious teleportation gateway, with traces of the races which built and exploited the network beyond. Americans, fearing a (literally) universe-destroying entity called the space-time Juggernaut, retreat with much-advanced technology to Fortress America, leaving the rest of the world to go to hell in its own fashion. Arab and Chinese astronauts retrace the Americans' lunar footsteps, and find that the gateway network leads, not just to other worlds, but to other times, and other parallel realities ... including worlds of fiction like Burroughs's Barsoom, and a close copy of Philip José Farmer's Riverworld, where ultimately all humans will be recreated physically, in order to pursue such endeavours as murder, rape and rocket-building, secure in the numbing knowledge that any injury will heal.

Barton's Moon is thus a portal to a reality sheaf, an ensemble of all logically possible universes of the kind envisaged by cosmologist Frank Tipler,<sup>14</sup> a unity of computer programming theory, cosmology and theology. But the theology is child-like – in my long-gone Catholic education I was treated to a much more sophisticated interpretation of eternity than this holodeck vision – and this meditation serves only, perhaps, to show up the essential absurdity of Tipler's projections.

Barton's prose is dense, sometimes verbless, his style intensely internalised. There is so much backstory, in fact, that at times this book reads like a sequel. But the interpersonal relations are fraught and adolescent, and the whole constructed rooted too deeply in contemporary American popular culture for credibility. It is all, as Paul McAuley remarked to me, rather overwrought.

But the Moon need not be made exotic by visitors; at times it is the Moon itself which can be strange and wonderful.

Modern theories of the Moon's origin often read like science fiction. The current favourite is the 'Big Whack' theory, in which a proto-planet the size of Mars shattered the young Earth; the Moon coalesced from the resulting cloud of debris.<sup>15</sup>

James P. Hogan's *Inherit The Stars* (1977)<sup>16</sup> promotes an even more spectacular, if astronomically implausible, idea. The discovery of a human corpse on the Moon, fifty thousand years old, leads to a group of scientists unravelling a startling back-story for the formation of the Moon – and, incidentally, a new origin for mankind.

Hogan posits that a planet called Minerva once occupied the space now containing the asteroid belt. A spectacular war led to the destruction of Minerva – hence the asteroid rubble – and Minerva's giant Moon was propelled, by the fall-out from the explosion, to the inner Solar System, where it was captured by Earth ... to become our Moon, bearing a handful of survivors (who became us!). This explains the heavier cratering on the Moon's far side, caught by the heaviest fall-out.

This cosmic story is intriguing, and Hogan's exuberance in

setting out a startling hard sf vision and something approximating to a true scientific investigation is exhilarating. But the book is oddly old-fashioned in tone, and utterly lacks any foreground plot or characterisation, which might have added great depth to the piece.

(I speculate on an even more strange origin for the Moon in *Moonseed*.<sup>17</sup>)

So much for the Moon's exotic origins. What of its fate?

Playwright R.C. Sherriff produced, in 1939, a disaster novel called *The Hopkins Manuscript*<sup>18</sup> in which the Moon, dislodged from its orbit, crashes into the Atlantic. The resulting tsunamis and winds destroy western civilisation – but there is a race for the Moon's supposed mineral wealth among the wrecked European nations, before an Asian warlord takes over after the final conflict. Given its timing, it is not hard to see the Moon's fall serving here as a metaphor for the more mundane, still more terrible disaster about to befall Europe.

Jack McDevitt's *Moonfall*<sup>19</sup> likewise features a grisly fate for the Moon. Against the background of a reasonably plausible near-future, a high-speed interstellar comet smashes into the Moon, destroying it completely; the fragments devastate the Earth, but the greatest chunk of all is deflected by a fleet of spacecraft – which includes the President of the United States as a passenger. The story is told, briskly and effectively, in short passages delivered from a variety of viewpoints, including snatches of broadcasts from CNN and their 21<sup>st</sup>-century competitors. It is impossible even for a non-American to dislike this book, so suffused is it by a Utopian optimism; the fall of the Moon is seen at once as a great lost opportunity ('we'll be confined to low Earth orbit, and there won't be a convenient short-range target left in the sky' [p. 63]), a Heinlein-esque all-eggs-in-one-basket argument for expansion into space (though this book is too sunny for any of Heinlein's ugly Darwinism) and an opportunity for the nations of the Earth to put aside their differences ('Even in Jerusalem, at long last, an accommodation seemed to have been reached. In its own dark way, the comet may have been a blessing' [p. 472]).

But there are few engaging characters to anchor this story for the reader, the pace is often too slow, and the telling lacks physical reality; there is little sense of how it feels to be in space or on the Moon or caught in the global catastrophe. And McDevitt himself puts his finger on the narrative problem with such impersonal-threat scenarios: 'Hell, the comet doesn't give a damn. It doesn't know we're here ... There's no hate mixed up in it anywhere.' (p. 203). Still, there is a well-expressed sense of regret for the loss of our Moon: 'The lunar cloud was already growing thin, drifting apart. The ancient sphere, mathematically perfect, reassuring in its promise of universal harmony, was gone' (p. 352).

A spectacular fate for the Moon was the inciting incident for Gerry Anderson's TV show *Space: 1999* (1975-77). A chain reaction is somehow initiated in a radioactive waste dump on the far side, knocking the Moon out of orbit. The series depicted the subsequent picaresque adventures of the scientists and engineers in Moonbase Alpha as the Moon wandered from star to star. In its time the series was the most expensive UK TV series to date, and pioneered many special effects techniques. But the series was

fatally compromised by conflicting transatlantic demands. Even the blasting of the Moon out of orbit was a plot device devised to ensure there would be no Earthbound scenes. There were some moments of imagination but the scripts were wooden and lacking in humour, and the meandering of the Moon showed no regard for even the most basic scientific principle.<sup>20</sup>

In Bob Shaw's *The Ceres Solution* (1982)<sup>21</sup> the Moon requires destruction, because it is a malevolent parasite. The story is set in a Universe which is, locally, populated by hundreds of human-like species and which is dominated by 'third-order forces', influences of stars and planets which fold down into human destiny rather like the influences of astrology. But humanity is uniquely blighted; the third-order forces are inhibited by our giant Moon. The plot concerns a race called the Mallonians who observe us through implanted observers; rather smugly, they watch as we tear ourselves apart. A breakaway group of Mallonians decide to 'liberate' humanity by destroying the Moon, by impacting it with the asteroid Ceres.

This is relatively minor Shaw; the scenario seems contrived, the plot awkwardly configured to deliver the characters to their decision points. But the writing is sprinkled with Shaw's characteristic human touches – particularly the awareness of the meaning of death for an individual, which renders the most throwaway action scene full of meaning – and his brief description of the final approach of Ceres to the Moon, as the sky becomes a 'convexity of falling rock', is compelling. And his use of the Moon – and his resolution of the Fermi paradox (where are all the aliens?) – is original.

One of the strangest, and most beautiful, fates for the Moon came in Brian Aldiss's *Hothouse* (1961).<sup>22</sup> In the far future, mind has all but fled the Earth, which has become enmeshed in vegetation. And giant spider-like creatures called traversers have learned to cross between Earth and Moon: 'Back and forth the traversers could shuttle at will, vegetable astronauts huge and insensible, with Earth and Luna both enmeshed in their indifferent net. With surpassing suitability, the old age of the Earth was snared about with cobwebs' (p. 17). And humans, when they age, are carried by the traversers to the Moon – to the True World, naturally terraformed.

We are too familiar with the Moon to find it exotic; certainly most of us today seem to feel no urgency to get there. This is a pity; if a Moon-like world – Mercury, say – were suddenly to appear in our skies, it would be the greatest event in history, and we would surely clamour to reach it.

Humans have been to the Moon, of course, and found little of interest there for students of the exotic. But we should remember we managed to send just twelve, largely untrained, astronauts to a handful of sites, chosen as much for their ease of accessibility as for their scientific interest.

The Moon has as much land area as North America, and almost all of it is unexplored. We have no idea what may be waiting for us over the next lunar horizon.

Or who.

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Stephen Baxter wrote on alt.spacef in Vector 197. If you were included in the Great Mailing Disaster, don't forget to send an A4 SAE 945p stamp) to Paul Billinger at the address on p. 2. Moonseed is scheduled for publication in August 1998 — Eds.

## Getting Carried Away: An interview with Paul McAuley by Maureen Kincaid Speller

*Maureen Kincaid Speller spoke to the Arthur C. Clarke Award-Winning author at around the time of the publication of The Invisible Country.*

**Maureen Kincaid Speller:** I'd like to fill in a bit of background about how you got started writing science fiction, when you started writing science fiction.

**Paul McAuley:** Traditionally, you do it when you're terribly young and I did it when I was terribly young. The first thing I tried to write was a novel — I was very ambitious — set on Mars and based on too much Doctor Who. I didn't finish that one and then I did actually finish one which I sent to Gollancz for one of their competitions, bless 'em. That didn't get published — I was about fifteen at the time. I did sell a story when I was about nineteen, but it didn't get published. It sold to Jim Baen when he was editing it, then it folded in the great *Galaxy/If* collapse. That was part of the collapse of science fiction in the early nineteen-seventies, when the American market went through a very rocky patch.

So, I kind of gave up after that really, but I came back to it when I was living in America as a Resident Alien. I had been reading it in between but I was completely unaware of things like fandom and conventions and the whole social sub-structure which underpins much of science fiction and, I guess, any literary endeavour. I just started sending stories out. It's a fairly traditional route to sell short stories.

I guess *Interzone* was one of my main markets. It was there, it was in Britain, I didn't want to pay too much postage to send stuff off to markets in the States. When I was writing things in the States, I had been sending stuff off, getting rejections, building a rejection pile, and occasionally getting encouraging little notes which is always useful. Once one starts making some headway by getting stuff published, one thinks one could spend a bit more time on this. That's the usual route, I suppose, and the route I took. I don't think there's anything unusual in my writing history.

**MKS:** What prompted you to go into science?

**PM:** I was always interested in natural history. I lived out in the countryside, I had an ant farm, I collected caterpillars to see them turn into butterflies. I had a chemistry set. In those days you could make thermite. I had my explosives phase, and my rocket phase; a very successful rocket phase. I always had an interest in those kind of things.

**MKS:** I don't really have a scientific background and I've educated myself as I've gone along. When I was reading *Eternal Light* I was sitting with a dictionary of the cosmos on one side.

**PM:** I was when I was writing it.

**MKS:** There is this idea that science fiction should have an educational, even proselytising function. When I am reading your books, I think 'oh gosh, I must go and look that up'. I see you mentioned Frank Tipler for instance.

**PM:** I think you're right. If you want to learn about science, you can go to a lot of very good books which are now written by scientists for the general public. I think the one thing science fiction has as a use in the world is in pointing out how science works, how the universe is viewed through the scientific philosophy. I'm basically arguing that science is a philosophy; it's not a natural way of thinking, it's an artificial way of thinking. It's

quite a deep way of thinking, coming up with truths, and I think that's one useful thing science fiction can do, especially now as there seems to be an awful lot of anti-science about, and also science seems to be in a lot of trouble. Having just quit university where I was working as a scientist —

**MKS:** I was going to ask you about funding problems.

**PM:** If you ask any scientist now, that's the first thing they'll say. Even the best scientists have to put three or four grants in to get one out whereas before they didn't. There's not enough money around.

**MKS:** How much of your biological training has bled over into your science fiction?

**PM:** It's a surprise to find how all my short stories have a kind of biological stamp on them. It's a question I get asked a lot and the answer usually is that at least it makes me careful about what I do, or at least more careful than I might otherwise be, perhaps too careful in a sense. If you're trained as a biologist, you know certain things to be true. You know that we're the most important creatures in the biosphere, you know to build from the bottom up rather than the top down, and maybe this permeates through the way I construct. It's also learning to look at things. In biological training, you used to be taught how to draw, not so much now. You were taught to look at things carefully and to draw them carefully. If you look at nineteenth-century textbooks, they're beautifully illustrated. They attracted some of the best illustrators of the time, not the best artists necessarily, but the best illustrators. I still think, being slightly old-fashioned, that observation's important. It teaches you to look at things; it's the same way as being an artist teaches you to look at stuff.

I had a lot of fun doing biology, it's just a shame that I reached a point where I was not having fun any more. Fortunately, I have something else where I can have fun.

**MKS:** The description in your books is detailed, but plausible. The things you describe, I get a very strong visual sense of what you're trying to put over.

**PM:** Books are a terrifically artificial way of looking at the world. It does expect an intense amount of co-operation from the reader to understand what's going on and one hopes one does one's best not to upset the subject flow. I've been trying to evolve a kind of shorthand; what's the three most important things to say, and then get it down to two.

The problem all beginning writers have is getting characters in and out of a room; one thing I've been trying to learn is how to get even beyond that; someone flies from A to B, just say they flew. That's all you need to do.

I just find this whole thing about completely inventing the future a bit silly. Even if it's the far future, there are still things which resonate. It goes back to archetypes as well. There's a lot of things we do, a lot of customs we have, which go back to things that were important in the twelfth century, say.

**MKS:** Getting back to fun — it seemed to me you were having a tremendous amount of fun with *Pasquale's Angel*.

**PM:** I did a tremendous amount of research for *Pasquale's Angel*.

My reward was to have a lot of fun with all these facts that I'd found out, plus one thing I wanted to do – when people go back and write historical novels, they're terribly gloomy. It's as if they're written with the wattage getting progressively reduced the further they go back. By the time you get back to 1515, it's a forty watt bulb. As it was an alternate history, I wanted to have lots of fun with the stuff. Part of the job of doing alternate history is play, so I was playing. And even though it takes place almost completely at night I like to think there's lots of colour in there as well.

**MKS:** It comes across as a very vibrant novel. I've always imagined that the Renaissance would be a very colourful time, rich tapestries, and that comes across beautifully. I particularly like the sequence where the Pope was coming to visit.

**PM:** That's true, that's actually a true representation of a procession in Florence. The circumstances were slightly changed and I added things, but you don't need to do very much because one of the things that were very popular were automata. Leonardo spent a lot of his time devising spectacular things, so a lot of his works are lost because they were made for parties or processions or entertaining ambassadors. The latest thing was to show off amazing things you could do, and art in those days was not distinguished from science. Leonardo's a good example. And the other point I wanted to do, which is a point that comes across if you start to do any reading about the Renaissance at all, is that the artists were in it for the money, they did stuff on commission.

**MKS:** People have a very misconceived notion of what it was like. They imagine turning out works of genius and forget that the artist had to live.

**PM:** The romantic version of the artist is really a nineteenth century construct and how true it was to what was happening then I don't know because I'm not up on the nineteenth century, you know, the artist living in garrets. You can't live in garrets if there aren't garrets, so they had to invent garrets for artists to live in.

**MKS:** It's very curious to watch people now trying to come to terms with the fact that geniuses weren't always great painters, there was a time before they were great painters, but they're treating everything with the same amount of reverence.

**PM:** Geniuses tend to be more right than wrong. They tend to have more good ideas than ordinary mortals, but I'm not sure how special they are apart from that. The portrayal of people in Pasquale's really was trying to treat them more as artisans rather than geniuses.

**MKS:** The William Morris approach.

**PM:** Yeah, if you like, because he was trying to get back to that. It's a romantic vision of the Renaissance, but it was getting back to the workshop ethic of doing art.

**MKS:** Yes, I've just been reading Fiona McCarthy's biography and she says he was trying to get back to it but, bless him, he just couldn't manage it because he was still the employer.

**PM:** Ruskin had that as well. They had that kind of principle, which is kind of cross-grain because it's trying to work in a social environment that is no longer there. You went to school to learn art in those days, you weren't apprenticed, because you couldn't be given away to somebody at a very young age in those days, which is what happened to most of the artists in the Renaissance. They started in workshops at the age of nine or ten. I don't know how old Leonardo was when he started but it was about that. He was an embarrassment to the family anyway because he was from the wrong side of the blanket. So kids were given away if they had any sort of artistic bent, it was great, they were no longer a burden to the family.

**MKS:** I've been thinking that some of what you are portraying, with things like the Fairies, I was very interested in the idea of taking it back to Clarke's comment about science being magic that works, it seems to me that your view of things is a lot more romantic and drawing on the folklore and legend, like King Arthur coming in.

**PM:** That's really about cultural imprinting, really. The idea with Fairyland was if you do create this new race, what sort of culture

are they going to have. They kind of are like fairies, but are kind of not like the romantic Conan Doyle Victorian idea of fairies. They're a little bit more like goblins.

**MKS:** The Seelie Court and the Unseelie Court, that kind of thing?

**PM:** More like the Thomas the Rhymer idea of fairies, a bit more malevolent, kind of aliens out there beyond the firelight idea of fairies, because it also ties in with our idea of aliens, they come and they take children away and time doesn't pass for those children and then they bring them back, which is what happened in Close Encounters. Where did those guys go, they went to Fairyland and came back. That's it in a nutshell.

Here it was the idea of what happens if we create our own bunch of aliens. Obviously they'd have a human inheritance and be surrounded by the culture.

If we think about outsiders as well, the whole history of Britain is about waves of invaders pushing the indigenous races into the wilderness and that's why the Arthur thing chimes so well with fairies as well. He ends up in a kind of Fairyland as well, the king under the hill. The Fairies are a kind of resistance movement in their own country. I suppose that's the romance, if you like. It is romantic, resistance fighters; an underground movement always is. On the other hand, the reality is not so great, the day-to-day thing is not so great.

London is just a series of taking in refugees – the Asians, the Bengalis, the Somalis now, the Russian Jews in the late nineteenth century. A whole series of people being brought in and making their own communities, finding their own place. But now it's more difficult because they're not being allowed to find their own place. And that's not just Britain, it's the rest of Europe too, so you're having, strictly speaking, real refugee camps being set up in the middle of Germany say. They've always had their tradition of 'guest workers' – a terribly mealy-mouthed phrase – so part of Fairyland, the backdrop, is part of that.

And one of the things that always interested me with Albania, which is where *Fairyland* ends up, is this thing that happened after the communist party was overthrown with Albanians crowding onto these dreadful old ships because they believed what they saw in advertisements. They believed that all Italians drove around in sports cars with blondes, how terribly despondent they must have been to get to Naples and find that Naples is like Tirana with advertisements. It's the Land of Nod.

**MKS:** It's the glamour of Fairyland, isn't it?

**PM:** The glamour, yes. What is fairyland? It's all in the head, well it's literally in the head with *Fairyland*.

**MKS:** There is a strong theme running through your books of people marginalised, also groups fighting a resistance. Going back as far as *Secret Harmonies* and *Four Hundred Billion Stars*, there's this sense of settlement and people wanting to break out and do something more, and being constrained.

**PM:** Yeah, it's what I'm writing about at the moment with the trilogy, about stasis in society versus change.

**MKS:** Your second volumes of short stories, *The Invisible Country*, is not so much a collection of short stories as a novel of faceted pieces, broadening out your universe.

**PM:** Part of the reason it feels the way you think it feels is because four of the stories are linked together because they're back-story for *Fairyland*. It's not necessary to read the stories to understand *Fairyland* and I hope it's not necessary to read *Fairyland* to understand the stories but I think the two do bounce off each other nicely.

There were only going to be three actually but then Ellen Datlow said 'have you got a novella for the site *Omni* have just put up?' and I thought about it and then I wrote 'Slaves', which is a semi-original story because it's not been in print before. It's only been bytes on the Internet.

**MKS:** Some one said to me that there is something about your novels, they demand to be read twice, one straight after the other. There's an awful lot of detail in *Fairyland*, a lot to assimilate at once

**PM:** It is something I'm trying to do because it's something I'm interested in doing now with science fiction. We don't have to keep beating people over the head with 'this is the future' any more which a lot of the early novels needed to do simply because the future was such a strange concept, say back in the 1940s. So you've got lots of space to put other stuff down, in other words make the future extremely detailed and that's partly what I was trying to do with *Fairyland*. It's also the fact that readers are a lot more sophisticated as well so you can drop hints in that are like those paper pellets you can buy and drop in water to expand into flowers, you can do that and that's again because we're so saturated with information, universal information; you can bounce that off the readers' consciousness much more easily than you could before.

And real-world science is moving so fast – despite the fact there's funding problems – there is so much momentum now and there are so many neat short cuts that people can use now that it has become, certainly in the biomedical field, extremely fast explorations that are going on. Not quite out of control, yet ...

**MKS:** No, I had a very strong sense, actually, particularly in *Fairyland* and one or two of the short stories, that it was in control, but only just, and you were very much questioning what was going to happen if ...

**PM:** Yeah, yeah. If you pushed it a little further it would be completely out of control but I wanted a structure where it is still just about in control. So in *Fairyland* the rich are protected from all the things that the gene hackers can do, they've got the universal phage that protects them, and it's the poor that gets it in the neck, basically. That's the story, as usual: it's the rich who benefit from technology and it's the poor who don't. It shows that there's an underclass that could benefit from it – so you have a very happy ending.

**MKS:** You're quite keen on happy endings, aren't you?

**PM:** Yes, I always used to joke with Kim Newman that my characters always walk away and get pensions and have a nice cottage by the sea. I literally did that in *Eternal Light*.

**MKS:** Is there anything wrong with that?

**PM:** No. This comes back to the perception of science fiction again, but from the inside, that the Americans always perceive Brits to be a gloomy bunch and the Brits always look at Americans as so gung-ho. I don't think that's necessarily so, there's gloomy science fiction coming from the Americans.

**MKS:** In 'Evan's Progress', the story you wrote for *New Internationalist*, you were commenting on science according to the model of Pandora's Box and you were suggesting...

**PM:** Oh, *Frankenstein*.

**MKS:** Yes, you were saying: 'the template of science is not that of Prometheus but of Pandora's Box.' You do see it very much as Promethean.

**PM:** Well, it depends what you mean by Prometheus. We know Prometheus got punished for what he did, but certainly it's a way of bringing light, it freed human beings from the power of the gods which is why he got punished. So if you look at it from that point of view, yes it is Promethean. But a lot of people do look at it as Pandora's Box so you're going to unlock something that's going to dump a lot of evil in the world and it's going to get out and be out of control, which is back to that out of control thing. I don't think that's necessarily true, to be honest, because it kind of implies there's a load of imps locked away there and they're going to get out.

**MKS:** The reason I asked is that, even if that model is true the other thing that comes out of Pandora's Box is hope.

**PM:** Exactly. But they don't see that because hope obviously gets kicked to death by the Doc Martens. But there are a lot of people who are just against genetic engineering. I mean, there are a lot of ethical problems with genetic engineering and the people who are working in the field are trying to do right, and there are various ethical barriers they have set up, and a couple of those are mentioned in *Fairyland*. Obviously, they're transgressed in *Fairyland*. But there are still a load of other ethical problems that

have yet to be addressed and there are a lot of impatient people who just want to get on with research.

**MKS:** A lot of science fiction I read concentrates very heavily on the action and the science but there's a lot of 'culture', the artistic expression, the music, coming over in your work.

**PM:** I guess it's partly my interests coming over. Art does use science. Architecture, if you look at that, it's a weird cross between art and engineering. It uses very cutting-edge science.

**MKS:** And there are people like Stelarc.

**PM:** Yes, I'm very interested in performance artists like Stelarc and so on. 'Slaves' mentions this; part of the idea of *Slaves* is that there's a bunch of people using that kind of material technology, as it were, maybe misusing it too, to make a living, and that comes out of that kind of integration of machines and bodies. And also it goes back to this thing of texture as well. I'm not interested in the kind of Alphaville vision of these celebrated robots roaming around doing their work, coming home, popping a pill, watching the 3D-o-tron, whatever the next awful term for the television substitute is. You want to get away from that, you want to give a more detailed portrait; you can't but help it, part of that portrait is the cultural background. You're assaulted by details of culture as you just walk down the street. A lot of it's commercial culture.

**MKS:** I found your portrayal of it a lot more convincing. So often, the one thing that seems to end up being recycled are the songs. Writers so often seem to imagine that three hundred years on, we'll be only listening to Beatles' songs, they'll have become the classical music. I felt your presentation of it's a lot broader. Bach's still there, a version of the Kronos Quartet, things like that. It seemed there was room for a lot of different varieties of music to continue.

**PM:** Yeah, if we look, there's not one dominant – the twentieth century is fractured anyway – but I don't think everyone would listen to, for instance, heavy metal, as some futures have, or be listening to Bach all the time. The problem one does always have is inventing. I do try and side-step that a little bit. I might mention a few names or show the latest pop star at a party but we wouldn't be listening to his rendition of something. I might mention something called 'pop' but I wouldn't describe what the hell it is; that's as far as it goes.

**MKS:** You seem to have a very strong interest in films as well as music. I was thinking of *Dr Praetorius* and *The Bride of Frankenstein*.

**PM:** *The Bride of Frankenstein* is the most wonderful Gothic film ever. *Dr Praetorius* is just this character who's been dropped in basically and takes over his scenes. He really is the mad inventor, he's got this great shock of white hair and drinks gin all the time. He's just a loony basically. Ernest Thesiger is the actor who played him and he gave a terrifically scary performance of him. I thought it would be nice just to borrow the character. He just got dropped into *Pasquale's Angel* in 1919 and then I thought, I'd mentioned he'd had problems in Venice, and then I thought 'well what happened there', and when I was asked by Steve Jones 'would I write a story to do with *Frankenstein*' that was an obvious thing to do, to go back and explore *Praetorius* a little more, and then I went forward and wrote another *Dr Praetorius* story, 'The True History of *Dr Praetorius*', which is nothing of the kind, and dropped a few other hints about his adventures. Now I'm thinking about doing a couple more of those; one of them's 'Dr Praetorius and the Lost Temple', which will be a kind of steampunk thing, and maybe 'Dr Praetorius and the Lost World'. And I think, probably stop there, actually. 'Dr Praetorius on Mars' is one that briefly crossed my mind as well, go back to Edgar Rice Burroughs and do it again. Which is another extraordinary cultural construct that hasn't gone away. Tarzan is another one. Elvis should have played Tarzan. It would have been great, the cry in the jungle.

**MKS:** I just don't see him swinging around on the vines though.

**PM:** In the early days he could have managed it.

**MKS:** Yes, he probably would have done, though I can't quite see him conversing with chimpanzees. What's your next book about?

**PM:** I'm doing a traditional skiffy thing now which is ten million

years in the future and there are no humans in it whatsoever and it's all about religion, religious philosophy. It's about being a god, or being a messiah, which is a very science fictional thing to be. And it's all about saving the world. There's a lot of stuff coming out, Tippler's book on *The Omega Point*, it's kind of dealing with some of the gaps in his rather boy-scoutish vision of heaven. Science's idea of heaven always turns out to be hell, basically, so it's trying to grapple with problems of responsibility. If we become as gods, what do we do then? And as usual it's going to be from the upside-down point of view rather than the top down point of view. And there's quite a dash of what theocracy means as well – there aren't that many in science fiction, to be honest. What happens if you can see where God lives, at least in summer. Every summer God's home comes flying across the night sky – what do you do then?

**MKS: When ritual breaks down you get murder and war. There does seem to be quite a strong flavour of that.**

**PM:** Yes, that's part of it. If you read the story, 'Recording Angel', there's the seed of it, which is about if you break down ritual you get civil war. And this novel enlarges on what happens next as it spreads throughout society. It was just going to be the one book, but it's a very long book. It's spread out. It is a continuous narrative, at least that was the idea, except there's time travel involved.

**MKS: I reckon that's going to be big again because they reckon we can do it now, according to *New Scientist*.**

**PM:** Well, they had anti-gravity in *New Scientist* the other day.

**MKS: Reading *New Scientist* is more like reading science fiction every day, it's getting very strange.**

**PM:** There are an awful lot of things going on these days that are supposed to be impossible. It goes back to *Eternal Light*: the cosmologists are weirder than we are, weirder than science fiction writers. It's what happens when you take mathematics to its extreme really. The thing is, if you can condense all of the universe down to one equation on a t-shirt, how wild is that? What's the implications of that? I had this real argument over *Eternal Light* about putting equations in or not. All I wanted to do with the equations was show this is how scientists thought, this is their medium, if they're cosmologists they work with equations so why not put a few in?

**MKS: Physicists I find most intimidating, from the point of view of someone who has a smattering. Biologists I can deal with, I don't always understand but I've got a basic idea of what's going on, to some extent with chemistry too, but the physicists are the scary ones.**

**PM:** Or mathematicians. There's a great story about a mathematician who gets up to do a lecture and starts off: 'Well, we take this proposition to be true.' And he stares at it, then he starts writing like mad, completely ignoring the students, covering like three hundred square feet of blackboard, and he gets right to the bottom right hand corner and he turns rounds and says, 'Yes, I am right, the proposition is true.' End of lecture. And it's a good thing to see, how a thought can seize you and carry you away. It's what science fiction should do as well.

**MKS: I think that's a very good point to stop. Thank you very much, Paul McAuley.**

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Maureen Kincaid Speller is the BSFA Administrator and winner of TAFF. For several years she reviewed magazines for Vector — Eds.

## A Paul J McAuley Bibliography compiled by Andrew M. Butler

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Whilst the 1960s, with New Waves on both sides of the Atlantic, has received a lot of attention in sf criticism, and the 1980s and after is obssively written about as the era of *Neuromancer*, the 1970s seem to be the invisible decade. One of our finest critics – and a writer active throughout the decade – helps to redress the balance, with a particular emphasis on Britain.

## SCIENCE FICTION IN THE SEVENTIES by Brian Stableford

We remember the 1960s – rightly – as an era of change, which swept up science fiction just as it swept up everything else. Within the narrow context of British sf, the replacement of John Carnell by Michael Moorcock as the editor of *New Worlds* still seems to everyone who was around at the time to have been the turning of a crucial corner, a clear demarcation of the end of one era and the beginning of another. There were similarly definitive events in many other contexts, broad and narrow, which put up brand new signposts pointing in the direction of the present. The seventies have, inevitably, suffered the sad fate of seeming very dull and flat by comparison, devoid of any such epoch-making turning-points – but as hindsight extends and accumulates, our perception of the past inevitably changes, and it may now be time to recognise that the really important shifts in the fortunes of science fiction were not brought about by the clamorous manifestos of the effervescent sixties but by more insidious events of the seventies.

At the time, the corners that were turned in the sixties seemed to those who made the transition as ridges that had finally been attained after a steep and difficult climb. The writers who rallied around the flags hoisted by Moorcock's *New Worlds* and Harlan Ellison's *Dangerous Visions* anthology felt that science fiction had been labouring too long under artificial constraints, held back by the walls of the 'pulp ghetto' and subjected to the unreasonable contempt of literary critics. They were longing to break free, to carry the cause of science fiction forward to a position of honour and prestige that it had been unjustly denied. They began the seventies with the conviction that the tide had turned, and that the battle – although not yet won – was theirs for the taking. From the viewpoint of 1970, it seemed as if the seventies would be a time when everything would run down-hill, accelerating all the while even for those who would be content merely to freewheel. From the viewpoint of 1970, it looked as if the last barriers to the progress of the genre had been removed – and the one thing no one could imagine was that new ones would be raised against it.

In the Summer 1970 issue of *Vector* John Brunner published the second of two fascinating articles on the economics of sf writing, which rejoiced triumphantly in the gains which had been made in the four years which had elapsed since he published the first. His exemplary 'average sf writer' Theokurt Frishblitz was no longer struggling to keep the wolf from the door. Advances were shooting up and more and more titles were being reprinted, to the extent that Frishblitz could look without envy at his one-time colleague in the advertising agency for which he used to work:

[The advertising man] was driving a larger and more luxurious car, but it wasn't his – it was company property. He was sporting a very expensive suit, but it was showing signs of wear; Frishblitz, who puts on a suit only to visit a publisher or his agent, was dressed in a much more comfortable outfit of sweater and slacks....

It occurred to Frishblitz...that he could choose whether he worked an eighteen-hour day, and his old acquaintance had to put up with it when his boss decreed he should.

In purely financial terms [the advertising man] might be making a trifle more per year. In terms of opportunity to relax, get around, plan his own life, Frishblitz concluded, he was by far the better off of the two.<sup>1</sup>

In a gleeful addendum to his essay headed 'It isn't me' Brunner revealed that he was doing even better than Frishblitz. Many other writers must have been in a similar position, looking forward with boundless enthusiasm. Aggressive competition between ambitious paperback publishers to obtain the cream of new work within the genre was driving advances up, and confidence in the ability of the books thus auctioned to earn back their advances was running high

in the aftermath of the first genre best-sellers. Piles of extra, 'unearned', cash were being delivered to writers whose early works were being reprinted and repackaged/Nor was it only milk and honey that were flowing in abundance; the less tangible rewards of critical and academic attention seemed to be within easy grasp. American universities were beginning to offer courses in science fiction; the Science Fiction Research Association was founded in 1970, the Science Fiction Foundation in 1972 and *Science-Fiction Studies* in 1973.

To those living in it, therefore, 1970 seemed to be a time of new departures – and it was taken for granted that those new departures would run smoothly and on time to their deserved destinations. The evidence to support this view was abundant; it was perfectly obvious that better and more ambitious work was being done within the genre than had ever been done before – the books reviewed in the issue of *Vector* in which Brunner's article appeared included Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-5*, Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Robert Silverberg's *Thorns* and Samuel R. Delany's *The Einstein Intersection* – and it seemed inconceivable that the merits of this work, and of science fiction as a field of serious and valuable endeavour, could fail to reap its just reward.

With the aid of hindsight, we can see that this optimism was partly justified – but we can also see when and how the wheels fell off. We can see exactly where and why the battle that was won turned into the war that was lost.

To some extent, the seventies did live up to the expectation that they would be a boom time for sf writers. Although the running was not smooth, particularly in the UK – the boom in sf publishing produced such a glut of titles that there was an equally spectacular bust in 1974 – confidence continued to run high until the very end of the decade. The mid-70s recession was swiftly followed by what appeared to be a robust recovery, which seemed to prove that the progress of the genre really was unstoppable, and there was a sudden surge in recruitment to the ranks of science fiction professionals.

In the 'All British' April 1978 issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* Brian Aldiss produced an article every bit as exultant, in its own way, as Brunner's *Vector* piece. It began by rejoicing that so many British sf writers were 'independent-minded men who have taken the plunge and become full-time writers'. Aldiss took the trouble to list the most recent batch of recruits to fully-fledged professionalism – Ian Watson, Andrew Stephenson, Robert Holdstock, Chris Morgan, Mark Adlard, Bob Shaw and Philip Dunn – remarking that they followed hot on the heels of Richard Cowper, Edmund Cooper, Christopher Priest, Duncan Lunan, Lawrence James, Barrington Bayley, Michael Coney, D. G. Compton, Angus Wells and M. John Harrison. Some of the brave souls, Aldiss admitted, were fully prepared to accept meagre rewards in order that they could follow their vocations – but others, he was quick to claim, were 'among the highest paid writers in the world, earning say £50,000 a year'.<sup>2</sup>

Aldiss did add some cautionary notes to his upbeat account of the present and potential future of British sf, including a conventional observation about the non-congruence of popular demand and literary ambition which began 'Yet now as never before sf is threatened by formula, simply because it is so commercially successful'. Aldiss did not claim that this posed particular problems for British writers, but when Robert Holdstock and Christopher Priest compiled an anthology called *Stars of Albion* for publication in association with the Brighton Worldcon of 1979 Holdstock's introduction – which estimated that there were then 'thirty or so fully active British sf writers' – took the trouble to emphasize that

'British writers are unique only in being a highly individual group, generally hostile to any commercial pressure to adapt or modify their work to market requirements'.<sup>3</sup>

These words appeared in print just as the temporary recovery of the marketplace suffered an ignominious relapse which put paid once and for all to the notion that the profession of science fiction was an easy ride. Although there was another explosive boom in sf publishing during the late 1980s, when Margaret Thatcher and Nigel Lawson touched off a veritable epidemic of lunatic optimism throughout the nation, the writers who queued up for their turn at that particular trough knew perfectly well that they were the lucky beneficiaries of a brief folly. Whatever else the experiences of the seventies had done for them, the sf writers who had lived through that decade had certainly learned to be cynical about the economics of sf writing.

Although the seventies flattered only to deceive, however, they were a time of unprecedented opportunity and unprecedented optimism. Perhaps British sf writers were not as grateful for this as their American counterparts – those counterparts have never been slow to accuse British sf of constitutional pessimism – but they did take some advantage of it. Aldiss, in his drum-beating article, lamented that 'perhaps British science fiction is not ambitious enough' and observed of some works he had recently enjoyed that they 'all have that modest British virtue of modesty' but the seventies was the least unambitious and least modest decade in the history of British sf. The late sixties had produced a highly significant clutch of ground-breaking works which stood out by comparison with what had gone before, but anything the seventies lacked in experimental fervour they made up in sheer self-confidence.

The greatest financial rewards of the seventies surge were, inevitably, reaped by writers of longer and more secure standing than those Aldiss took the trouble to 'talk up'. Arthur C. Clarke cashed in the celebrity obtained for him by 2001: *A Space Odyssey* (1968) by obtaining a contract which gave him the largest advance ever paid out for work within the genre to write the three novels which still stand as the pinnacle of his achievements as an sf writer: *Rendezvous with Rama* (1972), *Imperial Earth* (1975) and *The Fountains of Paradise* (1979). It is arguable that Clarke was effectively a writer *sui generis* even before the success of these works, but it was the seventies which made him a 'trade mark' author and a worldwide celebrity. In accordance with the conventionally-established brokerage of celebrity, however, this was seen as an essentially personal triumph rather than the victory of a particular speculative method. Clarke – through no fault of his own – became a 'guru' whose opinions were sought simply because they were his, not because they were derived by the scrupulous application of logic and reason to the extrapolation of possible futures. His success might have been rooted in the idea that science fiction was a genre whose time had come, but as soon as it was confirmed it became a testimony to the uniqueness of his own genius. The momentum acquired by Clarke's career did not serve to draw others along in its slipstream – and as the boom turned to bust, it became extremely difficult for others British sf writers to maintain any momentum at all.

Many of the writers listed by Aldiss as the bright new things of seventies British sf have, of course, long since fallen by the wayside. Others weathered the storm and remained full-time professionals. Hindsight informs us, however that there is not a single one who continued to make lucrative progress after 1979 as a writer of science fiction.

It might be argued that the most fortunate of Aldiss's nominees were those whose real successes came after 1979. M. John Harrison and Robert Holdstock did not begin to produce such mature and definitive works as *In Viriconium* (1982) and *Mythago Wood* (1984) until the boom was over, and they were both fortunate enough to be able to realign the trajectories of their careers, taking up positions well beyond the boundaries of genre sf. Those who took fuller advantage of the windfall years mostly had to suffer the slow draining away of the impetus that they had acquired and displayed during the

seventies.

Ian Watson's personal golden age extended from *The Embedding* (1974) through *The Martian Inca* (1977) and *Miracle Visitors* (1978) to *The Gardens of Delight* (1980). His work thereafter did not decline in intelligence or artistry, but it became so haunted and harassed by attempts to compromise with the pattern of reader demand that he has sometimes seemed to be living in the world of Harrison Bergeron, desperately trying (mercifully with only limited success) to quieten his ambition and imagination in the cause of becoming unthreateningly average.

Bob Shaw's most creative period as a novelist ran from the fix-up *Other Days, Other Eyes* (1972) via *Orbitsville* (1975) to *Vertigo* (1978) and he was drawn into similar experiments in compromise as he too tried everything possible to retain the affections of a dwindling audience and to swell its numbers with new recruits. His struggle was heroic, but ultimately futile; the health problems (which were to cause his death) increased the angle of his career's decline, but were not the only factor in the downward trajectory of his career.

Richard Cowper moved with increasing self-confidence from early essays in make-it-up-as-you-go hackwork to the brilliantly stylish stories collected in *The Custodians* (1976) and *The Web of the Magi* (1980), the best of which ('Piper at the Gates of Dawn') became the foundation-stone of the Kinship series. Cowper would surely have gone on, as Christopher Priest did, to do more work of at-least-equal quality had not ill-health intervened – but he might, like Priest, have struggled to keep his spirits up during the depressingly sterile eighties even if he had remained robust. In any case, the direction of his career had already begun to move away from sf in the direction of fantasy and it seems highly likely that like Priest, Holdstock and Harrison he would eventually have abandoned the genre altogether. The experience of those who did not gives eloquent evidence of the wisdom of such a course.

Barry Bayley, having found the morale to produce a wonderful series of quirkily colourful novels in the seventies – beginning with *The Fall of Chronopolis* and *The Soul of the Robot* (both 1974) – found that his career ran into a virtual brick wall after *The Zen Gun* crept into print in 1982. After two careful attempts to write less challenging books Bayley lost heart completely. D. G. Compton evidently suffered a similar loss of heart, until he showed some belated recent signs of life. Michael Coney did likewise, after failing in his own attempt to follow the Gadarene rush which swept so many ex-genre writers into the more fertile fields of fantasy, and Andrew Stephenson also went the same way.

In writers of longer standing, some of whom had already done their best work, while others had given up hope of ever doing anything worthwhile, the confidence of the 1970s was differently expressed. One writer of an earlier generation included in Aldiss's list by a fluke, Edmund Cooper, went rapidly backwards in creative terms as unprecedented financial success facilitated his determination to drink himself to death and fuelled the production of some of the most flagrantly contemptuous exercises in hackwork ever penned (most notably the aptly-named 'Expendables' series of 1975-6, signed 'Richard Avery'). Ken Bulmer wrote the first twenty-odd volumes of his pseudonymous 'Dray Prescott' novels, among others, and Ted Tubb produced sixteen Cap Kennedy novellas as well as the middle sixteen novels of the Dumarest series and various other items.

For these writers, increased confidence meant increased productivity – and who could possibly blame them for seizing an opportunity so long awaited? We can only wonder as to what genuinely fast writers like the late John Russell Fearn and the otherwise-occupied Lionel Fanthorpe might have produced had they been offered the opportunities of the seventies marketplace – and we can, alas, only shake our heads sadly at the realization that a few infinitely more accomplished writers also missed out on the boom for reasons presumably beyond their control.

Keith Roberts and Josephine Saxton were both active as the seventies began, and both became active again once they were over, but neither was in the groove when it really mattered and we can

only wonder what the brief surge of all-encompassing confidence might have contributed to the amplification of their abundant but never-wholly-fulfilled literary abilities. Ironically, the third writer who has to be added to this particular list is John Brunner, who began the decade with exultantly high hopes but was quickly and badly let down by the failure of his health. He did manage to produce *The Sheep Look Up* (1972) and *The Shockwave Rider* (1975), to complete the alarmist quartet begun by the two works which sent his hopes into orbit, *Stand on Zanzibar* (1968) and *The Jagged Orbit* (1969), but that was the end of him as a writer of any consequence.

We must not forget, of course, that the confidence which British science fiction of the seventies had was not entirely the product of the unprecedented hospitality of the marketplace. There was a widespread feeling that science fiction had somehow 'come of age'. Moorcock's *New Worlds* had given the impression of nurturing a kind of science fiction that was both resolutely adult and conspicuously modern, and W. H. Smith's had obligingly proved the point by banning it at the end of 1967 because of the colourful language employed in Norman Spinrad's *Bug Jack Barron*. *Dangerous Visions*, published in the same year, had been explicitly advertised by its editor as an instrument for abolishing all the 'taboos' that had previously prevented the genre from engaging with the entire spectrum of contemporary human concerns.

So writers began the 1970s with the feeling that they new artistic opportunities lay before them as well as new financial opportunities, and the majority of the writers named by Aldiss as new recruits to the profession presumably believed that the former were at least as important as the latter. There was a special exhilaration in the feeling that all agendas of concern were now potentially open, and that science fiction – which, they had been loudly assured, was the only form of literature capable of getting to grips with the forces determining the continuing metamorphosis of the present into the future – was finally established as something serious and worthy. A genre which had previously been condemned to run in blinkers, hard held on the bit, now seemed free to go all out for the winning-post.

Unfortunately, as Aldiss had scrupulously observed, the requirements of artistic integrity were to some extent in conflict with the demands of the genre marketplace. Publishers promoting genre lines wanted consistency, not imaginative bravery; they wanted a winning formula, not a vast spectrum of explorable possibilities. No matter how freely the genre ran, it was still stuck on the same old racecourse.

The science-fiction writers who harboured glorious ambitions of artistic triumph found – as many a jockey had before them – that when their horse was finally given leave to go flat out it simply was not quick enough. It did run on, after a fashion, but not fast enough to finish first – and to add insult to injury, the creature which sailed past it in the straight and stole all the glory was one that had long been dismissed as a no-hoper. The seventies was the decade when fantasy was also given leave to enter the genre race – and genre fantasy swiftly proved that it had the legs science fiction lacked.

For the best part of a hundred years it had been assumed by writers, critics and editors that fantasy was suitable reading only for children. It seemed perfectly obvious that in a world where belief in the supernatural was evaporating and that superstition was being crushed beneath the heel of the scientific enlightenment the only kind of imaginative fiction which could get a grip on its readers was that which at least pretended to accommodate its flights of fancy within the scientific world-view. Had this conviction not been so deeply-ingrained, there might never have been a mass-market genre of science fiction at all, but it was so completely taken for granted that all the evidence which pointed to a contrary conclusion was simply ignored.

The utter failure of this assumption was finally revealed, beyond the shadow of a doubt, by the runaway success of the American paperback editions of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* in the late sixties. Even then, the first response of the editors who founded

the fantasy genre was to assume that the lesson to be drawn was that there was a niche market for conspicuously upmarket 'literary fantasy'. Ballantine's first 'adult fantasy' line kicked off with William Morris and Lord Dunsany and followed up with George Meredith. Even Lin Carter – a man whose only stock-in-trade as a writer was slapdash imitative hackwork – clung as hard as he possibly could to the idea that fantasy was essentially esoteric, a field for cognoscenti, which could not be instituted as a popular genre. The series of *Year's Best Fantasy* anthologies which he began editing for DAW in 1975 commented approvingly on the way that writers like Richard Adams and Patricia McKillip had succeeded in selling books written for children to an adult audience and rejoiced in the revitalization of sword and sorcery fiction but his 1978 anthology, surveying the produce of 1977, introduced a new category into its summary appendix in order to warn readers against 'The Worst Book Ever': *The Sword of Shannara* by Terry Brooks.

By the time Carter penned this judgment, attacking everyone involved in the publication of 'this war crime of a novel', every single editor in America had rejected Stephen R. Donaldson's *Chronicles of Thomas Covenant* because every single one of them knew – beyond the shadow of a doubt – that readers could not and would not tolerate a hero suffering from leprosy. Carter's summary does not even deign to mention Donaldson's trilogy, although all three volumes had been published in 1977, confirming in no uncertain terms that his editorial instincts were just as seriously misled as everyone else's. It was, therefore, in frank defiance even of the supposed champions of the fantasy genre that Brooks and Donaldson demonstrated how much commercial potential the genre had, and in what directions its future lay.

In Britain the publication of a paperback edition of *The Lord of the Rings* was supplemented by the relaunching of Mervyn Peake by Penguin, but the subsequent success of *WaterShip Down* was regarded as a freak. It was not until Fontana published the *Chronicles of Thomas Covenant* in 1978 that the true potential of genre fantasy was made so abundantly clear to British mass-market publishers that no amount of conviction could stand against it. Once that potential had become clear, though, there was an inevitable rush to get in on the act.

The emergence of genre fantasy added very greatly to the marketing problems suffered by science fiction in the recession which began in 1979. Unlike horror fiction, which had always been separately marketed, such fantasy as had made its way into the paperback marketplace before 1970 had been put out on the fringes of science fiction lists, partly because so much of it was written by the same writers (L. Sprague de Camp, Fritz Leiber, Poul Anderson and so on), and it shared the same shelf-space in bookshops. From 1977 to the present day the proportion of that shelf-space occupied by fantasy has increased steadily and dramatically, reflecting a similar transmogrification of the contents of publishers' *sf* fantasy lists. Nor was this simply an unfortunate accident of categorization; the most significant corollary of the revelation that writers, critics and editors had been wrong to think of science fiction as the natural form of modern imaginative literature was that they had utterly mistaken the reason why the mass-market had allowed science fiction to become incarnate as a genre.

In fact, as we can now see perfectly plainly, most of the people writing and reading science fiction were 'really' fantasy writers and readers who were making do. What attracted the majority of mass-market readers to genre science fiction had nothing to do with its pretended accommodation to the scientific world-view or its potential to get to grips with the forces determining the continuing metamorphosis of the present into the future; they liked science fiction because science fiction – thanks to the blind prejudices of editors – was the only popular genre which offered wild, colourful and flagrantly impossible adventure stories.

If the successes of *The Sword of Shannara* and *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant* were not sufficient to ram that lesson home, the cinematic release in 1977 of both *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* conclusively completed the job. These unrepentantly

mystical movies deployed sciencefictional imagery not to respect but crudely to defame the scientific world-view, proving once and for all what every Edgar Rice Burroughs fan had always known without ever quite bringing the knowledge into the full light of consciousness: that the only aspects of science fiction which are truly popular – and hence the only ones which make it fit meat for the mass market – are those which are frankly and brutally antithetical to both science and real contemporary concerns.

With the aid of hindsight we can now see that the seventies did produce a crucial turning-point in the history of science fiction which was at least as important as the turning-point provided by the launching of the new wave. That turning-point may not have been obvious at the time, but that was because it seemed to many of the onlookers to be a retrogressive step rather than a progressive one: one which could not possibly bear any worthwhile fruit. In a sense, however, the fact that it was such an abrupt step away from what had previously appeared to be the course of progress made it all the more significant.

We can now see and understand that 1977 was the year which obliterated all the hopes which had been entertained for science fiction by demonstrating that the whole notion of 'genre science fiction' was based on a false assumption. In 1943, John W. Campbell jr had been forced by the advent of war to choose between *Astounding* and *Unknown*. Given his fervent belief in the importance and potential of science fiction he presumably did not hesitate for an instant before junking *Unknown* – but we now have reason to suppose that he would probably have been wiser, in a purely commercial sense, to flush *Astounding* down the toilet. Fantasy really did have the potential to be a mass-market genre, mass-produced to a standard formula in order to satisfy a reasonably stable and clearly-formulated pattern of demand; it was not, as even Lin Carter persisted in believing while he worked to secure its corner of the sf marketplace, an essentially esoteric literary form only capable of appreciation by a sensitised minority.

We now know, thanks to work done in the seventies by Terry Brooks, Stephen R. Donaldson, George Lucas, Steven Spielberg and many others, that it is science fiction which is essentially esoteric, of interest only to that apparently-tiny minority of readers which is sensitised to the aesthetics of the scientific world-view and seriously interested in the advance of the present into an alien future. We now know that the only kind of sf which has authentic mass-market appeal is 'sci-fi': futuristic costume drama which not only pays no heed to matters of scientific plausibility but openly derides such considerations.

There is, of course, a certain irony in the fact that all this happened when science-fiction writers were at their most confident, reacting to an intellectual climate in which everything seemed possible by doing better work than they had ever done before. It was not obvious in 1977 that the events of that year would work to the detriment of their ambitions. Many thought that no matter what deficiencies *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *Star Wars* might have as individual pieces of work their runaway success was bound to be good for the genre as a whole and would increase the amount of market space available to works of more serious intent. This was a mistake made by others too; at the 1976 Eastercon held in

Manchester Harry Harrison told of his adventures at one of the first specialist *Star Trek* cons, deriding the fans assembled there for the edification of their supposed superiors while rejoicing in the fact that he had actually been paid for putting in an appearance. Even the organisers of that initial venture had fallen into the trap of assuming that an interest in *Star Trek* must be symptomatic of a willingness to be interested in science fiction in general – but it was an error they did not repeat.

It was (and is) true that many readers interested in serious science fiction are perfectly capable of taking an interest in TV sci-fi, but the reverse was not (and is not) the case. Far from winning new recruits to the cause of science fiction, the cultivation of specialist *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* fandoms merely removed from the company of sf readers those fellow travellers who were only there on sufferance.

In exactly the same way, the success of genre fantasy removed from the company of sf writers those fantasists who had long been using it as a flag of convenience – and those writers who were doing their most ambitious and most serious work within the genre found, in consequence, that the windfall they had seen descending from on high was being carried away by the gathering storm, ultimately to distribute its most abundant rewards elsewhere.

In Britain this was less of a shock than it might have been because everyone in the British sf community already knew that the biggest windfalls always fell to earth on the far side of the Atlantic, but that did not alter the fact that of all the writers gleefully named by Brian Aldiss as men of newly-independent means only a handful managed to cling on to their independence. The two editors of *Stars of Albion* did so by going along with the wind of commercial change and becoming fantasy writers, albeit of a conscientiously upmarket stripe. Ian Watson tried that too, along with horror-writing and (more recently) technothriller-writing, but never recovered the appearance he had in the mid-seventies of being one of the most up-and-coming writers of his generation. John Brunner, who was doing even better than Theokurt Frishblitz in 1970 and had everything to look forward to, died a bitterly disappointed man.

There were some science fiction fans of the seventies who were not impressed by the fact that the genre was being welcomed into the groves of academe. I do not know who first said 'Let's get science fiction back where it belongs – in the gutter!' but I do recall that various versions of the rallying-cry were quoted far and wide during the seventies, usually with the kind of tolerant amusement reserved for causes already lost. The cause was, of course, never in with an honest chance of winning. Science fiction really did belong in the academy, along with all the other esoteric pursuits of unworlly experts. It is not entirely clear exactly to which part of the campus it belonged – certainly not in literature departments, which had always been geared to the unanalytical appreciation of safely-fossilized ideas, and not in science departments either – but there is no doubt that its place outside the campus was violently usurped and comprehensively transformed during the aftermath of 1977.

After 1977 nothing could be done to halt the process by which genre fantasy and its sci-fi subspecies would assume their rightful place in the affections of the multitude. The borrowed time on which the politer affectations of science fiction had been living for half a century had finally run out.

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Brian Stableford is a novelist, who produced the *Hooded Swan* and *Daedalus* series, the *Dies Irae* and *The Realms of Tartarus* trilogies and some singleton novels during the 1970s. His last article for Vector was 'Invisible People' (196, November / December 1997) and his last book was *Writing Fantasy & Science Fiction* and getting published (Teach Yourself Books, 1997) — Eds.

## Bugging Norman Spinrad – Interview by Maureen Kincaid Speller

*It's thirty years since Bug Jack Barron was serialised, a classic political sf novel serialised in New Worlds, leading to questions being asked in the House of Commons over what the Arts Council were doing supporting such material (although none of the places which we've seen recount this anecdote give chapter and verse of who asked the question and what the answer was). In conversation with Maureen Kincaid Speller, author Norman Spinrad reflects on the impact the novel had on his career, and on the state of the world today.*

**Maureen Kincaid Speller:** In reading *Bug Jack Barron* I had the sense that there were a lot of things going on in the world you were describing.

**Norman Spinrad:** Yes, I think that's what you have to do, you have to have a feeling that the world is scarcely understood.

**MKS:** How does *Bug Jack Barron* seem to you three decades on? I hope that's not an unfair question.

**NS:** Well it is an unfair question because basically everything I predicted came true – except television politicians turned out to be fascists of the right. R. J. Dorman, who was just finally defeated in Orange County, copied the format of the programme to the extent he had video phones, had a television show, and got himself elected to Congress. He's been there ever since. Pat Buchanan is another one. I call them the bastard children of Jack Barron. This is not what I intended. Berlusconi was another in Italy. I'm not exactly sure why, but television politicians turned out to be right-wing semi-fascists or worse. I take that responsibility, I guess – thanks. But that's been a rather strange experience.

**MKS:** It was very strange reading it. I was sitting there thinking, how does he do this? When was this published?

**NS:** Actually it was written in '67, it was published here first in '68.

**MKS:** I gather there was quite a lot of controversy.

**NS:** Ah, yes, it's one of my problems. I still have problems getting published here. I can't give books away here. There's a book I've been trying to get published here and I finally said '£1'. It got turned down. John Jarrold said we can't publish this book because the trade said we'd have to pump £25,000 into it or Smith's wouldn't take any copies.

What this has to do with *Bug Jack Barron* is that then, in '68, *New Worlds* serialised it in six parts and it had an Arts Council grant. I forget which part it was – I think it was about three or four – Smith's refused to distribute the magazine because it used the word 'fuck'. They were subsequently taken to task by the Arts Council, I won't say forced, but were persuaded they better not do this. There were questions about it in parliament – why did the Arts Council support this magazine? So ever since then I've had a lot of difficulty getting published here and there are three or four books I can't get a publisher for, all because of an institutional memory. I'm sure there's nobody at Smith's now who was there then, but there's a kind of institutional memory that operates in these things. If you look at the sex and dirty words in it now ... Jack Barron was written under contract for Doubleday, and they said take all this sex and politics out.

**MKS:** There wouldn't exactly be anything left.

**NS:** But nobody worries about sex any more. You can put the most perverted thing imaginable in anything.

But thirty years ago, that wasn't what it was really about anyway. That was an excuse, it was really about politics which, in retrospect, really is dangerous. It turned out not the way I wanted. That book has had a lot of influence. It had a very positive influence in France, where it was taken up by the people of '68 – they took it correctly, at least the way I wanted them to take it. In the States, somehow, it got read ... I'm sure Dorman read it, he stole the format, and Pat Buchanan, people like that, people whose politics were the exact opposite of Jack Barron's and of the book's, but they picked up on it: this is the way to plan a campaign, with television.

**MKS:** Was this just straight out of your paranoia?

**NS:** Well none of this was happening at the time, but there's always things in the air. It's a peculiar thing about Jack Barron, which I've tried to figure – at the same time I was writing Jack Barron, Brian Aldiss was writing *Barfot* in the *Head*, Norman Mailer was writing *Why Are We In Vietnam?* and Robert Heinlein was doing *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*. All these books written in a period of eighteen months in isolation from each other, but if you look at them stylistically there's a lot of similarity. Something in the air. Very strange.

When *Bug Jack Barron* came out, one of the biggest people attacking it was a guy named John J. Pierce, anti-new wave, vitriolic. I was at a convention in New York and Robert Silverberg comes up and talks to me and this Pierce is watching and, you know, he's ... well, I don't know what it was, but I took a shower afterwards.

**MKS:** I was surprised at how fresh the novel was. Is it in print at the moment?

**NS:** Are we in France? Out of print here, out of print in the States.

In the States, what Smith's is doing would be criminal, it's a violation of the anti-trust laws. They control about 25% of the market. In the States, at least in theory, the break point is about 20%, 17%. If they control that much of the retail market that's considered restraint of trade, and there are procedures to break up the company. In fact, in the States there are two or three companies that function the way Smith's does and there was a suit by independent booksellers against – not the bookstore chains but against the publishers. Because what the bookstore chains were doing was screwing bigger discounts out of publishers than they would give to the independents.

**MKS:** It doesn't surprise me. There's something they've been doing recently that is very nasty. You look in the local Smith's and there's displays of local history books, and there's all these little side deals with independents so they can get a few books in. And they've tried to screw extra money out of them and they've effectively put a blanket ban on these small local publishers because economically those guys can't afford to get their stuff into Smith's anymore.

**NS:** In the States the book store chains charge you for shelf space.

I was told I couldn't do a book for £1 because it would cost £25,000 to launch – to do what? To launch? Whose pocket was that money going to be launched into?

**MKS:** The most powerful person in British publishing is actually the paperback buyer at W. H. Smith. And we're lucky that he likes science fiction.

**NS:** Well, he likes Terry Pratchett.

**MKS:** It's the same thing, isn't it? There's a chance that other stuff might get through from time to time. But it's terrible.

When I was a child, W. H. Smith was actually a bookshop. It's gradually diversified way past being a bookshop, and it's become a stationers. Now you can look in my local Smith's and they've changed the floor plan, it looks like it's pretending not to be a stationers.

**NS:** It's happening to restaurants, and everything. The French understand this is a danger, that there's something beyond the bottom line – the French have an almost paranoid perception that there's something wrong with the bottom line thinking that's going on elsewhere. America is the image factory that makes everybody's image of the world. It's CNN, it's Hollywood, it's everything. The place that makes the images, that makes the dreams, doesn't have a perception of itself because it's making it

for everyone else. This thing in France that we have against American imports of films and TV, for instance, what they're really saying is that this is culture, and culture transcends economic matters, sustains values that are more important than profits and money, and this is something you won't get in the States. You won't get it too much in England, either.

Another thing you get in America, and to a lesser extent here, and to a zero extent in France, and that's all this political correctness. The way Clinton chooses his cabinet: maybe it'll be Madeleine Albright, because she's a woman, or has he promised it to Hispanic cabinet ministers, or has he two more blacks.

The difference between the past and now: creeps like Richard Daley in Chicago, you accepted that that's the way it was. Now they turn it to a political ideology. Before it was just a game, the way it was played.

#### **MKS: Ideology as opposed to honest corruption?**

NS: Yeah, a little decent corruption. Sure you're not going to win an election in New York unless you have some Italians in the administration – obviously, it's politics. But here, now, they become self-righteous about it, and because they think it's ideology, it's all distorted.

We need a balanced thing because that's how you win elections, and when you come to that kind of ideology you corrupt democracy.

This is why Europe is more interesting. There's so much more going on here now, it's rich in good material.

#### **MKS: I'll close by asking you what you think about the current science fiction scene.**

NS: It's a very strange period. I do read a lot because I'm a critic and over the last five years or so I find the most interesting books I'm reading are first, second or third novels by people who aren't really that well known. And a lot of them never seem to get well known.

It's true that in the last four or five years there hasn't been anything that's really turned me on. There hasn't been a really major thing like *Neuromancer*, but on the other hand there's been a lot of really promising newer writers and it's really interesting to see where they're going. I could name names, Rebecca Ore,

Richard Calder, Ian McDonald, Ian McLeod, N. Lee Wood's book too. If I start enumerating people I'm going to be slagging people by omission because there's twenty or thirty – Jonathan Lethem, Christopher Evans, I could go on and on. You could do this all day and still miss people. And yet, I think it's harder for these people to have that book that really breaks out of the pack, to develop as writers, because as soon as you get some talent writers start writing *Star Wars* or *Star Trek* books, there's terrible commercial pressure. A horrible, horrible example is Kevin Anderson. The books that Kevin Anderson did with Douglas Beeson were really good hard science stuff, then he got into *Star Wars* and it's affected his whole work.

I'm a critic so I get to see books that never really get attention. If you have thirty or forty really promising writers, how do they get attention? So these days I tend to deal a lot more with first, second, third books than with more established writers, and I think these days it's where all the action is. But it's hard to get at it as a reader, because there's so much coming out and there's never been so much garbage.

The publishers – here and in the States – are exercising no taste whatsoever. Except at TOR books. But aside from them, people are publishing Terry Pratchett as if it was Greg Benford. Well, you'll pardon me but it isn't. And they're publishing *Star Wars* books and *Star Trek* as if it's Philip K. Dick or John Brunner.

The problem is that, if this stuff was published with editorial taste and discretion, if there were standards ... If there's a total lack of editorial responsibility, it affects the readers. If there are thirty or forty good books, how are you going to find them? I'm not ashamed to say that there is science fiction that is legitimate literature, that aspires to be legitimate literature.

The only reason quality doesn't sell – and I firmly believe this – is because people have no way of knowing where the quality is. If they walk into a store and see garbage, how do they know how to find the Rebecca Ore or the Christopher Evans or the Richard Calder? They have to be really motivated people to look for reviews and stuff.

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Over a number of years, and in a number of places, both Gary Dalkin and Andrew M. Butler have railed against novelisations, endless trilogies and using authors as brand names. Here Andrew M. Butler (with interjections by Gary S. Dalkin) puts the case against tie-in novels, or wookie books, which describe...

## Watered-Down Worlds

I don't want this to sound like an accusation or an interrogation.

I've read many *Doctor Who* novelisations. All were published by Target Books. I read them out of personal enthusiasm for *Doctor Who*. They are, in Vectoresque, 'wookie books'.

Let's backtrack a few lines. Let's take a glimpse beyond the frame of this article. It is, in fact, a prequel, something written after another work but set before that work (rather like *Genesis of the Daleks* [1975] explains the creation of the Doctor's archenemies, years after Terry Nation had introduced them in *The Dead Planet* [aka *The Daleks* or *The Mutants*, 1963]). In this case, Daniel O'Mahony has written a case for the defence of wookie novels, *A Manifesto for Wookies* if you like. Somewhat after the fact, I have written the case against. It's not an entirely post hoc discussion: Gary Dalkin [interjected thus] and myself have had the opportunity in editorials and reviews, on panels and discussions, to rehearse the case against several times. You are of course free to read Daniel's article first, and this indeed might be fairer.

What, then, is a wookie book? First, an acknowledgement of

the term's origin is necessary. When I was a member of the discussion list SF-Lit, Mike Resnick was constantly dismissive of what he called 'wookie books'. As far as I am aware, he was the first to use this term. In its simplest form, the wookie book is a transcription of a film or television programme. Along with the merchandising of pyjamas, board games, wallpaper and models was the novelisation: mid-sixties Dalekmania saw David Whitaker's *Doctor Who* in an exciting adventure with the Daleks (1964). Across a universe or two, James Blish worked his way through *Star Trek* in a series of short stories. As soon as the original seam is exhausted – all stories to which copyright is available being adapted – the investment is protected by writing stories which fit in the gaps, or which examine the characters in their youths.

SF is peculiarly prone to such wookie-isation. David S. Garnett, in the introduction to *New Worlds* we published in Vector 194, notes that the sitcom *Cheers* was in some ways as successful as *Star Trek*. Maybe there has been a novelisation or two. Probably an episode guide or a behind the scenes guide. But no *'Cliff Loses*

a *Letter or Woody's Vacation* [...] *Young Norm* [...] *Carla's First Date*'. There have been spin-offs – *Frasier* is quite simply the best farce on television – but they've remained within the original medium of television.

It's a free world, and Murdoch (and his relationship with China) notwithstanding, it's a free press. So wookie books might be thought of as being mostly harmless. It is my contention that they damage the sf field in a number of ways.

For a start, they damage our notions of authorship. For centuries, the author has been God. Through a process of metonymy, the author comes to stand in for the work: we speak of Dickens, Joyce, Dick and so on, as a shorthand way of delineating a certain kind of work, produced within a certain context. The humanist sees literature as one achievement of humanity which can, in various ways, improve the lot of humanity – but the wookie book is killing the author. In the wookie book, the author listed on the contents page is one a committee of authorities, and her copyright or ownership of the novel may be pre-empted by a corporate body.

In his article Daniel O'Mahony notes: 'When asking me to write this article, Andrew M. Butler listed six points as a "case for the prosecution"'. Note this is here 'a "case" – not my case, although later it becomes "Andrew M. Butler's case", which O'Mahony then overstates by his own admission. He'll also refer to my 'sinister capitalisation of "Proper Books"', but which I must confess to be one of my favourite modes of indicating irony. Perhaps O'Mahony has chosen to ignore this, or perhaps I've failed to indicate this sufficiently. It is worthwhile to outline the case against, under the headings I presented to Daniel, in the hope of making this into my case. In fact, as Gary goes some way to point out, there are contradictions in 'my' case, because it was never intended to be a logically developed argument. But to change it now would be an act of bad faith.

### 1: The proliferation of wookie books is driving out Proper sf

There are only so many shelves that can be devoted to sf in even the biggest bookshop and much of this is taken by *Star Trek*, *Star Wars* and *Doctor Who*, along with an increasing number of more recent series: *Babylon 5*, *The X-Files*, *Dark Skies* and so on. Regional branches of one specialist chain – Forbidden Planet – seem to have abandoned any attempt to stock non-wookie sf: you are more likely to be able to pick up a shrink-wrapped bonkbuster than even Iain M. Banks's novels. In keeping with Gresham's Law, the bad drives out the good.

### 2: They are at best pale imitations of their movie counterparts

This is paradoxical, as all but a handful of sf movies prove that the best special effects outfit is one's own imagination. Readers of books can do special effects better than any film-maker and readers of wookie books should be no exception. The British tie-in edition of Philip K. Dick's original novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* to Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner* admits that the book has an added dimension:

Though the novel's characters and background differ in some respect from those of the film, readers who enjoy the movie will discover an added dimension on encountering the original work.

If you reverse this statement then it suggests that the film has a missing dimension; in the case of a densely layered film like *Blade Runner* this is clearly nonsense.

Contrariwise, *Blade Runner* demonstrates how difficult it is for film and tv to do character motivation. Primarily they are media of surfaces. Take every horror movie you've ever seen:

Girlie: There's someone, or something, out there, picking us off, one by one.

Heroic Bloke: Let's split up.

Girlie: Tell you what, I'll go scantly clad down this darkened corridor

In the linear excitement of the film, the thrill of the chase is all the narrative logic you'll ever need. It is necessary and sufficient. In reading a book, the absence of reason is glaring. Shouldn't Sarah Jane Smith be reflecting that this is the fifth time this week that she's crawling through a ventilation duct? Shouldn't she find this quarry strangely familiar? The wookie book or novelisation cannot afford to acknowledge such things, lest the integrity of the rest of the characterisation be called into question.

[GSD: Good films are about more than special effects, and good films have always been able to deal with characterisation. It is merely some recent Hollywood blockbusters that have jettisoned character. What movies do have a problem with is portraying interior mental processes in the same way as novels. However, movies have found their own visual analogues for reflecting ideas and states of mind. Unfortunately Andrew does his argument no favours by resorting to a parody of the illogical plotting bad horror movies. I would argue that the 'slasher' scenario he alludes to 'dumbed-down' the horror film in the same way the 'wookie book' dumbs down Proper Writing. In good films the 'thrill of the chase' is not 'all the narrative logic you'll ever need'. This is the thinking which leads to second-rate imitations: Battlestar Galactica aping Star Wars, Universal Soldier copying Terminator 2: Judgement Day. The second-rate is second-rate because of the very absence of narrative logic which would make us suspend our disbelief and care about what was happening on screen. Film requires internal logic no more or less than any other medium. To abruptly switch argument from individual, self-contained movies, to weekly, formula TV muddies Andrew's argument still further because entirely different rules apply to series TV. We accept that the quarry is somewhere else because we know that Doctor Who was made on a tiny budget. In a novelisation we can 'see' it as an alien planet.]

[AMB: It is, however, the Hollywood blockbuster that tends to produce the novelisation, rather than the more thoughtful (independent? small budget? actor-led? character-driven?) film, which shows characters with rich inner lives (partly through the quality of the acting). Possibly I overstate the case by saying 'the thrill of the chase is all the narrative logic you'll ever need', but even in a good thriller, from Hitchcock's *The 39 Steps* on, you do tend to forget any objections to motivations for running down corridors (until afterward?). If it's done well enough, you can check your brain in at the door. Books seem to work rather differently; because it's all in the mind, the bs-meter keeps ticking. And it's not just in lowest common denominator slasher films, running down corridors and splitting up is all of the Alien films and large swathes of *Doctor Who* and *Blake's Seven*. Meanwhile, back at the article:]

### 3 Their formulaic nature means that even in original adventures, the main characters cannot develop or they will not fit in with other books in the series.

Shouldn't Scully be convinced by now that something is out there? (On the whole, however, she should be reassured that even if she is killed, she won't stay dead for long.) Much sf on tv is situation comedy without the (intentional) laughs. Characters remain true to type, despite the slings and arrows of outrageous misfortune that have been thrown at them. Kirk will still get over falling in love, with ne'er a scratch, having had a girl in every spaceport. Spock will still raise a quizzical eyebrow, having spent thirty years in illogical human company. Scotty will still bitch about the laws of physics, having broken them every week.

And when a writer has to worry that a line about Daleks will contradict a panel in a 1971 comic strip, you can be sure that his imagination is being misdirected. Someone will notice. Even though Atlantis has fallen three times, there are two Loch Ness Monsters, two Great Fires of London and half a dozen civilisations on Mars, someone will still notice the most minute continuity

glitch.

**4: They are by nature ephemeral and not worth attention.**

Something like fifty sf novels are published each year in Britain and some of us also read crime, horror and other genres. We can't keep up with the monthly outpouring of *Star Trek*, *Doctor Who*, and so on, as well. Most movies disappear within a couple of weeks, to return in a faintly undead state on video. That *Johnny Mnemonic* or *The Fifth Element* novelisation will scarcely be around for long. It's hardly going to have a great impact on other novelisations. It isn't going to start a new cyberpunk or radical hard sf movement. So why bother reading it in the first place?

[GSD: If the movie itself will only be around for a couple of weeks, why bother going to see it? Isn't that just as ephemeral? And why bother to read a newspaper, listen to the radio or watch TV? Go to the theatre, a concert, sporting event, a party? Why eat a meal, go for a swim, or make love? Everything we do is made ephemeral by the passage of time: all flesh is grass. We do many things simply because we enjoy them. Alternatively, many novelisations stay in the shops longer than *Proper SF*: as you note, some branches of *Forbidden Planet* now stock only wookiee books. It's much easier to find a copy of Alan Dean Foster's *Alien* novelisations than it is to buy a new copy of a recent BSFA award winner such as Christopher Evans's *Aztec Century*. So which is more ephemeral?]

[AMB: don't forget the afterlife of the video rental, sell-through and satellite and terrestrial broadcast. You might not get to see it again in the version the director intended, but they are around for years]

**5 They're written for money, as quickly as possible and thus are unlikely to have any literary merit.**

Terrance Dicks wrote *Doctor Who* and *An Uneearthly Child* in something like a weekend. In that time he can hardly have had time to add more than its patronising footnote about pre-decimal currency, a couple of 'he said's' to the script and his trademarked mention of the nowhereness of the space-time continuum. Clearly the book exists to spin out some money for the corporate producers of the programme (and a pittance for the author) as yet another kind of merchandising.

Tom Lehrer once suggested that the theme song of a movie is there to entice us to see a film – and even if that fails, the producers will be able to make some money back on the song that they lost on the movie. The novelisation is merchandising and advert rolled into one. (The practice of publishers paying for the use of a cover photograph to tie-in with classic dramas makes this point even clearer, just as toy makers have paid for the rights to make Scully dolls).

[GSD: The films and TV shows are also made for money. No one objects automatically to a book being filmed. The only question is whether or not the film is good. There is no obvious reason why the process should not be reversed, and books, good, bad and in-between, written based upon films, or TV shows. A novelisation is no more intrinsically bad, than a film of a book is automatically bad.]

[AMB: but the balance is aesthetics and economics. Film and TV can having something to offer in addition to making money for their creators; some novelisations on the other hand appear to be little more than trailers or transcriptions. I have no automatic objection to filmed books, but something is always lost in translation – from whichever side you start.]

**6: None of these writers is likely to progress to writing *Proper Books* anyway, and many writers get trapped by them once**

they've started writing them.

No doubt the aspiring writer can serve out an apprenticeship on the wookiee book, before being given the chance to write their own – entirely original – fiction. It would be nice to know of a single example. Given the habit of some novelisations to hide the author's name on the back cover (Stan Nicholls's *Dark Skies* being a case in point), readers are unlikely to know who the author is, should they come across such a stand-alone title.

In *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, Kevin J. Anderson is described as having verve. This verve produced best-selling novels based on *The X-Files*, but I wonder how many of his other books will sell more copies as a result? K. W. Jeter was once a writer who challenged you with every book he produced. However challenging his *Deep Space Nine*, *Alien Nation* and *Blade Runner* books are, they're still dipping toes into someone else's universe. The once great Robert Sheekley seems to produce nothing more than *Aliens* or *Buck Rogers* in the *Twenty-Fifth Century* novellas. Is this really the best outlet for the postmodern stylist who gave the world *Options* and *Mindswap*? (OK, yes, I know he's been writing crime / thriller novels – as he did in the 1950s – but somehow it isn't the real McSheekley)

Whose *Alien* is it anyway?

It's not an sf example, but whose genius are we exploring when we read a novelisation (author forgotten) of the film *Wilde*, which used a script by Julian Mitchell which itself drew upon Richard Ellman's apparently flawed biography of Wilde? When we read the tie-in edition of *Blade Runner*, is it Ridley Scott's or his scriptwriters' or Harrison Ford's or Philip K. Dick's version of Deckard we are looking for?

When we talk about the intention of a novel to explore a given issue, there is relatively little problem in establishing whose intention it is. With an sf film employing hundreds of actors, technicians, editors, photographers, producers, as well as a director and a writer, the intention seems to be spread across all these people. Perhaps they will be pulled together by a director, but we never know when a producer has overridden the director. In fact, film criticism has been dominated by the auteur theory: the director-as-God. In recent issues of *Vector* we've looked at films by Gilliam, Burton and Besson. We haven't traced the careers of Bruce Willis or Brad Pitt as actors, or even the work of Dan O'Bannon as a scriptwriter. It's the director's show, and criticism published in *Vector* has reflected this. The author has disappeared, to be replaced by a corporate copyright, which – through a process of metonymy – we tend to label with the name of a director. For the last two decades at least, most films have had an opening credit which reads 'A film by –', or 'A – Film'. Fill in the name of the director, not the writer, in the blanks.

It is surely the wish of every writer to communicate, to entertain, to inform. Surely that is their purpose in writing? What is the novelist's purpose? He or she is perhaps just a messenger for the studio. Or to put it another way, given ah the things that can be said against wookiee books, why the hell should I read one? How different is it from pyjamas, board games, wallpaper and models?

If I've seen the film, it's going to be a rerun of what I already know, but lacking the publicly shared spectacle of a film. If I haven't seen the film, it's very unlikely to make sense, and will spoil the surprise of the film. In fact, all I seem to be doing is emptying my pockets to line someone else's. And the money could be better spent elsewhere.

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Special thanks to Penny and Chris Hill, and Daniel O'Mahony



## Dances with Wookies – A Defence Of The Wookie Novel by Daniel O'Mahony

I don't want this to sound like an apology or a confession.

I've written two *Doctor Who* spin-offs, *Falls the Shadow* (1994) and *The Man in the Velvet Mask* (1996). Both were published by Virgin Books, whose licence with the BBC expired in May 1997; consequently both books are now out of print (so this isn't a cheap plug either). I own copyright in the text. I wrote them out of personal enthusiasm for *Doctor Who*, utter confidence in my own talent, and the hope that this might get me somewhere as a writer. I now tend to regard them as better novels in their own right than good *Who* material, though it remains a definitive quality of the stories. They are, in Vectorese, 'wookie books'.

Wookie books aren't popular in these pages and I've been invited – as a dabbler in the form – to put the counter-case 'for reasons of balance'. I don't intend this to be a personal defence of what I've written. There's little merit in an argument that can be stripped down to a plea of 'some of them must be good', or, worse, 'mine are better than all the rest'. My background is in the *Who* books, and I've never had much inclination to write tries for other series, so some referencing to that series is inevitable. There is a case to be made that the *Who* books have distinguishing characteristics that aren't shared with other series – they're mutant wookies – so I'll risk a little distortion.

While I don't want to turn this into a memoir of self-justification, I feel uneasy about defending the paralytic category of wookie books in its entirety. Much of what's wrong with the form is self-evident on both a general and a specific level. It's not an area where a writer – any writer, wookie books hardly being confined to sf – should specialise in if they want to remain healthy as a creative and imaginative force. To argue a descriptive case on their behalf – which would inevitably and falsely be an attempt to establish the primacy of sharecropping over the wider field of (sf) literature – would be hopelessly misguided. Instead I'm going to try and make a prescriptive argument for wookie books. When asking me to write this article, Andrew M. Butler listed six points as a 'case for the prosecution'. While a point-by-point refutation would make for dull reading, they're a helpful outline for my response. They are:

- 1: The proliferation of wookie books is driving out Proper sf [the capital is significant]
- 2: They are at best pale imitations of their movie [or tv] counterparts
- 3: Their formulaic nature means that even in original adventures, the main characters cannot develop or they will not fit in with other books in the series.
- 4: They are by nature ephemeral and not worth attention.
- 5: They're written for money, as quickly as possible and thus are unlikely to have any literary merit
- 6: None of these writers is likely to progress to writing Proper Books anyway, and many writers get trapped by them once they've started writing them.

There are two arguments here, which are interdependent but can be usefully separated out: the *economic* case and the *textual* case. The first is best articulated by point one, which in turn is the necessary condition for the more tangential points five and six. The second, the *textual* case, trades on points two to four, with point six again a tangential factor. Out of the six points, I find point two the most problematic component of wookie books.

The economic case is by far the most important when talking about sf (and literature in general) as a matrix of commodities, a package governed by the absurdist rules of the real world as a market place. Wookie books are driving out Proper sf. This is a way of saying that nothing exists in isolation, that any choice for a thing – particularly one where money must change hands – is concurrently a series of choices against other things. Wookie books are strange attractors in the market place, with a knock-on

effect on the shape of the market itself. Point one affects the demand side of the economic transaction, point five the supply side. The wookie book may have a stranglehold that can only end when the rest of the market is too weak to support it any more. The economic case is fundamentally about ensuring the ongoing and healthy development of sf as a viable form; it isn't easily refuted.

At the same time, it isn't necessarily a charge against ties at all. They are only one example of the market place in operation. The tendency for markets is towards homogenous commodities and – in the long term – the stifling of the healthy aspect of competition (which is diversity). The trend towards mediocrity can – and does – find an outlet in any form. In the field of sf, ties constitute one such outlet, but it could just as easily be fantasy trilogies, posthumous titles by Golden Age writers (naming no names) or sequels by other hands. And these all have a similar effect. Valid as these accusations are, they co-opt the essentially symptomatic wookie book to the single causal rôle of moving the field towards mediocrity.

The economic case is in fact generalised to the point where it can be employed against more or less any aspect of a market culture. It isn't so much an argument as an act of specification. It reveals a close affinity between wookie books and sf; wookie books may be a marketing device, but so, shorn of the textual argument, is sf. For the average reader, it is another marketing niche. Andrew M. Butler's sinister capitalisation of 'Proper Books' takes on a whole new meaning if his points are read as a case against sf itself (think of every instance of lit. snobbery you can remember). Or against any genre category you care to name: Mills and Boon, the detective novel, westerns. Even thinking of individual writers: Dickens wrote 'for money, as quickly as possible' in 'ephemeral' monthly or weekly journals that were 'not worth attention'. The economic case that can generate infinite fallback positions, so long as you're careful enough to keep the category of 'Proper Books' undefined, a sacred mystery that inevitably casts what we can actually see in a poor light.

But this is to overstate Andrew M. Butler's case. I recognise that his points are concerned for aesthetic richness and self-regeneration within the field of sf, which is hardly the hallmark of hard-core lit. snobbery. Nevertheless, it is a specific position and argues for exclusion of certain designated texts: the economic case amounts to a protocol for apocrypha.

Let's run with this notion of *apocrypha*. It derives from western literature's best-selling shared-world anthology, the Holy Bible, and refers to a selection of books, some of which are excluded from the definitive Bible, but which can be found in some modern English-language editions. 'Apocrypha' means, simply, *hidden words*. It's easy to assume that they were excluded because they were heretical or trivial; *apocrypha* thus becomes a pejorative term. An apocryphal sf novel (such as a tie) is therefore trivial and unworthy of serious attention. However, there are at least three other reasons why the Apocryphal books were so called. Rather than being unworthy, they may have been considered too holy for public consumption, and certainly Catholic and non-Catholics allow different levels of importance to them. It may be that the text was physically lost or corrupted when the Bible was compiled – as in the case of the New Testament's apocryphal Gnostic Gospels. Or – and I think that this is the most significant for the discussion of modern sf and its relation to wookie books – the source text was in the wrong sort of language: such as the Jewish proverbs excluded from the Hebrew Bible but included in Greek versions of the Septuagint. By using *apocrypha* in this linguistic sense, we strip away the pejorative connotation and import the useful concepts of translation and authorial voices.

To digress for a moment, it's worth pointing out that the originated *Doctor Who* novels have not been universally popular with *Who* fans. Annual surveys compiled by *Doctor Who*

Magazine during the 1990s (when the originated novels displaced the novelisation of serials as the dominant form of tie to the series) revealed that an increasing number of respondents did not read or had given up reading the books, novels that – if market conditions were observed – should have been tailored precisely to fit them and their tastes. The complaint was that the writers and editors were ‘perverting’ the series, that Virgin – with their stated aim of appealing to general sf readers – were aiming to produce ‘mainstream sci-fi’ rather than ‘Proper Doctor Who’, and that the written word was not a suitable medium for the Doctor’s continued adventures.

A substantial number of *Doctor Who* fans would not recognise the need for this article, because their horizon of expectations is radically different from that of the general sf reader, though they might come to the same conclusions. This strain of wookie book was an impediment not to a body of literature, but to a television programme. Imagine this as an example of two linguistic groups misinterpreting – separately – the same body of texts. A novel clearly uses a different language to a television programme. Now imagine that ties belong to a separate language-body from the rest of literature: a further different set of grammars or conventions. Once we start to think of ties as translations from a (usually) visual medium to a literary one, we bring about a critical apparatus specifically for discussing this form. Translation brings into play an inevitable process of differentiation, which transforms the field of ties from a homogenous mass – which can be safely ignored – to a body of texts that can be sampled and contrasted. This apparatus may locate redemptive qualities which can seem half-hearted – perhaps exemplified by Orson Scott Card’s quasi-reflexive novelisation of *The Abyss* (1989) – or it might appear colonial, and certainly wouldn’t please the *Who* fans I’ve described. What’s important is that a kind of discourse should exist to discuss the tie.

Andrew M. Butler’s textual case is primarily concerned with limiting the extent of participating in discourse on wookie books. Point four of the case – they are *by nature* ephemeral – is an anticipation and closing down of discourse. It is not stating a given, but specifying a rule of talk: these are not to be spoken of. The ‘*by nature*’ clause gives the game away; ties are no more or less ephemeral – by nature – than any other book, because the natural quality of books is also the physical quality and all books tend to decay. Texts themselves do not occur naturally; they may seem organic to a writer or a reader, but this ‘natural’ quality is itself as much a fabrication as the text described. A text can only be rendered ephemeral if no one reads it or discusses it, so the ephemerality itself is a form of construction because anyone who has encountered a text must consciously choose to remain silent rather than to speak about it. Cultural ephemerality is a process of active refusal to engage in discourse – discourse is a continuation of the text by other means.

The translation between media that wookie books embody is itself a form of discourse, that is to say a discussion about the originating object or source material. The textual case against wookie books assumes a linear and parasitical relationship between the source text (a film, a tv series or whatever) and the tie (and its writer). The writer’s domain of discourse is defined by points five and six of the case against wookie books and his/her relationship with their own writing is in turn limited by points two and three.

In this scheme – which I can’t deny would be an ideal state sought (and perhaps attained) by some publishers – the writer is necessarily voiceless and anonymous. Or, to quote John Clute: ‘he sows what *bwana* tells him to sow, and he shall not reap’. In other words, the writer of a wookie book is a facilitator or translator, not

an *author*. The authority for a tie derives from the source text and the ‘bible’ or writers/translators’ guidelines derived thereof by the owners of the source material or their appointed agents. Consequently the finished text becomes a kind of map of the original object, which tries to exude the impression of both being faithful to the original text and being pristine – untouched by any hand that might want to ‘make it new’ (Clute again). Reading and writing such a book is, therefore, an exploration of already familiar territory. This is, I think, what the lost-third of *Doctor Who Magazine* readers – unencumbered as they are by any discursive recognition of the shadowy literary edge of their favourite series – would want from a tie. It is, I think, a kind of sharecropping.

I don’t want to use the term ‘sharecrop’ to designate *all* ties, nor to imply a specific contractual relationship between the ‘writer’ and the tie-originator. I specifically want to co-opt the word as a critical term to describe a ‘failed’ tie. Sharecropping is not simply defined by suppressing any hint of authorship, but also – as I’ve suggested in these pages before – by sapping the life and identity out of the source. A map of *Doctor Who* (or *The X-Files* or *Star Trek* or whatever) is not the genuine article but an outline, a palimpsest, which at its worst betrays the spirit and intent of that original.

Sharecrops are necessarily spectral, ghosts at the feast. This is not as a result of translation between media (because an on-going television series is itself a kind of tie, sharecrop or shared-world anthology, as different producers, writers, script editors and directors define and redefine the series). Instead it is because they are principally an opportunity for economic case exploitation. Sharecropping can be imposed by a publisher, bible, vegetative readership or (worst of all) the writer, and can take place in any media, because sharecropping is an attitude. The single most damaging example in *Doctor Who* wasn’t on the printed page but on television, in the form of the 1996 US-made tv movie version which mimicked rather than substantially engaged with the original. It was very popular among *Who* fans.



If, as I’ve argued, writing a tied novel is a discursive process, then ideally it should not be explicitly so. Reader and writer alike should be aware of a conjunction of voices in the text – not necessarily a chorus because disharmonies and solos can generate interesting results. The ideal relationship between the author, reader and source text should be one of mutual recognition. The source text becomes respected and understood; the author needs to create the conditions by which the source text becomes legible in a new medium (which is the essence of all authorship, but is particularly relevant to sf); the reader needs to be demanding, critical, less complacent. At the risk of sounding hopelessly utopian, the originating text should be a literal shared world (or discursive world), shared between author and reader. Then we might begin to have something resembling real sf and real literature. Whether that’s something the franchise holders would encourage is debatable, and that remains the biggest stumbling block for an accepted body of wookie novels emerging.

This article isn’t, as I said, an apology or a confession. It’s a wookie trap. It’s a manifesto for the act of reading and writing ties; a method for apprehending and interrogating them in a way that will hopefully make more sense of a field which is too big and too significant to be confined to the ephemerality of silence. There is, as I said, a great deal that’s wrong with ties; but this article is a tool for discovering what’s right about them.

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Daniel O’Mahony has reviewed a number of wookie books in these pages. He hasn’t always liked them, so that’s okay. In a letter to Andrew M. Butler, he notes that the comment on the *Sinister Capitalisation* of ‘Proper Books’ was ‘jocular rhetoric’. Or should that be *Jocular Rhetoric*? Whose irony is anyway? *Terminal Irony Strikes Again* — Eds.



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

Ric Alexander (Ed)

*The Unexplained* \*

Orion, 1998, 433pp, £17.99 ISBN 0 75281 004 9

Reviewed by L. J. Hurst

Every decade seems to produce its own attempt to categorise reality through an anthology of the unexplained. For the 1970s Doctor Christopher Evans edited *Mind At Bay* and *Mind In Chains*. Getting ready for the new millennium is Ric Alexander's *The Unexplained*. His approach is similar to Evans's, though this is a much bigger collection, so that we get an introduction (by Peter James in this case), and then thematic studies before each story, some of them classics, others rediscovers, and still others published for the first time here. Each group of stories is collected into 'archives' dealing with Supernatural Mysteries, Psychic Phenomena, Alien Encounters, Time Warps and Urban Legends. In turn each of these archives has its story chosen to represent a different theme so that Alien Encounters includes stories on Unidentified Flying Objects, Gods From Space, Alien Abduction and Extraterrestrials.

Dr Evans ended his introduction to *Mind In Chains* by saying that his selection said something about him and the limit of his mind. He invited readers to think about their alternative selections and what that would say about them. Applying this to Ric Alexander produces a world bound by some strange curves – for instance, in the Alien Encounter section the stories are all classics by Ballard, Gerald Kersh, Robert Heinlein and Theodore Sturgeon, as if Alexander accepts that the Space Age ended thirty years ago as Ballard once said, and that no one has anything else to say. Yet in the next section on Time Warps, Arthur Machen's 'The Golden Pyramid' from the Edwardian period sits next to Kit Reed's Reagan era 'The Bride of Bigfoot'. There you can read a continuity. Machen's story deals with a girl taken by the fairy people, his hero manages to see the fairies dancing in their ring but the girl is not rescued. He says 'I don't regret our inability to rescue the wretched girl. You saw the appearance of those things that gathered thick and writhed in the Bowl; you may be sure that what lay bound in the midst of them was no longer fit for earth'. And in Kit Reed's story, his wife taken by the Bigfoot who has crippled him, a husband says 'I learned something extraordinary in that terrible embrace. Susie didn't want this thing; it just carried her away'. The thing out there has always been stronger and more horrible than we might hope.

# First Impressions

## Book Reviews edited by Paul Kincaid

The weaker stories are the originals and the more recent: Ian Watson's 'Tulips From Amsterdam', a *conte cruelle*, and Clive Barker's 'The Forbidden', which introduces the Candy Man onto a run down estate.

The final story is Harlan Ellison's 'Croatoan', which is categorised as Sewer Alligators under Urban Legends, but is something more exotic. The disturbed protagonist follows an aborted foetus into the sewers and finds a whole lost generation under the city – 'the children who rode the alligators'. The lost have found themselves.

I hope that fans of *The X-Files*, at whom this book is targeted, will be lead out to the huge worlds of the authors collected here.

Tom Arden

*The Harlequin's Dance*

Gollancz, 1997, 448pp, £16.99 ISBN 0 575 06517 6

Katharine Kerr

*The Red Wyvern*

Voyager, 1997, 342pp, £16.99 ISBN 0 00 224142 0

Reviewed by Andrew Adams

Katherine Kerr has written two series of books set in the same universe: the Deverry books and the Westlands Saga. This is the start of a new series (probably four books again) in the same universe again. I haven't read the previous books, but that doesn't seem to be much of a problem. There's only one actual character (Nevyn) common between the sequences. The basic link, however, is that the major characters are continually being reborn.

*The Red Wyvern* tells three stories. The main one is set in Deverry in 849 during a period of civil war, the main conflicts from which continue and evolve into the reincarnations in Deverry in 1065 and the Northlands in 1116. A chart at the back of the book shows the apparent reincarnations that have appeared to date.

Kerr's writing is excellent. Even in the brief sections on the Northlands and later Deverry, her characters come alive, and the continuity between incarnations is apparent; yet the people still come from different backgrounds. The mysterious nature of Nevyn (a powerful mage with some odd ways) adds spice to the tale, while the politics and wars arising in the Civil War have labyrinthine twists but are relatively easy to follow when the reader pays attention. Kerr has managed to hook me on her world and writing, and I will be looking out her previous books while waiting for the followup to *The Red Wyvern*.

I am more ambiguous about Tom Arden's *The Harlequin's Dance*.

The blurb tells of the idea for *The Orokon* (as this series is called) coming to him during a train journey in The Czech Republic, which is suitably bizarre. The description of wars among the gods with which Arden starts the novel is reminiscent of Eddings's *Belgariad*, which perhaps aroused expectations of a gentle tale that caused some of my ambiguity towards this book. *Pawn of Prophecy* it is not. It features a far less sanitised medievalism than Eddings. While not as brutish and realistic as, say, Bruce Fergusson's *Shadow of His Wings*, it is nevertheless harsh and brutal at times. Ambiguity, lies, deceit, prejudice, horror and decency all lie within the pages of *The Harlequin's Dance* and on balance I think Arden just about manages to pull off what he's trying to do, which is set the stage for an epic tale.

The book's main flaw is that it jumps to and fro from character to character with little in the way of linking material. In particular, a jump of many years between sections can leave the reader disoriented. Hopefully, this is only because the author is trying to set up a large-scale conflict, with many pieces of background which must be covered for the later events to make sense. While he suffers from flaws common in those writing their first novels, he will hopefully improve, and the Orokon should be worth readers' perseverance.

**Sarah Ash**

***The Lost Child* (1)**

Orion, 1998, 344pp, £9.99 ISBN 1 85798 424 2

Reviewed by Sue Thomason

This fantasy is one of those that is almost a historical romance, with a little magic added to spice things up. The main setting is the quasi-medieval quasi-French city of Arcassanne, where Captain Jaufre d'Orbiel has just returned from a quasi-Crusade to the quasi-Holy Land, bearing the powerful, fascinating and dangerous dying gift of his best friend, a Guardian Amulet. The amulet is one of four created by the Tsiyonim (quasi-Jews) who have a ghetto in Arcassanne, thought to have been destroyed and/or irretrievably lost at the destruction of the Tsiyonim's holy city, which event scattered the Tsiyonim to the four corners of the earth.

Jaufre has promised his friend that he will hand the Amulet over to the Tsiyonim, so of course as soon as he gets back to Arcassanne he starts dabbling in Black Magic to see if he can awaken the Amulet's hidden powers. During his attempt to summon the Amulet's guardian, he kills a child by slitting its veins with a Tsiyonim knife, then dumps the body in the Tsiyonim quarter and accuses them of ritual murder. The rest of the book follows various peoples' attempts to avert the seemingly inevitable pogrom, with diversions in search of Tiphereth (the one remaining Tsiyonim sanctuary of holiness and scholarship), the three other Amulets (none of which have actually been destroyed or irretrievably lost, surprise surprise) and their extremely destructive Guardians, and astonishing revelations of Tsiyonim blood in high places.

On that basis, I would sum up the book as a competently-plotted and written bog-standard fantasy – but my feelings about it changed completely on page 157. Our heroes have reached Tiphereth, the community of scholars sits down to their evening meal, and a blessing is said. A blessing that starts, 'Baruch atah adonai elohenu...' Which is the opening phrase of a prayer from the Talmud. A Hebrew prayer. In fact it is the opening phrase of the standard Jewish benediction, 'Blessed are you, O Lord our God...' So the Tsiyonim are not quasi-Jews. They are real Jews, trapped in Fantasyland and making the best of it.

I really feel very uncomfortable about this. It is one thing to write a fantasy using Jewish mythology and legend. It's another to attempt, say, a magical-realist treatment of the Holocaust. It is a third, and much less satisfying thing, to create a sanitised, fantasy version of some extraordinarily bloody and unpleasant real-world events, like the medieval 'witch libel' mass killings of European Jews. In fact my main criticism of *The Lost Child* is that it's far too nice a novel. A couple of Amulet Guardian manifestations cause extreme weather events which devastate the harvest, but the book closes in happily-ever-after mode, ignoring the fact that without divine intervention 80% of the cast are going to starve to death over the next year. Also, despite several near-romances, the book closes with the social order happily restored, noble marrying noble and poor scholar marrying nobody at all. Nothing seems to have changed in any significant way, although some potential for change has been suggested. In conclusion, I would recommend this book as a pleasant way to pass an unoccupied hour – but don't expect to be seriously moved by it.

**Damien Broderick**

***The White Abacus***

Avon Books, 1998, 342pp, \$5.99 ISBN 0 380 79615 5

Reviewed by Gary Dalkin

The title is a symmetrical transformation through the spectrum of colour, and worldview, of a despairing poem, 'The Black Abacus' by Robyn Ravlich, parts of which are excerpted herein. In *The White Abacus* symmetries, and their transformations, feature significantly, as do narratives and their relations to various worldviews – 'The world is a recirculating narrative'. Telmah (try it backwards) is our hero, and Shakespeare's play is Damien Broderick's recycled narrative.

This is no simple science-fictionification of the play, but a labyrinthine baroque palimpsest, set in a fully-realised future into which a large portion of Shakespeare's epic has been translated. Broderick adds a new beginning, introducing the ai, Ratio, born into a physical body so that she might befriend and spy on Lord Telmah for the Gestell.

Hu and Ai civilisation is spread across thousands of earth-like worlds, between which instantaneous travel by hex gate is routine. Telmah is a prince from the asteroid worldlet Psyche, a backwater because, for religious reasons, the Psycheans refuse teleportation. The products the Psycheans manufacture supply the galactic civilisation, yet while economics tie, divisions are greater. The asteroid dwellers have adopted genetic engineering on a lavish scale, technology rejected by the Gestell. Meanwhile the Gestell embraces teleportation and artificial intelligence, both prescribed in Psyche.

When Telmah's father is murdered, the Prince and Ratio travel from earth to the asteroid where much, but not all, of the Elsinore drama is played out. For this is a sunnier tale than Shakespeare's, with fewer deaths and some startlingly imaginative twists towards the end, when Broderick avoids the throne-room for hard sf adventure.

The first third of *The White Abacus* is laboriously slow, the narrative almost dragged to a halt by a plethora of characters, the richness of the invented world and the complexity of the prose. However, the tale grows in appeal as the pages turn, and I strongly suspect will repay re-reading. At first it appears as no more than an ingenious literary game, though patience is rewarded with what eventually becomes a remarkable story, filled with striking ideas and true sf wonderment. There are philosophical ideas to be disputed, allusions to famous sf stories to be spotted, and fun to be had guessing which piece of classical music will be mentioned next. Also lurking in the text is an intriguing coincidence involving the actress Kate Winslet.

Damien Broderick is, like his fellow Australians Greg Egan and Terry Dowling, a writer of singular vision, and *The White Abacus* is 'a better mousetrap, a tragical-comical-pastoral-goddamepic!' (p215). That such a fine book is currently only available as an import betrays the shameful state of British publishing.

**James Bibby**

***Roman's Revenge* (1)**

Orion, 1998, 245pp, £16.99 ISBN 1 85798 526 5

**Chris Fox**

***Wizard's Brew* (1)**

Aspire, 1998, 331pp, £3.99 ISBN 1 902035 01 1

**Tom Holt**

***Wish You Were Here* (1)**

Orbit, 1998, 252pp, £15.99 ISBN 1 85723 555 X

Reviewed by John R. Oram

Three humorous fantasies, and all very different. I'll start with Chris Fox's offering, *Wizard's Brew*.

The people of the village of Fishcake are starving and call upon their local wizard to summon up a decent catch of fish. Unfortunately, his spell goes wrong, and he calls up what looks like a giant slug instead. It is, in fact, one of the Fhomoire, an ancient race of man-eating demons, banished long ago by the Celtic gods. After a thousand years or so, it is hungry, and soon eats up the entire population, including the incompetent wizard. It sets off to find the means to recall the rest of its race and to invade Camelot. All that stand in their way are a poverty-stricken wizard, a dwarf, some rabbits, and a couple of foxes. How the Fhomoire are defeated makes a very entertaining read.

How to describe it? Take Pratchett, Holt, Beatrix Potter, *Watership Down*, *Animal Farm*, and *The Wizard of Oz*, and you will have some idea: a veritable wizard's brew. This Camelot is nothing like any other version. Uther spends his time either writing out abdication speeches, or tending his tomatoes. Merlin is one of the sourest versions it is possible to come across. The rabbits are superb, imagine Richard Adams's

creations on speed and you're somewhere close. This author is worth looking for, and at £3.99 it's a bargain.

Tom Holt's book is very different to anything he has written previously. To begin with, it's set in America rather than Britain, and he's using American myth, something he's never done before. The story begins with a lake which is haunted by the spirit of a young Indian girl. Legend has it that if anyone swims in the lake their deepest desires will come true. Four different people come to the lake: a young man obsessed with the world of fantasy; a young woman who wants to be attractive to men; a female reporter for a sensationalist newspaper who makes up incredible stories which she actually believes - her present story is based on her theory that the Vatican, the CIA, and the Australians are plotting world domination - and lastly a shy lawyer who loves money and loses his car keys. His dearest wish is to get them back, but nothing is simple. They all have their dreams come true, but *how* is quite another matter.

This is not a typical Tom Holt book. Don't expect his usual gentle humour, there's more bite in it: this is an angry book with the author aiming his shafts at lawyers, the press, and social inadequates. Only one character gets a happy ending. A brave experiment, but a bit of a curate's egg - good in parts.

I've never read either of James Bibby's previous books, so it came fresh to me. *Ronan's Revenge* starts where the previous book finished: Ronan and his friends are relaxing, but upmost in their minds is the destruction of the Orcane Sword Corporation who have been the source of previous troubles. Unfortunately, the board is only too aware of this and sends assassins and magically-engineered animals to kill our heroes. The Orcane board are in league with a clan of dwarf scientists who are responsible for inventing new weapons of war and creating killing creatures to fight in future wars. How the situation is resolved makes for a cracking good read.

To call it humour is a mistake. It has some funny moments, yes, but there is little humour in people having their guts ripped out; nor are there many laughs to be had out of a village being blown up and its inhabitants slaughtered. This has all the makings of a straight fantasy novel and should be read as such. The humour only underlines the serious parts. The characters come alive for me. I laughed when the situation arose, was horrified at the tragic deaths and the inhumanity of the evil protagonists. The author should stop wasting his time trying to write humour and start writing straight fantasy, he has the talent for it. I look forward to reading more of his books.

## S.V. Date

## Final Orbit

Avon Books, 1997, 343pp, \$5.99 ISBN 0 380 79625 2

Reviewed by Stephen Deas

Any bookshop that puts this in the science fiction section is lying. It's a thriller and makes no pretensions to be anything else. A very mediocre mass-market American thriller, the sort that might get made into a rather disappointing movie if Mr Date has a good enough agent. Rather spineless has-been astronaut gets to have another go and put things right. Sort of...

Ultimately, the point of a thriller is to thrill, and that's really where this falls down. At least in low-grade fantasy, Thud the Barbarian has to trek through the Forest of Hideous Deaths and the Swamp of No Return to pick up his plot tokens. Astronauts, it seems, have an easier time of it. They just pick theirs up from the doormat along with the junk mail - the first half of the book consists of little more than white room conversations in which a monotonous succession of characters trundle up to the hero with the next piece of the puzzle (with the occasional digression into trite moralising) and it all feels very static. In some ways the saving grace here is the hero, who at least seems like a plausible person, although his generally wishy-washy attitude doesn't do anything for the sense of pace (or lack of it).

Things pick up once our hero lifts off on his final, troubled flight. At last some of the other characters stop behaving like Barbie-dolls and get some distinct personality. Some. Most, however, continue to behave exactly as their first impression would lead you to expect, usually either doing the right thing or the wrong thing with nothing in between. If you're a technophile, the second half has some interesting background details - there's a lot more attention given to the surroundings once they're all caged in a space shuttle. But the plot doesn't thicken the way it should. There's too much flour, the cook hasn't been paying attention, so it's gone lumpy and tastes bad. It's all a bit of a shame, because the ingredients could have been quite tasty if only they'd been mixed right. The ending is a partial surprise - I guarantee it'll be changed for the movie - which is good, although not quite what I was hoping for (shuttle plunges to earth in ball of flame, killing every character in the book... Oh well).

Overall, one to pick up at an airport when you've got a long flight ahead and you've forgotten the book you actually wanted to read. Maybe the spectre of a stricken shuttle picks up a little more tension that way...

## Stephen Cole (Ed)

## Short Trips

BBC Books, 1998, 336pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 563 40560 0

Also tape book read by Nicholas Courtney and Sophie Aldred

BBC, 1998, 2hrs 45mins ISBN 0 563 55746 X

## Michael Collier

## Longest Day

BBC Books, 1998, 276pp, £4.99 ISBN 0 563 40581 3

## Terrance Dicks

## Catastrophe

BBC Books, 1998, 248pp, £4.99 ISBN 0 563 40584 8

## Paul Leonard

## Dreamstone Moon

BBC Books, 1998, 250pp, £4.99 ISBN 0 563 40585 6

## Steve Lyons

## The Witch Hunters

BBC Books, 1998, 282pp, £4.99 ISBN 0 563 40579 1

## Jim Mortimore

## Eye of Heaven

BBC Books, 1998, 277pp, £4.99 ISBN 0 563 40567 8

## John Peel

## Legacy of the Daleks

BBC Books, 1998, 246pp, £4.99 ISBN 0 563 40574 0

## Justin Richards

## Option Lock

BBC Books, 1998, 281pp, £4.99 ISBN 0 563 40583 X

## Keith Topping & Martin Day

## The Hollow Men

BBC Books, 1998, 284pp, £4.99 ISBN 0 563 40582 1

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

Ever since re-acquiring the rights to the *Doctor Who* books, the BBC has been assiduously churning out titles at a rate of two or three a month. They have the inbuilt problems that come with any series novelisation: the characters must be essentially unchanged by the end in order to be ready for the next episode, and the stories must fit within any prescribed

or assumed history that the series has acquired. After well over thirty years, *Doctor Who* has a lot of history, but it also has a lot of Doctors - eight at the last count - which at least gives the novelists the chance to pick and choose character and characteristics that best suit the tale they want to tell.

Of the selection before us, for instance, *The Witch Hunters* takes us right back to the First Doctor (William Hartnell) and a story which sees the Doctor, with his companions Ian, Barbara and Susan, arrive just outside Salem, Massachusetts, in time for the famous witch trials. This, at least, conforms to the BBC's original intention for the series, which was to be an entertaining way of teaching about history.

It wasn't long, however, before the series became more famous for its monsters, and all the other books, to one degree or another, are about confrontations with alien threat. *Catastrophe*, which is set between the television episodes 'Planet of the Daleks' and 'The Green Death' (all the books featuring earlier incarnations of the Doctor are scrupulously about placing them within this historical time-frame), has the Third Doctor (Jon Pertwee) and his companion Jo on the planet Kastopheria where various races, including the warlike Draconians, are vying for control over the planet - but there is a strange glowing crystal in the jungle.

The Doctor, of course, survives to become the Fourth Doctor (Tom Baker) who, with Leela, embarks on a hazardous 19th century expedition to Easter Island in *Eye of Heaven*, with the famous stone heads become altogether more sinister. A couple more transformations later and we have the Seventh Doctor (Sylvester McCoy) back on Earth with his assistant Ace for *The Hollow Men*. Here a sinister dark stain is spreading across the country from 21st century Liverpool and the ancient dead stalk the country lanes. It is interesting to note the development of *Doctor Who*, from history lesson to science fiction to something which seems more straightforward horror story.

It is also interesting to note that four of these eight novels concern the Eighth Doctor (Paul McCann). Is this simply feeding the fans hunger

for a continuation of the series that BBC Television is notoriously refusing to satisfy? Or is it, more simply, that with only one television appearance, the Eighth Doctor has left the field wide open, there are no awkward episodes for the writers to fit their novels between? Whatever the reason, we now have the Doctor and Sam in 22nd century England in the aftermath of the Dalek's invasion helping the First Doctor's granddaughter, Susan (*Legacy of the Daleks*); in present-day England combating a 700-year-old secret society and the nightmare of nuclear destruction (*Option Lock*); in a desperate struggle for survival on the planet Hirath where the surface is ravaged by colliding time-fields (*Longest Day*); and out in the depths of space caught up in a struggle

between a sinister mining company and ecological protestors (*Dreamstone Moon*).

Finally, all the Doctors appear in the collection of short stories, *Short Trips*, where there seems to be slightly less need to fit the stories rigidly within the time-frame of the various television series. The fifteen stories are by a selection of familiar *Doctor Who* writers, including Paul Leonard, Robert Perry, Steve Lyons and *Vector's* own Daniel O'Mahony. Six of the stories have also been recorded, read by familiar *Doctor Who* actors Nicholas Courtney and Sophie Aldred, and released on two tapes.

## Dave Duncan

## Present Tense

Avonova, 1997, 417pp, \$5.99 ISBN 0 380 78130 1

Reviewed by Kathy Taylor

*Present Tense*, the sequel to *Past Imperative*, is the second book of *The Great Game* trilogy. At the end of *Past Imperative*, Edward Exeter was returned to First World War Earth and it is at this point that *Present Tense* picks up the story, telling of Edward's adventures in once again reaching the alternate world of Nextdoor and then as D'Ward Liberator in the Vales.

Dave Duncan makes a valiant attempt to have his characters speech and behaviour reflect their environment. This generally works well with the characters from England during the First World War. The descriptions of the stretcher bearers on the battlefields and the shell-

shocked soldiers at the hospital have a ring of awful authenticity. The only flaw is their too ready acceptance of the magical and a secondary female character whose approach to life seems too modern for her times.

It is more difficult to judge the level of success in terms of the characters from Nextdoor. The religious structure is interesting and many of the social and group dynamics in the villages and towns appear well thought out. However Golbfish, one of the more interesting secondary characters, appears at times too flexible and far too stoic for his background.

Although *Present Tense* does not stand alone as a novel it is a good yarn which mixes some interesting characters with most of the usual stock ones. It's not the modern Haggard, but if you enjoy Haggard you'll probably enjoy *The Great Game*.

## Adam Nichols

## The Paladin

Millennium, 1998, 503pp, £6.99 ISBN 0 75281 562 8

## R.A. Salvatore

## The Sword of Bedwyr

Voyager, 1998, 247pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 00 648343 7

## Amy Stout

## The Royal Four

Avon Books, 1998, 301pp, \$5.99 ISBN 0 380 79190 0

## Victoria Strauss

## The Arm of the Stone

Avon Books, 1998, 426pp, \$5.99 ISBN 0 380 79751 8

Reviewed by Lesley Hatch

Both Nichols and Salvatore start new series here, *The Whiteblade Saga* and *The Crimson Shadow* respectively. *The Paladin* is the story of the transformations of Elinor, who dreams of snaring her beloved, Annocky, by sympathetic magic – in this case involving an effigy of him and a rhyme taught to her by Dame Sostris, the local 'medicine-woman'. But Elinor also has knife-wielding skills, taught by her absent father, and is not afraid to use them. When her plans to share her life with Annocky are thwarted by her mother and 'stepfather' arranging a marriage, Elinor leaves home. Dame Sostris sends her to a wisewoman who gives her a herb which causes Elinor to look dead for a time, to all intents and purposes: her first transformation, from living to dead. Unfortunately, Annocky finds another girl, so Elinor seeks work on board ship, discovering too late that she is to be sold as a slave. Her second transformation, into a swordswoman, comes after the ship is wrecked and she is washed ashore with no memory of her past life. The third change comes about when she manages to reconcile Kess, skilled swordswoman and the possessor of a magical sword, with Elinor to become Elinor Whiteblade.

But more than this her story is also a journey through varied lands: in one a mad lord ruling over a ruined city gives her the blade and demands she kill him with it, to end his suffering; in another farmers help Elinor to escape after this act; and in a third she causes the downfall of a group of religious fanatics. In addition, there are the 'humanimals' – talking creatures magically created by the Seers of the old days. The author has painted a picture of a varied civilisation, the story ends positively and I eagerly await Book Two.

I'm less sure about the Salvatore. From the moment I discovered the existence of an island called Baranduin and an army of cyclopians, I had misgivings about just how derivative it was going to be, especially when you consider that the games in the arena belonging to Eorl Gahris Bedwyr owe a lot to the Roman tradition, even including the thumbs up/thumbs down verdict at the end of one contest. And when we get introduced to a halfling who plays the trade of highwayman, I concluded that the author had chosen his characters without much thought. But, despite these traditional 'figures' (there is a Praetorian Guard, a treasure-

loving dragon, elves, and a wizard who is not all he seems to be), the novel is actually very enjoyable.

Luthien Bedwyr, younger son of an Eorl, is an innocent whose eyes are gradually opened to the reality of life under the evil wizard-king Greensparrow, until he finds himself forming an unlikely partnership with highwayman (and halfling) Oliver deBurrows. Luthien's rite of passage contains comic and tragic elements. He finds love, acquires a cloak which renders him invisible, yet leaves behind the mark of The Crimson Shadow of the title, which gives the people hope, so that they revolt against their oppressors. There are sufficient loose ends to fill Book Two and, if you want a light-hearted read, I recommend this novel.

Amy Stout, meanwhile, is up to Book II of *The One Land Saga*, and this novel could really have done with a brief summary of what happened in Book One. Granted, the map and *dramatis personae* were of some assistance, as was the Prologue, but an indication of previous events would have helped to sort out exactly who was who. This is not a dull story, if a trifle confusing, and from the start I found it was difficult to distinguish between the good and evil characters. With the exception of the elfwight Alvaria, with a nice line in turning people who displease her into trolls by a particularly painful method, there was no clear-cut dividing line between good and evil. Even the Forty-Nine Mages were not easy to understand in terms of whose side they were on (I would have to say that they were on no-one's side but their own).

I would like to be able to say I enjoyed this novel, but I did not, at least not entirely: I could not get sufficiently interested in the characters to care what happened to them. Let's hope Book Three is clearer.

At first glance, Victoria Strauss's *The Arm of the Stone* is much like many other novels: a powerful and wealthy family were custodians of the Stone; the Stone was coveted and eventually seized; one member of the family survived, in hiding, and was ultimately told his heritage. The Tale is passed down the generations and ends with a prophecy that the One Who Comes will one day be reborn.

This version of the Tale tells of Bron, the unknowing possessor of a mental Gift in a world in which Mindpower is respected, who resolves to join the all-powerful Guardians to destroy them from the inside. It is also the story of Liliane, aspiring entrant to the Fortress, and her progress through examinations and testing to the point where she is accepted; Goldwine, a Novice who absconds from the Fortress; and Jolyn, a Third Year Novice who delights in making the lives of Liliane and Bron a misery. I won't describe the events in the Fortress, or how the lives of Bron and Liliane intertwine, because it would spoil an excellently crafted piece of work. Strauss has created a world rich in detail, fascinating characters (whom you instantly like or dislike) and who never lose your interest. I can honestly say I did not anticipate the turn of events and, if this is a first novel, then I am impressed. I look forward to seeing more of her intriguing work.

**David Farland*****The Sum of All Men* [1]**

Earthlight, 1998, 661pp, £9.99 ISBN 0 684 84028 6

Reviewed by John R. Oram

Just before the winter feast of Hostenfest, Prince Gaborn Val Orden is on a visit to the city of Bannisere as a prelude to asking the hand of the Crown Princess Iome in marriage. He only has his bodyguard, Borenson, and his Days, a man who chronicles his life, for company.

During his brief stay he learns of a plot against the royal house and of Raj Ahten, the Wolf lord, who wants to bring all the northern lands under his rule in order to fight off invading forces from another land. These are not normal invaders but giant monsters who will lay everything waste. But Raj Ahten's methods are no better. Wherever he goes, he takes terror with him. His ambition is to become the Sum of All Men, but time is running out, he only has three years of life left and he has been warned that an Earth King is coming who can defeat him.

Gaborn rides to warn the king, sending Borenson to warn his father. His warning is fruitless, Raj Ahten uses all his powers of glamour to take the city without a fight. He takes an endowment of wit from the king, leaving him a simpleton, and an endowment of glamour from the princess, leaving her ugly. The prince rescues them and takes them to his father. Unfortunately, his father has learned of the fall of Sylvaestra, and has ordered Borenson to kill all the dedicatives, including the king and his daughter. Borenson is in pain at this: he has known the king, eaten at his table. Meeting Gaborn with Iome and her father, he agrees not to kill them, knowing that he must now slaughter all the old king's dedicatives. He carries out his orders to slaughter the helpless dedicatives in the castle,

but it turns his mind. He is only carrying out orders – how many soldiers have used that as a defence against crimes of war? – but he knows it is wrong. It is rare to find ethical questions such as this raised in fantasy. I found myself repulsed by his actions, yet at the same time sympathetic towards this tortured character. Ironically, once Gaborn has won through to his father and brought the old king into his presence, King Orden realises what he has done and rescinds the order. It is too late, and, of course, Borenson does not know, setting him up for a last tragic act.

David Farland's book is riveting. It is fast paced, and rarely lets up. The characters are well realised, and, more importantly, they have motives for their actions. Even Raj Ahten has only been doing what he feels to be right: a big change from the usual Dark Lord. And then there is the matter of endowments. All the kings and lords take endowments, it is only a question of degree. Gaborn's father buys them from people who are poverty stricken; Iome's father takes them from people who are willing to give them as a gift, on the promise that they and their families will be looked after. The Days, also, are a nice touch. These characters never actually take sides in any conflict, and are part of a religious order which exists to chronicle the lives of the great. All lords, ladies, kings and queens are accompanied by a Days. They have no name, only the title, Days. Different.

I've read a lot of fantasy and I look for originality: David Farland is an original. This is not, as the blurb says, for people who like Robert Jordan, it's for people who like good fantasy. You can't judge this book by its awful cover. If you want fast paced, good fantasy, buy it. I don't think you will be disappointed.

**Raymond E. Feist*****Shards of a Broken Crown* [1]**

Voyager, 1998, 417pp, £17.99 ISBN 0 00 224654 6

Reviewed by Alan Fraser

This book concludes the popular Midkemia series that began with *Shadow Of A Dark Queen* and continued with *Rise Of A Merchant Prince*. At the end of *Rage Of A Demon King*, Volume 3 of *The Serpentwar Saga*, Feist had killed off the Demon King and the wicked Emerald Queen, but also disposed of many of the major characters who have been in his books since the start of the *Riftwar* series, devastated Krondor, and left the Kingdom of the Isles in the hands of the Emerald Queen's general Fadawah.

Here we are in mopping-up mode, as the magicians led by Pug and the remaining Krondorians battle to rid their continent of Fadawah and the Emerald Queen's army. Also, the dastardly Keshians are taking advantage of the Kingdom's misfortunes to invade from the South, seeing a chance of an easy gain of territory. To make matters worse, yet another facet of the universe-threatening 'Nameless Evil' appears in the shape of a few more nasty and invincible demons, so once again the good guys are fighting not just to save their country, but also their planet and the universe! The younger generation represented by Jimmy and Dash, the two grandsons of Jimmy The Hand, the bankrupted but morally reformed merchant prince Rupert Avery and warrior Erik von

Darkmoor, take centre stage. Pug the magician yet again plays a major role, while sadly a few more old hands have found their ends to meet. This book was rather too loosely woven for me to find it greatly enjoyable, with so many strands working towards their conclusions that not enough room was given to develop each one. Nevertheless, *Shards Of A Broken Crown* will be an essential read for those who have come this far, and leaves a few openings for the start of Feist's next series!

In an interview with Feist that I read recently, he stated that he is currently working on a new Midkemia series that will yet again feature the characters Jimmy and Dash (at least at its beginning). What I would like to see is a story which in its course explains how Midkemia has come to be populated by members of all the races and nations of our Earth, perhaps even linking here at some stage of our history through the Hall of Worlds, but I don't know that Feist's ready to tell that one yet.

**Raymond E. Feist*****Rage of a Demon King***

Voyager, 1998, 642pp, £6.99 ISBN 0 00 648298 8

The previous volume in *The Serpentwar Saga* has also been published in paperback. When it was first published, Janet Barron complained (V195): 'It did not engross. The pace was leaden, the characters flat, frequently petty or sentimental, and sometimes both.'

**George Foy*****Contraband* [1]**

Bantam, 1998, 390pp, \$12.95 ISBN 0 553 37545 8

Reviewed by Colin Bird

The blurb for this book makes it sound like a tense slice of gritty cyberpunk but, instead, we get a slick regurgitation of post-Gibson sf that offers nothing new to the genre – rather like the author's previous novel, *The Shift*.

The plot concerns Joe Marak, hot-shot pilot and smuggler, who lives with his pet rat, 'God', in a bureaucratic near-future Manhattan. After being shot down whilst trying to smuggle some organic computer chips and twenty five macaws into the USA, Marak finds his trade under threat. The BON (Bureau of Nationalisation) are undertaking a ruthless crackdown on illegal trade with the assistance of the mysterious 'Bokon Taylay'. The smugglers' codes are being broken and Marak's colleagues are being shot down one by one. A rumour suggests that the fugitive author of the Smuggler's Bible may be the only man able to break Taylay's code. With his trusty laptop-cum-scrambler in tow, the pilot

sets out, collecting a group of wayward friends on the way (in a strained *The Wizard Of Oz* metaphor) and travels east to track down the elusive author.

This is a profoundly irritating book, full of lazy plotting and glib lingo. There are a few telling jokes and sharp observations but the author fails to assert himself over a diffuse and wandering narrative. There are pages and pages of rambling dialogue and few signs of the ruthless editing that might have saved the novel. It's impossible to identify with any of the characters and the author's predilection for dumb similes doesn't help (as an example: 'her breasts were like small volcanoes in Iceland!'). The typically American identification of smugglers as valiant 'free-traders' also grates.

This stuff has been done to death in the thirteen years since *Newromancer*. Cyberpunk became a cliché almost as soon as it was born and novels like Stephenson's *Snow Crash* and Cadigan's *Fools* have introduced a much needed sophistication to a rather tired subgenre. *Contraband* represents an unwelcome return to an outmoded form.

**Steven Gould**

**Helm**

TOR Books, 1998, 383pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0 312 86460 4

Reviewed by Janet Barron

On a lost colony planet, all that remains of the science of Earth is contained in a device which can imprint directly onto the human brain. Used once in a generation, and only on one trained for many years to receive it, this tenuous link with Earth has been preserved for hundreds of years. When teenaged Leland de Laal climbs, against all odds, to the Helm on its spire and, unprepared, takes the device and wears it, he sets changes in play; changes both personal and political.

Leland knows only that his family have turned against him; his father shuns and shames him, his brothers attack him, some with rather more enthusiasm than others. His father knows that unless Leland's character is swiftly forged in adversity, that madness will follow as the knowledge implanted by the Helm begins to integrate.

The Helm, now hidden again, but no longer on its inaccessible spire, becomes a desirable target for unprincipled factions, for the imprinting process can also be used as a conditioning tool, to create a mindlessly

loyal soldiery. In this semi-feudal, limited-technology society, Leland must develop sufficiently to turn the knowledge in his head into strength and personal wisdom, and deal with all the consequences of his actions.

Some of this is pure fun-stuff and very readable it is, too; the interface with the knowledge of the Helm is a stored human intelligence who just happened to be an Aikido master, and integration is made evident mostly by Leland's ability to make use of his new-found martial arts talents. As a martial arts expert himself, Gould writes these scenes with authority and flair. But the fun is leavened with insights, ecological and technological, which take this from the realms of fantasy thriller into the heart of sf.

Steven Gould writes clean, sharp prose and has produced a story with ample pace and plot for the adventure-hungry teenager, and just enough emotional depth and psychological insight for the older reader. This is a similar blend to that used with success by Lois McMaster Bujold, and like Bujold, Gould produces old-style sf for modern sensibilities, complete with strong female characters and subtle shadings of motivation.

**Kate Jacoby**

**Exile's Return**

Gollancz, 1998, 442pp, £16.99 ISBN 0 575 06527 3

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

The exile of the title is Robert Douglas, Earl of Dunlorn, who returns to his home in the kingdom of Lusara, recently conquered by the invader Selar. Even Robert's family and friends do not know where his loyalties lie, or why he has chosen this particular time to come home. Most of them make demands on him; all of them find it hard to believe that all he wants to do is live quietly on his own lands.

I found it hard to get into this book because Kate Jacoby introduces a very large number of characters in the early pages, and to begin with it's not clear how many of them are important and how many are merely bit players. But once the story gets going with Robert's accidental meeting with the girl Jenn – who proves to be much more than she appears – it becomes much more involving. There's an effective background with a Scottish flavour, as the names suggest, and a sense of history.

This is intelligently handled fantasy, and I was particularly impressed by the characters, who have much more depth and ambiguity than sometimes seen in this genre. There are also characters I feel have more to them than the present book shows, in particular Rosalind, Selar's

Queen, who is herself Lusaran. My one reservation was the character of Robert Douglas himself; though everybody speaks of his charm and charisma, I didn't feel these qualities, though the man grew on me as the story progressed. He's interesting. There's a mystery about him: part of it shared with the reader, so that we know he is a sorcerer in a land where sorcery is forbidden; part of it, by the end of this book, still unexplained. Kate Jacoby is good at dropping clues, raising questions, and making her readers want to know more. In particular, the book sets different groups of sorcerers against each other, but suggests at the same time that they may have misinterpreted the power they are using. Robert and Jenn have a role to play but so far we don't know what it is.

The book is subtitled 'First Book of Elita' and there is obviously a long way to go. *Exile's Return* draws the first phase of the story to an end, but new threads are starting up all the time and many issues still remain unresolved. I don't get the feeling that this is the first book of a sequence; it's not separate enough for that. Rather, it's the first instalment of one very long story. If you object to reading something that isn't neatly wrapped up by the last page, then don't read it, or at least wait until the other volumes are out and you can read it all together. I'll certainly look out for the next volume, and hope to find out where Jacoby will take the story next.

**Jenny Jones**

**Where the Children Cry**

Gollancz, 1998, 384pp, £16.99 ISBN 0 575 06157 X

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

This is Jenny Jones's fifth novel, after the fantasy trilogy, *Flight Over Fire*, and the ghost story, *Blue Manor*. *Where the Children Cry* is another ghost story in an almost classic mode of a curse or revenge that carries across time and generations. This time the setting is York, rather than the Epping Forest of Jones's childhood and *Blue Manor*. The sense of place and the oppressive weight of history of York is well realised, although you get the sense that Jones is quite ambiguous about the city in which she lived for twenty years.

In 1965 a group of pupils are involved in a seemingly innocent prank which leads to tragedy and the death of one of them, a young Jewish boy named David Seifert. The children's accounts are confused, contradictory and frightened. The death is passed off as a freak accident. Thirty years later, the remaining witnesses find themselves together in York for one reason or another. Ben Bowen has remained at the school as a music teacher, Owen Rattigan's daughter, Sophie, is a pupil there, the bully Kenneth Pyper is now a governor, with two sons at the school. To York come Joss Fletcher, in his newly-promoted role as heritage archaeologist, along with his Jewish wife Lily and son Theo, and also Louisa Jamieson, daughter of the then matron of St Anthony's, drawn back by her mother's terminal illness.

Against Joss's misgivings, Theo is enrolled at the school. History is about to repeat itself. History goes back a long way further than 1965. In 1190 – a part of York's history not celebrated by the city's heritage industry – the Jewish inhabitants of York were massacred by townsfolk led by a white monk, who turned out to be the only Christian casualty,

of a stray stone thrown from the top of Clifford's Tower. It is the shade of that monk, Sheepshanks, who seems to be conjured by the discovery of an old Latin manuscript in the school library, which Owen laboriously translates and reads to the others one night in the basement boiler room. At a crucial moment, Kenneth sneezes, and no-one remembers to bless him. After that, nothing is the same again. Enmity starts to break out between Kenneth and David, and David is mercilessly hounded, bullied and haunted until his eventual death in that same basement. Only Louisa catches a dim glimpse of the white-robed figure that terrifies David more than Kenneth's relentless bullying. Thirty years later, that figure comes back to haunt her as a new constellation of abuse and harassment forms around Theo.

The problem with Jones's book, perhaps typical of the genre, is that the plotting is too obviously forced, that every event, even Joss's sprained ankle, becomes significant. There are no loose ends and all the threads of history are gathered back tightly into the present. It gives the book its oppressive momentum, but it also makes it feel curiously enclosed, as if the characters have no real independent life outside the service of the plot, trapped as thoroughly and fatally as the historic Jews of York. Then, too, there is more than an occasional loss of control of tone of voice, where Jones's apparent strong dislike of the privileged public school system intrudes through her characters (and is particularly forced through the odd situation of Louisa, the only girl at an otherwise all boys' school), and in Owen, in full rant mode, where it is hard to distinguish between the child and the adult voice. This distracts, and there were rather too many times I felt jerked out of the story to watch the author's too-carefully staged manipulation of events and emotional content. From that point, I think, she lost me. Which is a shame, because when she's not doing it, when she's fully involved with the story, Jenny Jones can be a powerful and engrossing writer.



**Adam Lee*****The Dark Shore***

Avon Books, 1998, 495pp, \$5.99 ISBN 0 380 79617 1

***The Shadow Eater***

Avon Books, 1998, 335pp, \$13.00 ISBN 0 380 79073 4

Reviewed by Jon Wallace

Irth is a world built around Charm. Charm is used for many things, largely replacing technology and medicine, but most importantly to keep away sleep, so that the night tides do not sweep you into the Gulf...

*The Dark Shore* (Book One of the Dominions of Irth) starts with an enigmatic prelude which gives way to (and seems to have nothing to do with) the tale which unfolds. Irth is being invaded by cacodemons who have crossed the Gulf from the Dark Shore. These cacodemons are immune to Charm and so the Peers who rule Irth are powerless against them. This volume introduces the Dark Lord from the Dark Shore, Hu dre Vra, and tells of his creation by circumstance and the actions of Lord Drev, the wizard-king and regent of all dominions, and his defeat at the hands of the forces that gather around Jyoti (a Peer who has learned the skills of fighting without Charm) and her younger brother, Poch.

*The Shadow Eater* picks up the story later. Reece, a magician from

the Dark Shore, is helping Jyoti to rebuild her city, Arwar Odawl, which was destroyed by the forces of the Dark Lord. At the same time, at World's End, a higher being has summoned the gnome, Old Ric, to send him to Irth with the Shining One, Asofel, to find and exile the force which has stopped the growth of the baby in her womb.

In *The Dark Shore*, Lee reveals his world a drop at a time, each new thing comes to us in its natural place, without the wedges of facts that tempt some writers. That prelude is left to nag at the reader until its resolution towards the climax of the story. And the same principle applies in Book Two. Each new location, each new race are come upon in their place, with no infodumps to spoil the story, or indeed to condescend to the reader.

But Lee has other strengths as an author. His characters, strange though they are, live and breathe and we care about them, his worlds are well constructed, and the Charm and other magics used here are plausible and thought out. And to his credit, these books are complete in themselves. Book One finishes with a satisfying conclusion, Book Two gives enough details that Book One is not strictly necessary (although, do read them in order...) and it too finishes at an ending full of hope and light.

**James Alan Gardner*****Commitment Hour***

Avon Books, 1998, 343pp, \$5.99 ISBN 0 380 79827 1

**Carolyn Ives Gilman*****Halfway Human***

Avon Books, 1998, 472pp, \$5.99 ISBN 0 380 79799 2

**Stephen Leigh*****Dark Water's Embrace***

Avon Books, 1998, 331pp, \$3.99 ISBN 0 380 79478 0

**Susan R. Matthews*****Prisoner of Conscience***

Avon Books, 1998, 312pp, \$3.99 ISBN 0 380 78914 0

Reviewed by Daniel O'Mahony

Judging by *Halfway Human*, Carolyn Ives Gilman wants a Tiptree Award. She wouldn't be an underserving winner. In parts the book has something of the trap-like quality of *The Sparrow* to it, but here we see most of it from the viewpoint of the bait. The eugenic dystopia of Gammadis is revealed through the neuter Thedla - a member of the 'bland' underclass whose life is transformed by contact with Gammadian liberals and by the ambiguous intervention of a non-Gammadian cultural anthropologist (this novel's very own sparrow). Unfortunately this comes wrapped in an over-ornamented frame story which relies too much on *Star Trek*-style plotting and cod-liberalism. But the trap still has teeth and Gilman should keep her mantelpiece clear. Just in case.

I'd offer similar advice to Stephen Leigh, but *Dark Water's Embrace* is an unlikely winner. It's a more complex and ambitious work than *Halfway Human* and less derivative (despite hints of *The Chrysalid*). The human-descendants of Leigh's cheerily-monikered, densely-detailed Mictlan are half-conscious of their own imminent extinction. They are not the first inhabitants of this world, however, and a preserved native body erupts from the past to illuminate the present, with consequences.

**Charles Pellegrino*****Dust***

Avon Books, 1998, 387pp, \$15.95 ISBN 0 380 97308 1

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

The first notable ecocatastrophe story written after Charles Elton first popularised the term 'ecology' in the 1920s was J. D. Beresford's 'The Man Who Hated Flies' (1929), a quaint parable in which man's quest for the perfect insecticide removed the world's assiduous pollinators at a stroke. It is, alas, difficult to credit that much efficacy to a mere insecticide - but it's even more difficult to figure out some other cause that would have the same effect. Charles Pellegrino's *Dust*, which tracks the horrible carnage which ensues when the world's insect population vanishes, invokes a genetic 'time-bomb' which comes into effect every 33,000,000 years or so, although he spares the scientists in his story from having to work out the Darwinian logic of the notion. They are, of course, too busy trying to save an underserving world which is suddenly bereft not merely of its pollinators-in-chief but also of a highly significant crowd of pest-controlling predators and a vital food-source for thousands of other economically-significant species.

Pellegrino is described on the book's rear flap as a 'scientific gadfly' -

Surprisingly the result is more intimate and less schematic than *Halfway Human*; though it seems occasionally shapeless, the narrative sputters with incident, preferring brood over drive. What will keep it from the Tiptree is the distancing fascination of the author with his subject. There is, though it does no harm here, something ineluctably masculine about Leigh's writing.

The same applies to *Commitment Hour*, only more so. That may well be the point. Aside from its terrestrial setting and its comparatively localised implications, there are striking plot similarities with *Halfway Human* (a society whose members only settle into a fixed gender on reaching adulthood) and *Dark Water's Embrace* (social panic about same-sex relationships and gender-role transgressions) or both (neuter/hermaphrodite prejudice). Gardner's prose, like Leigh's, frequently grumbles into fantasy but is much lighter in tone. Intentional or not, *Commitment Hour* reads best as parody. Gardner's cod-naïf protagonist and Pythonish dialogue conjure with an absurdism which at times seems much more effective than his earnest stablesmates.

Ursula Le Guin is presumably supposed to feel sincerely flattened by this line-up, but the resemblance is superficial. With the possible exception of *Halfway Human* none of these novels really has much that's new or profound to say about the human condition or gender roles; they read better as stories than promises. Their protagonists are all prodigies or misfits whose actions push patently unjust societies towards an invisible, unquestioned normalcy. It's a shame then that the only book in this batch which dares to imagine a fully-adult protagonist - Susan H. Matthews's *Prisoner of Conscience* - is also the most disappointing. The clarity of the author's imagination is lost in slippery, anonymous prose; there are no obvious hooks. No awards then, but of all the writers here Matthews seems the most likely to really shake the world.

a telling phrase which might help to explain why he has so much sympathy with the vanished insects and why the story-line is such a godawful mess. Given that the sequence of events is so hectic and so relentlessly linear one would hardly think it possible that the narrative could become so confused and so prone to stall, but it does. It continually loses pace because Pellegrino can never resist chucking huge chunks of speculative science into the story whenever there are a few moments to spare between people getting eaten alive by dust-mites or infected with CJD by vampire bats who don't like the taste of mad cows. If the characters are in no fit state to engage in such philosophical rhapsodies - and a few of them never are, by virtue of being science-hating sociopathic demagogues or little children - the authorial voice is more than willing to fill in for them, and then some (everything is repeated, just in case you missed it the first time). Nor does there seem to be any real attempt to update the reader on the exploits of various characters at intervals regular enough to comprise actual narrative threads; just because we get a whole chapter's worth of characterisation thrown in at random intervals doesn't mean that the character in question will ever be seen on stage again, let alone that the reader will ever be granted more than fleeting access to his or her thoughts. The

only character analysed in any real detail is the arch-villain, whose charm is a mask for absolute evil, Pellegrino is, of course, careful to repeat his careful explanation of why scientists aren't charming several times over.

The doyen of hard sf writers, Hal Clement, once observed that he never used villains because the universe is hostile enough to make mere human villainy irrelevant, but he worked for understanding editors. *Dust* gives every evidence of having been written under the influence of someone exceedingly well versed in the theory of best-sellers. 'Charlie, darling, you have to give the readers somebody to hate besides themselves, and you have to have a whatsis-hanging scene where the hero pulls his little girl back from the abyss, and we simply must have much more blood.' Pellegrino does his level best, but it's not enough to obscure the fact that the manner in which he purges the world of all the stupid people – revelling in the heartbreaking tragedy of the fact that because the morons are all suckers for the winning smiles of science-

hating sociopaths they contrive to drag a few Mensa-members down with them – is ever-so-slightly lascivious in its sadism.

The really clever ones are, of course the insects. Every single species has this time-bomb which instructs them all to become extinct at exactly the same time, and there isn't a single breeding pair anywhere in the world in which this bit of rogue DNA left over from 33,000,000 years ago – utterly unused and free of selective pressure in the meantime – hasn't been disabled by mutation. And you thought science was exact! Insects, you see, are just the ecosphere's way of doing a little spring-cleaning every time a new wave of cometary collisions is expected – because that's the kind of tidy mind ecospheres would have, if they had minds at all. The in-house editor, of course, would never have dreamed of questioning the plausibility of a move like that – after all, the author's the scientist, and the target audience watches *The Outer Limits*.

## Terry Pratchett

## *The Last Continent* □

Doubleday, 1998, 281pp, £16.99 ISBN 0 385 40989 3

Reviewed by Chris Hill

The Librarian of Unseen University has lost control of his morphic function (i.e. he keeps changing shape). The Archancellor decides that to cure him they need to know his Real Name. The only person who might know is Rincewind, failed wizard (sic), last seen accidentally exiled on the mysterious lost continent 'EcksEcksEcksEcks'. While trying to find out more about the continent, the faculty heads find themselves trapped on a small island in the pre-history of the Discworld (which is still in the process of being created – by the God of Evolution, no less). Meanwhile, Rincewind is approached by a talking kangaroo (called Scrappy) – a representative of the Creator – who tells him that the wizards have managed to change the history of the continent and, as it all happened because they were trying to find him, it is up to Rincewind to put it right.

*The Last Continent* is Pratchett's skit on Australian culture and follows on more-or-less directly from *Interesting Times*. Everyone talks in tw-Australian, drinks lager and answers every problem with the phrase 'Still, no worries, eh?' This is decidedly *not* Pratchett at his most subtle. However, the digs are so good-natured that few are likely to be offended by them. There are also a number of references to famous Australian

films (the identification of which is, as always, left as an exercise for the reader).

To be honest there is nothing much new here. The wizards argue among themselves and Rincewind becomes a hero by running away a lot. Also, the resolution is not as strong as others in the series have been; this is one of the occasional volumes where the plotting seems to take second place to the jokes. Of course, having said that, many of the jokes are very funny indeed (causing me to laugh out loud on several occasions). But in the end I could not help but be a little disappointed. This is strictly Pratchett-by-Numbers; a recombination of the elements that make him popular. In many of Pratchett's books I get a strong sense that he has something to say, that behind the humour there is a serious observer of human nature and human folly. *The Last Continent* seems to lack that edge, and the book is weaker as a result.

Reviewing Pratchett is, perhaps, rather a futile exercise. If you are already a fan, then you will probably go out and buy the book as soon as possible, no matter what I say. If you are not a fan then you probably still cannot understand what all the fuss is about. So no doubt *The Last Continent* will sell as well as all the others. These days sf and fantasy fans are a tiny part of Pratchett's readership. But there is a serious danger of the books becoming routine, like a stand-up comic constantly recycling his material. And that would not be funny at all.

## Rudy Rucker

## *Freeware*

Avon Books, 1998, 262pp, \$5.99 ISBN 0 380 78159 X

Reviewed by Steve Palmer

Following on from the classic novels *Software* and *Wetware* comes Rudy Rucker's latest Ware book, *Freeware*. Although touted as cyberpunk, there is something in these novels that somehow sets them apart from the work of the Gibsons, Shirleys and Sterlings of this world – perhaps the cosy, almost cranky atmosphere of these very funny books. (Nobody could ever say *Neuromancer* or *Schismatrix* was funny...) Some of the old characters from the award-winning *Software* are back, Cobb especially, but also Stahn, and now they have family trees.

To outline the plot would be faintly ridiculous, about as meaningful as describing the topology of a ball of string. You just try to follow it; I did the best I could. Thankfully, this novel, like its predecessors, is a joy to read from start to finish, and for two reasons: genuine inventiveness, of which more in a minute, and the same fantastic language as peppered the earlier volumes, except in this one everything is taken a stage further. Just a few examples; moldies (the *raison d'être* of the book, kind of genetic, multimorphic robots); uvvy (kind of like a TV, kind of like a computer terminal); newies (remotely controlled artificial cameras like insects); and many, many more.

One notable difference in this third of Rucker's series is how much more sex there is. I suspect the shape-changing, musky, fungal entities created by the author made him imagine lots of sexual possibilities, and there they all are in the book, some in quite graphic detail, others (the funnier ones) not so. The author's skill means you laugh where you are supposed to, and feel slightly soiled elsewhere, as for example in the scene where a moldie tries to kill her (its) partner during sex, by shoving a pseudopod up his nose and into his brain. Nice work if you can get it, and there's lots of it in this incredibly surreal future world.

Half of the time I found myself thinking some of the inventions would be great, the other half I hoped they would never come about. In

one sense it is all a bit too surreal, but the vitality of the inventions and the euphoria of the scenes, the characters, the situations, the set pieces – and that madcap language – bites you on the bum and demands to be experienced. In Rudy Rucker the world of sf had one of its maddest of mad professors. And he is still going on about mathematics, to wit, Hilbert Space, N-dimensional tessellation... if I have one complaint, it is that perhaps there are too many ideas here. Still, better than none at all.

## Steve Sneddy

## *Laying Siege to Tomorrow*

Hilltop Press, 1998, 19pp, £2.50 ISBN 0 905262 16 6

Reviewed by K. V. Bailey

Though brief, this account is, given the limitations of research resources, a thorough survey of 'Poetry in UK Szanzines from the 1930s to the 1950s'. It is in two parts: a critical/historical essay and an invaluable descriptive bibliography, with additional notes and a comprehensive index. The essay offers various surmises as to why sf and fantasy verse took fanezine root in the 30s, flourished through to the mid 50s and then virtually disappeared. Sneddy suggests that consumerist materialism was the assassin; Vine Clarke (who edited *Eye* in the 50s) is quoted as believing that a postwar shift away from *gratuitas* had combined with educational factors which diminished facility with language to produce the same result. Sf poetry's re-emergence is to be the subject of a future publication.

Both essay and bibliography document individual engagement. The young Arthur C. Clarke was fanezine-poetically active in the 30s; also the even younger C.S. Youd (John Christopher) as both editor and contributor, continuing into the early 40s. Ken Bulmer worked similarly through the 40s and early 50s, and Allan Tetley (Derek Pickles) and Ted Tubb were both editing and contributing, with John Brunner contributing, over the same period. Necessarily, only extracted lines and images indicate the nature and quality of the verse, plus Steve Sneddy's

glosses, cryptic or detailed ('filkishly effective'; 'like a verse pastiche of Heinlein'; 'a strongly imaged, ambiguously stanced, outcry against war's demands to take sides'). His title is graphic. The phrase occurs in a quoted poem by C.S. Lowndes: 'You can build a fortress but you can't lay siege to tomorrow; / The millions have claimed tomorrow; you can't jump the claim.' Does the title's positive twisting of the phrase

imply, I wonder, agreement with Shelley's estimate of the poet's role and proclaim a resistance to any swamping demotic tide?

Available from: 4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield HD15 8PB. Cheques etc. to Steve Sneyd.

<b>H. Rider Haggard</b>	<b>People of the Mist</b>
Edgar Allan Poe	<b>Murders in the Rue Morgue and Other Stories</b>
Bram Stoker	<b>Lair of the White Worm</b>
Jules Verne	<b>Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas</b>

Reviewed by K. V. Bailey

Readers of this new publishing venture are welcomed to 'the thrill-tastic world of Pulp Fictions', an indication of its chosen style for cover illustrations and presentation, deliberately reminiscent of an earlier mode. Its slogan is 'Better Read than Dead', which might be reversed for the first revival under review. Bram Stoker's *The Lair of the White Worm*, announced as 'an outstanding classic by a world master' is a minor, crudely cobbled Gothic horror wherein a certain Lady Arabella is possessed by a wyrm-serpent, its lair a nauseous swamp underlying the ancient Castra Regis, which with the snake-woman is destined for messy destruction. Rider Haggard's *People of the Mist* also has an ophidian/crocodiliandity. It is a novel outside the Alan Quartermain and Ayesha sequences, though again centred on a tribe and city hidden among mountain ranges. It is good to see it in print again. Dated and stereotyped as all these darkest Africa yarns must be, Haggard was such an effective tale-spinner that his writings stay readable. His best creation here is the indestructible Kaffir dwarf, Otter, devoted servant promoted

to masquerade as god, who is always saving situations for 'Baas'. The story has every expected ingredient - evil (slaving) defeated, hunt for treasure (jewels), prophetic omens, ritual sacrifice and a happily romantic ending. Read it in a mood of literary nostalgia rather than of simple escapism, and enjoy the bonus of the period Arthur Layard illustrations. *Murders in the Rue Morgue* serves as title for the E.A. Poe selection containing that and seven other stories, mostly undoubted classics of the decadent romantic-gothic-horror genres. Some are ancestral to such genre developments as detective fiction (the title story) and the spectral archetype ('The Masque of the Red Death'). In 'The Fall of the House of Usher', the sinking of the family-simulative mansion beneath 'a black and lurid tarn' foreruns such melodramatic denouements as the swallowing-up of Bram Stoker's *Castra Regis*.

Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Seas*, now newly and expertly translated by William Butcher for Oxford World's Classics, belongs to a different class of publishing operation. It carries over a hundred pages of Introduction and illuminating scholarly apparatus, and does much to mitigate the damage done earlier by combinations of inadequate translation and presentational and media vulgarisation. I half regret the accurate but untraditional pluralising of 'Sea' in the title. In fact, not only is the novel innovative in Nemo's wanderings encompassing the whole globe, but the *Nautilus* swims a single world ocean, even discovering a watery tunnel between the Red and Mediterranean Seas and diving beneath the ice to find the south polar continent. It is interesting to compare Verne's concepts and available sources in that latter episode with Kim Stanley Robinson's researches, experiences and attitudes 130 years later in *Antarctica* both novels imaginative classics of their centuries, each in its own way and to varying degrees idealistic and extrapolative, yet neither definitively or exclusively.

<b>Maggie Furey</b>	<b>The Web: Sorceress</b>
Peter F. Hamilton	<b>The Web: Lightstorm</b>

Reviewed by Andy Mills

Two further books in a new series for children. As before, Orion/Dolphin have commissioned 'name' authors (previous contributors to the series have included Stephen Baxter, Eric Brown and Graham Joyce), though I cannot foresee either Peter Hamilton or Maggie Furey stressing these offerings on their CVs.

The format for both is identical. A group of young teenagers who hang together in the Web stumble upon criminal activity (featuring a villain common to both), face VR danger and pull through together. *Lightstorm* has a science bent to it (the children investigate strange lights on a Norfolk marsh, the result perhaps of a large company's environmental damage?) whilst *Sorceress* leans quite definitely towards McCaffrey, with a game-world featuring dragons which goes awry. The kids are by and large as interchangeable as the plot; the real star of these books is the Web itself, described in the (necessary) glossary as being the network of communication links, entertainment, educational and administrative sites that exist in cyberspace in the year 2027. But the VR as described in both novels reads uncomfortably like *Tron* and appears as unlikely (and, one asks, would people really spend all their time in all-over bodysuits, as postulated here?) the intriguing elements of this future world lie in some of the implications only touched upon in these adventure tales - for instance, the breakdown of cultural barriers and the effect of this on young people's attitudes, the impact of very limited transport on the economies of nations formerly dependent on tourism. Still, it's good to know some things never change: in *Lightstorm* the narrator's mum's 'cocoan' (her special place) is the kitchen.

These are nevertheless competent, easy reads, where the writers do their best under the constraints of the prescribed series format. The

pace is good, though I have to say that the problem I have with adventures in virtual reality is that, as with dream stories, one is never convinced of any real threat to the characters; this lack of tension is made all the worse by the fact that as these are wholesome children's books you know nothing bad will happen to the protagonists.

One final point: these books cost £3.50 for an average 88 pages each (glossaries not included). Pretty costly, I'd say.

<b>Robert Weisbro</b>	<b>The Official Guide to the Xenaverse</b>
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Reviewed by Mat Coward

Apparently, there's a TV show called *Xena*. It is evidently full of underdressed young women, which certainly sounds like the sort of thing I might watch, if only to annoy the BSFA's Stuff Graduate Faction, but apparently it's shown in Britain on Channel 5, which explains why I haven't seen it - and why, even if I had known about it, I wouldn't have been able to see it.

Those of you who are already Xenaphiles will definitely want this very generously illustrated book. Despite being written by 'a professor of American history' it is one of the best examples of its kind - that's the guide to a cult TV show kind - that I've ever seen. It contains all that you'd expect: detailed episode guides, behind the scenes guff, young media professionals sharing their brilliant philosophical insights with us, shooting anecdotes, cast profiles, facts that are so trivial that to call them trivia would be to trivialise the word trivia, and so on. But as a bonus, it's all done with a humour and enthusiasm that made it a pleasure to read even though I had no idea what it was all about.

And the pictures, some of them in colour, are... most enlightening. I think I'll buy a new TV aerial.

**Patricia C. Wrede**
***The Magician's Ward***

TOR Books, 1997, 288pp, \$23.95 ISBN 0 312 85369 6

Reviewed by Kathy Taylor

This Regency Romance lightly disguised as magic fantasy manages to do a pleasing job with both elements. The societal structure for the magic follows the usual College of Magicians with apprentices, but there are several rather nice touches. Along with the fairly common concept that a magician is the social equal of anyone is the idea that at their 'coming out party' female magicians are expected to produce an illusion, rather than show off their piano playing or other similar talents. Another is the *livre de mémoire*, a memory book rather than a spell book in which the French magicians habitually wrote down those bits of the spell they had trouble remembering along with anything else they needed to remember

like laundry lists!

As a romance there are shades of G. B. Shaw's *Pygmalion*: Richard Merrill is to transform Kim not just into a magician but into a lady. Unlike *Pygmalion*, the practicalities of speech and mannerisms in this are rather glossed over. The romance between Kim and Merrill is instead rather Heyerish in tone and plot and provides amusement. The ending is also Heyer rather than Shaw. Shaw always said that Eliza had too much sense to marry Higgins, but predictably Kim ends up marrying Merrill. I don't think Merrill had to be quite so emotionally illiterate where Kim is concerned, though it seems to be a common flaw of this type of hero. Although *The Magician's Ward* never manages the wit in dialogue of Shaw or Heyer, it is well written with generally believable characters and an internally consistent reality. It's a pleasant read, and I'm happy to recommend the book.

**Chelsea Quinn Yarbro**
***The Angry Angel***

Avon Books, 1998, 359pp, \$23.00 ISBN 0 380 97400 2

Reviewed by Gary Wilkinson

Setting itself up as a prequel to *Dracula*, *The Sisters of the Night* trilogy, of which *The Angry Angel* is the first instalment, describes the stories of the 'three weird sisters' - the future brides of Dracula. And that of course is the problem: it soon becomes clear what is going on as the story makes its weary way towards its inevitable conclusion.

The book opens in Salonika in 1500, with Kelene and her Christian family being forced to flee northwards to avoid the invading Ottoman Turks. They are guided in this journey by Kelene's visions from the 'Militant Angels'; in particular one 'Angry Angel' who is eventually revealed to her wearing a large enveloping black cloak and 'dragon' armour (who could this be I wonder?). Things go from bad to worse for the family, as the angel's advice seems to spare them from one disaster only to divert them into something worse. Kelene's visitations become more and more seductive and demanding and the long slow (the novel covers several years) journey into the heart of darkness begins. In a

Balkans shattered by war Dracula becomes our new Kurtz and Kelene becomes his depraved protégé until the novel reaches its abrupt, horrific and horrible conclusion.

One of the main themes is corruption of the innocent, in particular explicit and implicit references are made to child abuse. To survive the family is forced to contemplate selling its children into marriage or castrated bondage to the Turks. At the start of the novel Kelene is 14 and on the 'brink of womanhood', and in a scene obviously 'inspired' by *The Exorcist*, the exorcising priest is revealed to be a murdering child molester by Dracula speaking through Kelene and thus useless against Dracula's rather less banal evil.

An attempt has been made to merge the fictional character of Dracula with his historical inspiration, Vlad Dracul the Impaler, but to be honest by this time I felt I had been bored into a state of Undeath myself and was not paying much attention. I suppose it is meant to be a Dark Romance but it came over as simply grim in tone. Unenlivened by endless mediocre description and padding, many of its paragraphs become very skippable. Although well illustrated by Christopher Bing, it is unremittably ghastly and leaves a very nasty taste in the mouth.

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