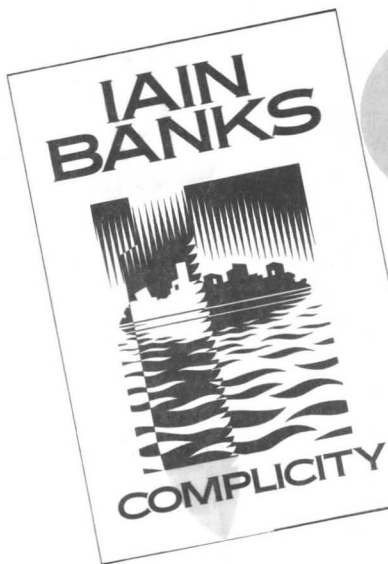


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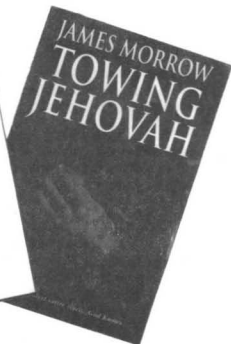
The critical journal of the BSFA

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July/August 1995



Books
of the
year
1994



Vector 183

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New members and renewals:

Alison Cook, 52 Woodhill Drive, Grove, Wantage, Oxon OX12 0NB, UK

USA:

Cy Chauvin, 14248 Wilfred Street, Detroit, MI 48213, USA

The British Science Fiction Association Ltd
Limited by guarantee – Company No: 921500
Registered address: 60 Bournemouth Road,
Folkestone, Kent CT19 5AZ

Editor: Catie Cary

224 Southway, Park Barn, Guildford,
Surrey, GU2 6DN

Hardback Reviews: Paul Kincaid

60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone,
Kent, CT19 5AZ

Paperback Reviews: Stephen Payne

24 Malvern Road, Stoneycote,
Leicester, LE2 2BH

Magazine Reviews: Maureen Speller

60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone,
Kent, CT19 5AZ

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Editorial

Because of pressure of work, Catie Cary was unable to put together an issue of *Vector* for this mailing. This issue has been put together at short notice by Paul Kincaid.

Catie has decided that her work commitments are now getting too much for her to keep up with her editorial duties on *Vector*, so she has reluctantly decided that it is time to step down. She will edit one more issue, which is due out in time for the Worldcon in August, then retire.

So the BSFA is now looking for a new editor. In particular we are looking for someone to act as Features Editor and someone to act as Production Editor, but if anyone is willing and able to take on the whole job we'd be delighted to hear from you.

Anyone interested in taking on the job of *Vector* editor should contact Maureen Kincaid Speller, 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent CT19 5AZ, or e-mail mks_pk@cix.compulink.co.uk

In the meantime, the main feature in this issue is the result of our annual survey of BSFA reviewers to determine what books stood out for them in 1994. And very surprising reading it makes as well.

Paul Kincaid

Books of the Year

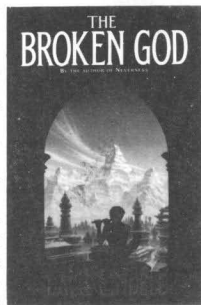
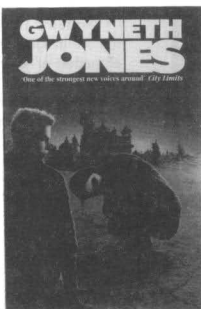
1994

Vector Reviewers' Poll
Book of the Year

Complicity
Iain Banks

With a British Worldcon looming, you'd expect publishers to bring out books likely to compete for Hugo honours. Instead, the books that appeared have made little impression.

It is curious that the BSFA Award winner didn't feature on the Arthur C. Clarke Award shortlist, while the Clarke Award winner wasn't on the shortlist for the BSFA Award. In fact, if you compare the two shortlists, they might have come from different years such is the lack of overlap. Then, when we conduct our annual poll of Vector reviewers, we find the BSFA Award Winner languishing among the also-rans, and the Clarke Award winner doesn't feature at all (but Pat Cadigan's *Fools* made a respectable showing last year, when only available in an imported American edition)!



2

Towing Jehovah
James Morrow

3=

Lost Souls
Poppy Z. Brite

Calenture
Storm Constantine

Love and Sleep
John Crowley

North Wind
Gwyneth Jones

Green Mars
Kim Stanley Robinson

A Well-Favoured Man
Elizabeth Willey

Lake of the Long Sun
Gene Wolfe

The Broken God
David Zindell

Other nominated books
(in alphabetical order of
author)

The House of Doctor Dee
Peter Ackroyd

Somewhere East of Life
Brian Aldiss

A History of God
Karen Armstrong

The Birds
Frank Baker

Feersum Endjinn
Iain M. Banks

Everville
Clive Barker

Mother of Storms
John Barnes

Who Was that Man?
Neal Bartlett

Arthur Rex
Thomas Berger

Drawing Blood
Poppy Z. Brite

Engineman
Eric Brown

Interface
Stephen Bury

The Land of Laughs
Jonathan Carroll

Foreigner
C.J. Cherryh

Some 80 titles were nominated by reviewers, and for a time it looked as if no single book would emerge as the winner. Never in the ten years or so of this poll have so many books been listed, with such little agreement as to the favourite.

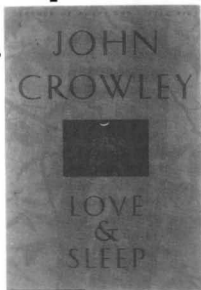
As ever, reviewers were given *carte blanche*. Books needn't have been published during the year in question, nor did they have to be science fiction, or even fiction.

This year, more non-sf and more non-fiction than usual was nominated. 15 titles were not sf or fantasy (though that 15 does include four non-fiction books with sf or fantasy related subjects).

No fewer than 8 books were also in last year's top 30. In some instances, of course, this is simply a matter of catching up, or of waiting for a paperback edition like the rest of us. Yet, up there near the top of the list, and a book that looked for a while as if it was going to top the poll, is *Love and Sleep* by John Crowley, which is so far only available in American hardback.

So the reviewers seem to be as adventurous as ever in their reading, while turning more than ever to old books, some, such as the two by Olaf Stapledon, dating from the 1930s. In many ways this is reassuring, science fiction is old enough now to have a venerable history, and books like John Crowley's *Engine Summer* (described by K.V. Bailey as: "Unique: future myth, ingeniously if unevenly realised, and so beautifully written") and the Stapledons deserve to be read time and again. Yet to have them cropping up still among the books of the year is a little unexpected.

In the end, of course, the current crop of fantasy and sf rises to the top. Not the very top, which belongs to Iain Banks's ingenious crime thriller with his mordant violence and cruel humour. As Tanya Brown remarked: "Sometimes it feels as though Banks is teetering on a narrow line between controversy and mere shock value ... but all in all a thought-provoking and entertaining read." It's hard to say whether this had more to say to sf readers than Iain M. Banks's

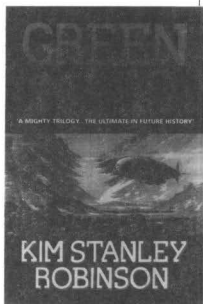


Feersum Endjinn, or whether it was just that *Complicity*, which appeared earlier in the year, also had a paperback edition whereas *Feersum Endjinn*, as yet, has not.

Other than *Complicity*, the only books to receive significant votes were current sf and fantasy. James Morrow's *Towing Jehovah*, ("Entertaining and thought-provoking as well as (of course) preposterous" said Norman Beswick) was the surprising runner-up. Then came *North Wind* by Gwyneth Jones, runner-up for the Clarke Award, which Paul Kincaid called "sly, subtle and remarkably satisfying"; Kim Stanley Robinson's *Green Mars*, described by Steve Jeffery as promising to be "the hard science fiction achievement of the 1990s"; and Gene Wolfe's *Lake of the Long Sun*, of which Cherith Baldry said: "Wolfe never ceases to amaze me. I don't know how he can be so complex and subtle and at the same time so lucid".

Yet there were surprises. *A Well-Favoured Man* by Elizabeth Willey has not received the same publicity or attention as other books on the list (these may not be unconnected), but it's there, perhaps driven by the same sort of word-of-mouth which pushed *Vurt* to the top of the rankings last year. If comments like Simon Bisson's ("If there had to be a best fantasy novel of the last couple of years this *Tempest* meets *Amber* book may well be it") are anything to go by, it is likely to pick up a loyal readership.

Last year even books which were 20th or 30th on the list had been picked by two or three reviewers. This year, beyond the first ten titles, no book was mentioned more than once. Which explains why this list is broader, but more curious. There are titles one would have expected to receive more votes: Greg Egan's *Permutation City*, for instance, ("a deep exploration of philosophy, physics and mathematics" – Simon Bisson) or Rachel Pollack's *Temporary Agency* which K.V.



The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction

John Clute & Peter Nicholls (eds)

Olaf Stapledon: Speaking for the Future

Robert Crossley

Engine Summer

John Crowley

Best New Science Fiction 8

Gardner Dozois (ed)

Permutation City

Greg Egan

Shadow of a Dark Queen

Raymond E. Feist

The Art of Science Fiction

Frank Kelly Freas

Aurian

Maggie Furey

Bloodstone

David Gemmell

Red Ball

John Gideon

The Making of King Kong

Orville Goldner & George E. Turner

Summer King, Winter Fool

Lisa Goldstein

Gray's Anatomy

Spalding Gray

Take Back Plenty

Colin Greenland

Sorcerer's Ward
Barbara Hambly

Waking the Moon
Elizabeth Hand

Ascent of Wonder
David Hartwell & Kathryn
Cramer (eds)

Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow
Peter Hoeg

Graiblazers
Tom Holt

City of the Iron Fish
Simon Ings

The Language of the Genes
Steve Jones

The House of Lost Dreams
Graham Joyce

Nightmares and Dreamscapes
Stephen King

Pasquale's Angel
Paul McAuley

China Mountain Zhang
Maureen F. McHugh

Nautilus
Vonda McIntyre

Intervention
Julian May

Dreams of Sex and Stage Diving
Martin Miller

The Facts of Life
Richard Milton

Bailey says "in its deployment of magic and metaphysics is even more persuasive – and terrifying – than *Unquenchable Fire*", or those two novels in which sf confronts the weather, *Mother of Storms* by John Barnes and *Heavy Weather* by Bruce Sterling. The award-winning *China Mountain Zhang* by Maureen F. McHugh ("The undramatic nature of the plot is the very strength of the book: it is a story of the little people who are so often overlooked by sf writers" – Andy Sawyer) may pick up more votes next year since it was only available in an American edition. While *Interface* by Stephen Bury might do better if it receives a British edition, and if it is realised that Bury is a pseudonym for Neal Stephenson who came close to beating *Vurt* with *Snow Crash* ("Stephenson better than ever with US history as conspiracy" – Andrew M. Butler). And there are unexpected discoveries, or re-discoveries, such as *The Birds* by Frank Baker ("If I've read one novel which deserves to be re-discovered, this is it ... a forgotten masterpiece" – Gary Dalkin).

Fantasy did better than usual this year. Old favourites Raymond Feist, Barbara Hambly and David Gemmell were joined by newer writers such as Maggie Furey, whose first novel, *Aurian* was "a new voice trotting out tried and tested fantasy elements in a way that refreshes" – Vikki Lee. Paula Volsky aroused interest with *The Wolf of Winter*, "a sweeping novel of high fantasy in which the characters are so skilfully drawn as to arouse by turn sympathy and disgust, then sympathy again", according to Martin Brice.

Horror also had its adherents. Andy Sawyer called Kim Newman's *The Quorum*, "a darkly funny novel which manages to overturn several of the conventions of the horror novel in its ambiguity towards the nature of evil". While Norman Beswick said that *The Tale of the Body Thief* by Anne Rice was "Vampirism used to explore and probe as well as surprise and excite".

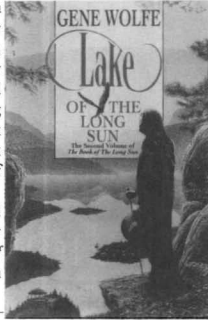
Along with *Complicity*, other mainstream novels evoked something akin to "sense of wonder". *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow* by Peter Hoeg "has more sense of an alien world

(and more hard science) than many sf/fantasy novels ... and a sense of atmosphere and place which is evocative enough to make you shiver even in a warm room" – Tanya Brown. Peter Ackroyd's *The House of Doctor Dee*; according to Steve Jeffery "weaves together careful historical research, haunting and possession and dark sexuality to arrive at a bleak and shocking question of identity".

Last year the revised edition of John Clute and Peter Nicholls's *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* appeared on

the list. It is there again this year, joined by several other reference and non-fiction books, such as Robert Crossley's monumental biography of Olaf Stapledon. Andy Sawyer said : "If you read one biography this year it has to be this full and sympathetic picture of a writer who deserves to be better known."

One thing remains: however much science fiction grew up in the magazines, short stories don't feature well in these lists. Out of 80 books, only two short story collections were mentioned. Ah well.



The City, Not Long After
Pat Murphy

The Quorum
Kim Newman

Vurt
Jeff Noon

Felidae
Akif Pirincci

Temporary Agency
Rachel Pollack

Men at Arms
Terry Pratchett

Soul Music
Terry Pratchett

Raiders of the Lost Carpark
Robert Rankine

The Tale of the Body Thief
Anne Rice

Half Asleep in Frog Pajamas
Tom Robbins

Siege of Darkness
R.A. Salvatore

A Suitable Boy
Vikram Seth

The Ends of the Earth
Lucius Shepard

Stone Diaries
Carol Shields

Last and First Men
Olaf Stapledon

Star Maker
Olaf Stapledon

Heavy Weather
Bruce Sterling

Globalhead
Bruce Sterling

The Iron Dragon's Daughter
Michael Swanwick

Sideshow
Sheri Tepper

The Wolf of Winter
Paula Volsky

The Fallen Moon
Ian Watson

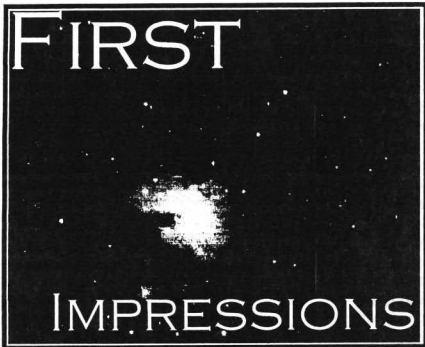
The Skystone
Jack Whyte

Doomsday Book
Connie Willis

A Bridge of Years
Robert Charles Wilson

White Moon, Red Dragon
David Wingrove

Calde of the Long Sun
Gene Wolfe



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Reviews
of
Hardbacks
and
Paperback
Originals
edited by
Paul
Kincaid

Index of books reviewed

Roger MacBride Allen – *Isaac Asimov's Inferno*
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 William Gibson – *Neuromancer*
 Frances Gordon – *Blood Ritual*
 Alasdair Gray – *A History Maker*
 Wendy Haley – *These Fallen Angels*
 Robert Jordan – *Lord of Chaos*
 Jeanne Kalogridis – *Covenant with the Vampire*
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 Jonathan Lethem – *Gun with Occasional Music*
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 Gene Wolfe – *Calde of the Long Sun*

Roger MacBride Allen Isaac Asimov's *Inferno*

Millennium, 1994, 244pp, £14.99
 Reviewed by Simon Bisson

Everyone has heard of Asimov's 'Three Laws of Robotics'. We've seen how he created stories based around paradoxical interpretations of these laws, including a trilogy of intriguing science fiction whodunnits. Now Isaac has passed his torch onto Roger MacBride Allen, through the graces of the Byron Preiss sharecropping factory.

Inferno, part of a planned trilogy, is the sequel to *Caliban* which introduced the eponymous 'No-Law' robot as well as robots that obey a variant of the classic Three Laws, the four New Laws. These depend on co-operative activities, so they give robots more freedom than the Three Laws' imperatives. In the same manner as Asimov's R. Daneel Olivaw/Lije Baley novels, *Inferno* is a who, or perhaps what, dunnit.

The 'Inferno' of the title is a world simmering on the edge of conflict between Settlers, new colonists from Earth, and Spacers, the robot-dependent descendants of the original terraformers. With the planet's terraforming beginning to fail, the scene is set for political

crisis and civil war. *Inferno* explores the cusp: the murder of the planet's Spacer governor. In the ensuing turmoil the finger of suspicion points at Caliban, and Sheriff Alvar Kresh, together with Caliban's designer, must untangle the webs of conspiracy, whilst keeping the fragile peace.

There are a lot of share-cropped novels about, and the Estate of the late Dr Asimov has a lot to answer for – with the *Robot City* and *Robot's In Time* series filling the bookshop shelves. Most writers seem to use these simple pot-boilers as a tool for paying the bills, but Allen has interesting ideas and strong views, and uses them to raise *Inferno* above the general sea of mediocrity. His novel *Orphan of Creation* explored the linked moralities of animal experimentation and human slavery. *Inferno* asks a new question: what responsibilities do we have to slaves we've created? The co-operative nature of the New Laws may be an answer, but they remain chains of a different sort.

Inferno isn't classic SF, but it is decent midlist writing. After his *The Hunted Earth* diptych, Roger MacBride Allen has become a name to watch in the hard SF field,

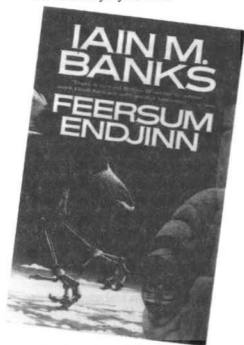
Inferno won't have done his career any harm.

Iain M. Banks

Feersum Endjinn

Orbit, 1994, 279pp, £15.99

Reviewed by Lynne Fox



The first thing to do after reading *Feersum Endjinn* is to read it again, to assemble the experience into a greater/a different coherence, and, of course, to meet Bascule again.

In a sense, this re-reading is necessary because the book is a search for coherence and understanding that is never completely resolved. At least, not for the reader. And this is what gives the book its powerful impact. As in his earlier novel, *The Bridge*, Banks recreates the search experience of the central characters through a neat structuring of the novel and a careful dispensing of information.

To emphasise the structure is to suggest that *Feersum Endjinn* is more immediately comprehensible than it is. My level of understanding most of the way through was about that of Gaston the sloth: "Thers fings goan on ..., thass ol I can sai ... Frankly I dont no xactly whot they r myself, or whethir Id b abl 2 tel u about them

if I did, but as I dont I cant nway, u c?"

There are ten chapters, each of which traces regularly and in order the storylines of the four central characters, except where the plot dictates the occasional interpolation of another viewpoint. This neat structure isn't obvious as you read but provides some necessary linear coherence to a richly complex world.

The separate strands intertwine and move faster as the denouement approaches and characters begin to convene in the same physical locations. The four main characters are Asura, a strange innocent springing fully grown from we know not where; Gadfium, a hard-bitten, devious and determined scientist; Count Sessine, a romantic hero, and Bascule, a young teller. Each of these, unbeknownst to the others, is moving towards the same goal, and each illuminates something of the perplexing world of the novel for the reader.

Initially, these different viewpoints create and add to the extraordinary layering of impressions we have of Serehfa. Banks confuses us with a multiplicity of paradims which in turn seem to explain this strange world as software, virtual reality, medieval battleground, church, doll's house, mirror-world or paradise garden. Each paradigm, like each viewpoint, only illuminates partially. Our perception of the world shifts, is suddenly, startlingly located in the real world by reference to familiar place names, and moves again as we learn about the crypt, where life is lived again. Life after death? A virtual life? Life as information in a computer system? The surfaces shift constantly.

All this is only the beginning of the rich and wonderful confusion. People are people, constructs, animal chimerics; animals talk, are chimerics, are nanotechs. Characters apparently die only to live again in the crypt,

ad return to effect astounding rescues. Death is no longer a once only event ad one of the fancier sequences in the novel tells of the successive immediate deaths of a character. Time runs at different speeds.

In the complex rendering of this amazing world, Banks pulls into service the conventions of many literary genres. At times *Feersum Endjinn* is fable, allegory, swash-buckling adventure, dystopia, comedy, surreal dream. And as the novel resides in no fixed genre, so the reader cannot assume a single appropriate reading. There isn't much stable ground in *Feersum Endjinn*.

Yet there is a fundamental security of vision which permeates the book, and it's of an old and simple variety. In the end, I think, *Feersum Endjinn* works with all the power of a fairy tale. There is hope, valour, courage, kindness. These values win through; and this basic security carries the readers and characters through the confusions of their search. Most of this is realised through the character of Bascule – a triumph of creation.

Bascule is a young character who writes phonetically, a device which is incredibly funny. These passages, though they initially slow the reader, give a wonderful innocence and humour to a character who otherwise might be too good to be true. Bascule is extremely articulate (some of Banks's best writing is in these passages, just see what he has to say in Chapter 3 about the evolution of birds), courageous, honest and loyal. Like a traditional fairy tale hero he is friendly to animals – here ants, sloths, sparrows and lammergeiers – and old people; bravely goes to rescue a friend and performs a heroic deed. Innocent and ignorant, Bascule is a moral touchstone, a source of security in the bewildering wonder of the novel.

So I want to re-read it, to make the journey again with more

information and pick up on more of the puns, jokes and clues which are woven into the dense world of this brilliant novel.

Clive Barker

Everville

HarperCollins, 1994, 640pp.
£15.99

Reviewed by Stephen Payne

There's a scene in *Everville* where one of the protagonists, Joe, having stumbled upon the wonderland of 'Quidity', is cast into its dream sea. Within its depths, he makes love to the dream-realised persona of his lover, Phoebe, as she lies sleeping in her bed in the 'real' world of Everville. This is, I think, the most touching moment in this huge, sprawling novel. Joe, on the run after killing Phoebe's brutal, abusive husband, and Phoebe, stranded in the mundanity of Everville, are cast as the star-crossed lovers, and the looking-glass nature of this book is highlighted so dramatically to the reader. As the convoluted tentacles of the plot twist and turn about these two characters, it is the nature of Barker's imagination that we see so clearly...

Everville is the place where the crossroads between two worlds meet, where all hell (quite literally) is waiting to let loose. The novel starts where it has to start, at the founding of the town a century or so ago, but the founding is surrounded by mystery and lies – the skeletons in the closet are numerous and just waiting to get out. The narrative soon switches to the present day and Barker then sets about introducing his ensemble cast. There's Joe and Phoebe, of course, a gaggle of townspeople celebrating the annual town fair with brass bands and lemonade, a selection of characters from Barker's previous volume in this series *The Great and Secret Show*, a few ghosts and last, but certainly not least, the

baddies. Barker excels at the baddies. He's like a Lovecraft in overdrive when he starts describing the various monsters, demons and associated supernatural creatures that populate this volume. Some are individuals, like the Kissoon, Mr Buddenbaum, King Texas; some are unclassifiable, like the Lix and the Iad. Barker is very particular about his names. And the good guys? Well you may recognize some of them – Tesla, Grillo and D'Amour all make a return visit. Thrown together, they live, love and die for the secret of Everville and its fantastical twin, the dreamland of Quidity.

Everville is a great, throbbing neo-gothic adventure. In it, Barker has created a Chulu mythos for the nineties, a Peyton Place from Hell. As the plot strands entwine to their inevitable conclusion, we can step back and wonder at the extraordinary imagination on display here. For Barker is not a great writer, his talent, confirmed by his paintings, illustrations and movies, is imagination – and that's why we are so entranced by his books.

Robert Crossley Olaf Stapledon: Speaking for the Future

Liverpool, 1994, 474pp, £32.50
Reviewed by Andrew Butler

In an article in *The Times Literary Supplement* in September 1983, Brian Aldiss reviewed Leslie Fiedler's book on Stapledon, noting the irony of it being an American who was first to write at length about the English writer. Aldiss noted: 'the uneventfulness of his [Stapledon's] life' and concluded that: 'It would be appropriate if Olaf Stapledon found his greatest readership in the future.' Another American, Robert Crossley, responded to Aldiss by beginning to research a biography, and a decade on it is

finished, complete with a foreword by Aldiss. Crossley has also edited a collection of Stapledon's letters, a couple of previously unpublished works and written on the relationship between Wells and Stapledon.

At first glance, it is indeed an uneventful life. Born in 1886, in Wallasey, Olaf grew up in the Liverpool area and in Port Said, where his father worked. At fifteen he was sent to a progressive boarding school, Abbotsholme, in Derbyshire, and then went up to Balliol College, Oxford to read history. When he graduated, Stapledon was unable to settle down to a career, and variously worked in his father's shipping company, and taught at Manchester Grammar School and at WEA colleges. He was teaching in North Wales at the outbreak of the First World War and, feeling unwilling to fight and unsure of going to prison for being a conscientious objector, volunteered to work as an ambulance driver in France. It was not until the 1930s that he became involved in the politics of peace, advocating a world government, and attended PEN conferences across Europe, as well as a disastrous gathering in New York in 1949. By then his fiction was already beginning to fall into obscurity, and he died the next year.

As with most biographies, this one treats a fine line between being exhaustive and exhausting. The first one hundred and eighty pages fall into the latter category, as Stapledon struggles to find a voice in (largely unseen) poetry and to choose a suitable career, though the account of his courtship of his Australian first cousin, Agnes Miller, is sketchy at times. We are told: 'Just before he set off for North Wales, Agnes had agreed to marry him (though by mid-August she had changed her mind' (p.124). Why had she agreed? Why did she change her mind? Presumably the answers are in *Talking Across the World*

(1987), a collection of Agnes and Olaf's love letters edited by Crossley, but it would surely bear repeating. Why, on the eve of his American trip, did Stapledon defy geographical sense by giving a lecture in Hull then staying in a Scarborough hotel, before spending the next day in London? The account of the visit to New York deals in much detail with his brush with the FBI and anti-communists, but devotes less than a page to his meeting with the American sf writers of the Hydra Club.

But then Stapledon is never presented as an sf writer in this biography: his interest in astronomy, his friendship with J. B. S. Haldane, his correspondence with Wells the social reformer and his involvement with Arthur C. Clarke and the British Interplanetary Society, yes, but there is no sense of Eric Frank Russell living just down the road, nor of the pulp tradition across the Atlantic. Stapledon chose to write for magazines such as the *London Mercury* and *Scrutiny* rather than *Astounding*. To make an awkward distinction: Olaf produced a literature of philosophy rather than a literature of ideas.

In fact it becomes clear from the biography that it is more helpful to view him rather as a modernist than an sf writer. Whilst Aldiss, in his foreword, claims that: 'Stapledon affected to despise' the Bloomsbury group (p. xiii) (and his earlier review stated he was against them), the reality is more complex. Olaf corresponded with Virginia Woolf, attended meetings with E. M. Forster and defended T. S. Eliot's poetry. It is tempting to read a line in *Odd John* (1935) as autobiographical; after John's attack on the Bloomsbury writers, he tells the narrator: 'You're an outsider. Fate has kept you fluttering safely in the backward North.' It seems fair to suggest that Stapledon would not be a member of any club that would have him as a member. He

was a champion of workers, but not a communist, a philosopher and teacher but not academic, pacifist but not a conscientious objector.

Crossley has done a splendid job of relating these divided attitudes to the work itself. He has drawn the autobiographical parallels in the fiction without falling into the trap of suggesting that Stapledon merely transmuted his life into art. At times he is sceptical, as he is with Stapledon's claim that *Last and First Men* (1930) was inspired by an epiphany whilst watching seals in North Wales in 1928 (pp. 183-4). This clearly jars with Stapledon's stated working methods, and provides an unfeasibly short time span in which to draft two billion years of future history.

But while Crossley's scholarship appears faultless, his execution on occasion leaves something to be desired. There are a few pointless repetitions, such the references to Stapledon's work for the poor of Liverpool (p. 102 and p. 111) and to Katherine Burdekin's pseudonym of Murray Constantine (p. 210 and p. 276). More problematic is Stapledon's friend Lillian Boves-Lyon being twice described as 'cousin of the Queen Mother' (p. 268 and p. 366), which is surely anachronistic prior to 1952. Perhaps these may be due to Crossley's nationality; the continual capitalisation of the North and mentions of Wirral, rather than the Wirral, also read awkwardly. This is probably also at the root of Crossley's decision to begin the biography proper with Stapledon's arrival in the United States. The next three hundred and fifty pages thus lead up to this, although for the first half of these it seems an unlikely event for Stapledon to be involved with.

These are minor carpings, however. Crossley has produced an important piece of scholarship, which deserves to spark the rescue of Stapledon's work from the minor writer label under which he

has languished for so long. Aldiss's comments about the irony of Americans who are interested in this English writer remain valid more than ten years on, but Liverpool University Press are to be praised for bringing this biography to an English readership. It seems likely that *Last and First Men* and *Star Maker's* (1937) status as classics will keep them coming back into print over the decades. But perhaps the Liverpool University Press Science Fiction Texts and Studies could now draw upon the Stapledon Archives in the bowels of their library to produce reprints of equally interesting works such as *Death into Life* (1946) and *Youth and Tomorrow* (1946), plus his unpublished manuscripts. Stapledon's writing, which consistently demonstrates humanity's insignificance in the cosmos, should naturally overshadow the human author himself. But the fact that both writing and author have not faded into obscurity over the last decade is largely due to Crossley's efforts.

David Gemmell Ironhand's Daughter

Legend, 1995, 283pp, £15.99
Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

Ironhand's Daughter is the first part of a new series of novels by David Gemmell under the general title: *The Hawk Queen*.

In this introductory volume, Gemmell presents a Highland kingdom which, some years previously, was defeated and enslaved by the Outlanders. The Outlander baron Ranulph Gotasson now intends to finish the job by invading the Highlands and slaughtering the inhabitants.

The Highland people look back to the days of their greatness, and in particular to Ironhand, their greatest king who, legend says, did not die but passed into another world from where he will return



when his people need him. They live in expectation of the rising of a leader against the Outlanders. Into this situation comes the huntress Sigarni, the last of the bloodline of the Highland kings, who is revealed to have a particularly close connection to Ironhand himself. It will cause no surprise that it is she who emerges, during the course of the book, as the leader for whom her people have been waiting.

Quite a lot of this scenario sounds familiar. The connection with Arthurian legend is made through Ironhand and through Gwalchmai (Sir Gawain allowed to grow old?), a prophet who cared for the young Sigarni. There is also a connection to the historical events in Scotland during and after the '45 Rebellion. Some of the details – like naming the decisive battle 'Colden Moor' and using the phrase 'the King over the Water' – hammer home the point a bit too hard, as if Gemmell hasn't made a full imaginative assimilation of his material.

In general, the lines of good and evil are too sharply drawn, especially since I have come to expect from Gemmell an awareness of moral ambiguity within the conventions of the genre. Certainly there are ambiguities – decent characters, for example, drawn into the evil –

but on the whole the reader is left in doubt where their sympathies should lie.

Another problem is with the character of Sigarni herself. We are continually told how charismatic she is, with men vowing themselves willingly to her service, yet the greatness of her character is never made real. And although there is an obvious point in making the saviour of the Highlanders a woman, Sigarni's attitudes and way of life are so close to the masculine that a lot of this point is lost. However, there are more volumes to come, so there is a lot of scope for the character to develop and it might be only fair to reserve a final judgement.

David Gemmell is a writer I respect and I have enjoyed his earlier books, but I found *Ironhand's Daughter* disappointing. It's readable, and I'll look for the next in the series, but I never really felt involved in it.

William Gibson *Neuromancer*

HarperCollins, 1994, 277pp,
£14.99

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

So this is the book that launched a thousand cyberpunks, that bequeathed the word 'cyberspace' to the language, that turned a first-time novelist hammering at an old-fashioned typewriter into the guru of computer nerds everywhere.

Now, ten years on, here it is again in a 'Special Tenth Anniversary Edition' of 'the most praised Science Fiction novel of the Decade'. One must wonder, cynically, if this new hardback edition hasn't appeared coincidentally at this time because HarperCollins lost out to Viking for Gibson's most recent book, *Virtual Light*? After all, in size, shape and price it is pretty much a

standard hardback, there isn't much that makes it 'Special' beyond a flash on the cover and a woefully short afterword by the author.

Still, it does give us an opportunity to reassess *Neuromancer*. In his brief afterword, Gibson quotes as his favourite description of the book a passage from Bruce Sterling: 'About four hundred separate and various crimes are committed ... Whenever normal people or authority figures show up in the novel they are almost always immediately killed. At the end, the Artificial Intelligence wins, and gets what it wants. The lovers, by contrast, break up.' If this is *Neuromancer* as the author wants to see it, then it is a pretty slick, superficial sort of book. But then, that is exactly what *Neuromancer* is. That amount of crime in what is no more than an average length novel, the way that authority figures are written out almost as soon as they appear, tell us that this is a novel written in a hurry. Gibson himself has said in interviews that whenever the pace flagged he would introduce a new character, or spark off a new incident. Judging from the jagged feel of the novel, the pace flagged about once every two or three pages.

What we are looking at is a book in which any overall shape or plot is subsumed under the dread of boredom, the desperate need to keep things happening. No wonder so many characters are wiped out so rapidly, they are there not because they have any part to play in the structure of the book but because its irresistible momentum demands a new burst of action. There are no still points, no moments of quiet within which the reader can catch her breath or get to know a character. Even the most vivid figures in the book, Case and Molly, are not characters but a melange of reactions and window-dressing (Case the typical burnt-out case rediscovering

himself in his old skill, Molly the efficient killer without a past whose personality is defined by black leather and mirrorshades). By *Mona Lisa Overdrive* Gibson had slowed the action down to give us a sense of something outside the pages (but also to reveal a creakiness in the action); *Virtual Light* is, all round, better plotted, better characterised and better written (though hampered by a much weaker plot device). When you get right down to it, *Neuromancer* isn't really terribly good: so why is it the one work of science fiction that stands out from the 1980s?

In part it was because the book was written in such a hurried way. It is a helter-skelter of incident, a breathless rush that feels like it is carrying you away on the sort of wild adventure that sf hadn't actually delivered for many years. In this sort of book the faults deliver more than the qualities would have done. The jump cuts and surreal virtual experiences, in reality a sign of failure of nerve or lack of technique on the part of the author, actually read like a new way of storytelling for a new sort of world. And the timing was perfect. As late as the 1970s the overwhelming philosophy of the computer world was that computers belonged in places of work, so when John Brunner, for instance, introduced notions of linked computers and viruses in *The Shockwave Rider*, it was a world that didn't really impinge on his readers beyond the pages of the book. By 1984, on the other hand, computers were finding their way into homes as something other than sophisticated toys. *Neuromancer* took us into a world we could begin to feel at our fingertips. The glamour of characters like Case and Molly was that they were the sort of competent action-heroes in the sort of mean streets we had read about in Chandler and Hammet, and we could get to be that way through

the computer screen in our own home.

Neuromancer was the outstanding sf novel of the 1980s not because it was the best (there were many better books) but it was one of the most exciting. In the underworld and *Sprawl* it gave us a glimpse of a decayed urban landscape we thought we knew, and in cyberspace it gave us a glimpse of escape. And because it moved so fast, because at the end of the book we actually know nothing about these worlds, they can be whatever we want them to be. In a very real sense, *Neuromancer* allowed us to dream; in a very real sense, *Neuromancer* was a dream.

Frances Gordon

Blood Ritual

Headline, 1994, 340pp, £16.99

Wendy Haley

These Fallen Angels

Headline, 1994, 250pp, £16.99

Jeanne Kalogridis

Covenant with the

Vampire

Headline, 1994, 244pp, £16.99

Reviewed by Tanya Brown

It may be coincidence that Headline are publishing three new vampire novels, all by female authors, just as the film of Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* is released. It's neither fair nor accurate, however, to dismiss them as pale Anne Rice imitations.

Covenant with the Vampire is set in 1845, a prequel to *Dracula*. It opens as Arkady Tepesh and his sensible, pregnant English wife Mary return to his family's sprawling castle, set in acres of gloomy forest in the heart of beautiful unspoilt Transylvania. It is (of course) a dark and stormy night, and the journey – necessitated by the death of Arkady's father – has been long and tiring. The first person Arkady sees is his brother – who died

horribly as a child – pointing ominously into the forest. A lesser man would run screaming; but Arkady has cast off the superstitious beliefs of his childhood for a healthy Victorian rationalism, and attributes the 'hallucination' to 'the stress of travel': 'I am a modern man who puts his hope in science rather than in God or the Devil'. As the novel progresses, however, his naivete begins to seem like blind stupidity – especially when contrasted to Mary's growing fears, confided only to her diary (*Covenant with the Vampire* is composed of extracts from the journals of pragmatic Arkady, sensible Mary and Arkady's sister Zsuzsanna, who is mad). Arkady's fears are still those of a rationalist: that the police won't believe him when he reports a servant's disappearance, that the peasants are abusing Uncle Vlad's good nature, that a guest has accidentally fallen from a high window. Only when he begins to recall some of his repressed childhood memories does he realise the horror of his situation.

This is the first in a projected trilogy by Jeanne Kalogridis, a 'bestselling American author whose work, published under a pseudonym, has been translated into seventeen languages'. Any guesses? Here's a clue: I don't think it's Anne Rice. Despite a blurb which promises an 'erotic, stylish and page-turningly terrifying' novel, *Covenant* is less bloody and sensual by far than Rice's novels. (Granted there's a certain amount of biting and sucking, as has come to be *de rigueur* in vampire novels, but it takes more than that to make an erotic novel). Kalogridis's style is (deliberately) more reminiscent of Bram Stoker's as she charts the gradual descent of Arkady Tepesh from man of reason to supernatural creature.

In contrast to Kalogridis's measured pace and antique style, Wendy Haley's *These Fallen*

Angels reads like a thriller. The sequel to *This Dark Paradise*, it is set in contemporary Georgia, USA, where a vampire has suddenly appeared to stalk the mean, hot streets. Alex Danilov, the thousand-year-old hero, knows only that it isn't him; but he has no idea that the gorgeous and black-hearted Lydia, trapped inside one of her own witchy crystals since the end of the last book, is on the loose again. Meanwhile Alex's young nephew Justin just wants to settle down, marry his pregnant girlfriend and live a normal life, unfortunately his mother, who has been gallivanting in Europe for nearly a year, has other plans.

Alex, surrounded by women (live, dead and undead), has to extract himself and those he holds dear from a bewildering mess of occult events and attempt to maintain his own sanity. *These Fallen Angels* is very obviously a sequel: the repeated references to the mysterious 'events of a year before' do nothing to advance the plot, though they might increase sales of the previous book as the perplexed reader tries to make some sense of the characters' motivations. Alex is fascinating, but we learn little of his past, and his behaviour seems rather foolish for a man (or vampire) who has had a thousand years to learn from his mistakes. Surrounded by women, he is almost entirely at their mercy in one way or another – which makes for a sensuous novel, if not exactly a compelling read.

Like Jeanne Kalogridis, Frances Gordon is best-known for her work under another name. Fantasy fans will recognise the cheery gruesomeness that distinguishes Bridget Wood's Celtic novels, beginning with *Wolfking*. *Blood Ritual* demonstrates that she can write contemporary horror at least as well as dark fantasy. Michael Devlin, a journalist who lost his sight while investigating the fate

of Bosnian refugees, travels to a Viennese clinic with Sister Hilary from the convent where he has been nursed as far back to health as is feasible. With them is Sister Catherine, returning to her family home to visit her beloved brother, who is dying. Or so she believes.

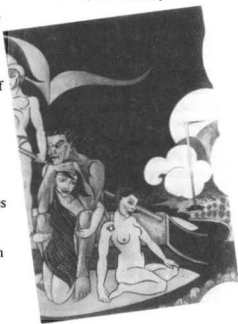
Michael and Hilary travel to the Romanian borders in search of the organisation Tranz, which offers sanctuary to the dispossessed. Michael learns of Nazi atrocities committed within CrnPrag, the Tranz stronghold, and begins to formulate his own theories about the missing refugees – until Hilary visits CrnPrag and escapes with tales of something much older, much darker and with a great thirst for blood.

Meanwhile Catherine has been lured back to the familial bosom in order to accept the heritage she has been attempting to exorcise – that of her famous ancestress, Elizabeth Bathory, who had a taste for the blood of young girls. It's a taste that lingers in her descendants, although without the sexual element which Elizabeth enjoyed so much. Back in London, the nuns of St. Luke's are beginning to discover some unpalatable truths about Tranz, and about Sister Catherine – truths the family cannot allow to be rediscovered.

This is the goriest of the three novels, and the most sensual; Gordon concentrates on the perverse sensuality of blood, rather than simply exploring the sexuality of vampires – or humans. Elizabeth's descendants aren't strictly vampires; they have a complex relationship with blood, rather than the simple physical addiction of the more traditional vampire. A complex and mature novel; of the three, it's closest to the timbre of Anne Rice's work, but with a style and tone which are refreshingly original.

Alasdair Gray A History Maker

Canongate, 1994, 224pp, £13.99
Reviewed by K.V. Bailey



It is an ambitious novel that subsumes or implies a world history within its compass. David Wingrove does it on a global stage over eight volumes; Alasdair Gray interpretatively attempts it in little more than 200 pages, his stage the shores of a small loch (Saint Mary's Loch) in the Ettrick Forest, his point of perception the twenty third century. I say 'interpretatively' because, although he has produced a roystering and often Rabelaisian funny yarn of battle and its aftermath, of rivalry, domesticity and seduction, an underlying aim is to provide a speculative gloss on the way the world has gone and the way it might go. In a style pitched between the mock-heroic and the intimate, he follows the working out of certain socio-economic possibilities. This is made clear at the outset in a long epigraph, in the style of a spoof future encyclopedia, which traces the change in meaning of the word 'economics' from the ancient Greek – the art of domestic housekeeping (directly to meet the householder's needs) – to the political use of it by British

governments to mean 'the art of keeping their bankers, brokers and rich supporters supplied with money'. A further emphasis is present in the acknowledgement of indebtedness to Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa*, her field study of a 'kindlier society'.

The structure of the novel is intriguing. The main narrative is an autobiographical printout composed by Wat Dryhope but written in the third person and put by him into the care of his mother, Kate. Kate adds the Prologue and Postscript, and also the 'Notes and Glossary Explaining Obscurities', a quarter of the text. In part this elucidates lowland Scottish words and phrases 'liable to ramfeezle Sassenachs', in part it explains 'what those who ken little of the past may find bumbazing'. These Notes carry a strong authorial ideological burden, though they are given legitimate fictive context by Kate's remark that, for posterity's sake, although the notes are about (her) immediate present, they 'are put into the past tense, since the present soon will be'. We, the readers, of course, are only experiencing the author's purely imaginary future while recognising that its foundations lie in his, and our, real present and common past, which gives a distinctly metafictional flavour to the novel. I do recommend attention to those Notes, they are not crude infodump but are integral to the work.

The world they present, the perspective they offer, is defined, in a long analysis of successive ideologies and historiographies, as 'Modern', which succeeds the 'Marxist' and the 'Postmodern'. This future Modern period is one in which 'the open intelligence network and powerplants made cities, nations, money and industrial powers obsolete'. The story's microcosm of this is the Ettrick community, sustained by its 'powerplant', a universal conucopia for food and every kind of raw material and synthesised

product. Ettrick women, as well as being 'housemothers', are musicians, sculptors and the like; some of the men, on the other hand, may be artists, gurus, teachers or planetary seeders, but others are completely engrossed in war games which produce mendable casualties, even fatalities, but which inherit something of the energy and aggression-sublimating nature of team sports.

The book opens on the third day of a set battle between Ettrick and Northumbria United which will determine possession of an iconic standard. Ettrick face certain defeat until a cheating stratagem carried out by the chief protagonist, Wat Dryhope, occasions a massacre but saves the standard. Wat himself believes the stratagem was a foul, but when it is unexpectedly approved by the UEFA-like Geneva regulators he finds himself unwillingly hailed as a hero. This in turn sets off a wave of world-infecting militarism (linked semi-metaphorically to a transmissible virus) with Dryhope as its vector, his machoism fostered by a cybernetically sophisticated seductress who designs to bring down the rustic, peaceful status quo. But Dryhope is a divided man, guilt-ridden, both lustful and an ambivalent misogynist. He becomes torn between the reactionary pull of war games escalating towards a recrudescent nationalism and, at the other extreme, the way of the 'Henwife' who even eschews the powerplant and can survive its impairment.

There is a brilliant climax as the standard is restored and opposed choices become a matter for decision. Which wins? There follows a resolving postscript, the details of which I'll leave obscure save to say that Gray (in the voice of Kate Dryhope) manages to expunge discordant elements from his 'utopia' and at the same time to reflect a nostalgia for the anti-conformist and to cast a last

glance at a third way of life common to this future world – that of the 'gangrel', the archetypal gypsy or traveller.

Finally, a word of commendation for the interspersed thematic designs: witty, effective in their repetition and perfectly placed.

Robert Jordan

Lord of Chaos

Orbit, 1994, 901pp, £16.99

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

The books get bigger and bigger. Jordan's sixth book in the Wheel of Time series, *Lord of Chaos*, takes the whole story past the 4000 page mark so far.

Continuing on from the end of book five, Rand al'Thor, The Dragon Reborn, struggles on with his task of uniting the nations in preparation for the Last Battle at which, it is foretold, he will be both hero and anti-hero. His mastery of the One Power continues apace, as do his struggles against the madness said to take all men who can channel it. The voice of Lews Therin, called Kinslayer for his part in the near total destruction of the world at the last Last Battle thousands of years before, continues to try and take control of Rand's thoughts and actions in an attempt to get it right second time around.

Both factions of the divided Aes Sedai, women who can channel the One Power (without risk of going mad of course), start sending their envoys to Rand. But it seems they only seek to control him, these tricky people are not to be trusted and stubborn old Rand wouldn't trust them anyway even if they could be – they are women after all, a completely incomprehensible and alien race.

Nynaeve and Elayne learn, during a visit to the dream world of Tel'aran'rhod, of a ter'angreal (a magical remnant from the past) that can revert the abnormal

weather pattern of increasing and excruciating heat, drought and famine, back to its more normal pattern. An unexpected promotion to Aes Sedai proper enables them to plot their way to the city of Ebou Dar in search of it.

Egwene continues her education with the Wise Ones of the Aiel until she receives a summons to return to Salidar, temporary home of her faction of the sundered Aes Sedai White Tower. Instead of the punishment she expects to receive for masquerading as Aes Sedai whilst still only a novice, she is raised to a position beyond her grandest expectations.

Perin Aybara, conspicuous for his absence in book five, returns with a vengeance – leading the legendary women of the Two Rivers to war for the first time in a thousand years, whilst Matt Caughen (the third of the original three friends from the Two Rivers) continues his struggle against involvement in all the madness, becoming the greatest general the world has ever known in the process.

This vast, sprawling tale has finally, to my mind, gained a sense of direction. Although it has been clear since Book One that the end result will be the Last Battle, Jordan has never really convinced me that he knew how to get the tale there. So many threads, so many plots, subplots and deceptions, seemed to constantly keep the story running parallel to, rather than heading towards a desired finale. I don't really know how Jordan has kept hold of all this, but he is pulling it all together now, and grippingly so. For some reason, although still there in plenty, the irritating interactions between the male and female characters in previous volumes no longer seem to annoy or distract the reader from what's going on. Could it be that that the sexes are learning to understand each other after six chunky volumes? Not at all, Jordan just

seems to be making much less of this than he has in the past, although truth to tell, I think his characters are too busy to have time to constantly debate such mundane things.

It may be because we are getting near to the end of the series that the tale seems to have developed a sense of urgency. It's getting grittier, and the threats and dangers to the various characters are taking a more believably serious turn. *Lord of Chaos* is an absolute page-turner that begins to reward those with dedication enough to have followed the series so far. I await the next book eagerly, and will even forgive Jordan if he joins that elite band of fantasy authors with verbal diarrhoea who break the thousand-page barrier, but only on one condition – that it is the last in the series and that he brings it all to a satisfactory conclusion. (O.K. So that's two conditions, but who's counting?)

Richard Layman *Quake*

Headline, 1995, 375pp, £16.99
Reviewed by Stephen Payne

Earthquakes are a messy business. Take the Banner family. When the earthquake hits (as they say), Clint Banner is caught at work narrowly avoiding the tumbling walls of his office. Sheila Banner, his wife, is trapped in the bathtub as her house crashes down around her. And Barbara, their daughter, is out taking a driving lesson. The 'quake' erupts on page 7 and the remainder of the book recounts the trials and tribulations of these three characters through the aftermath and on to their final reconciliation.

For Clint and Barbara this is a story of adventure and barbarism as they make their way home across the remains of L.A. For Sheila it is a story of survival as, yes, you guessed it, she lives next

door to the neighbourhood psycho – and we all know what psychos like to do. (If you're in any doubt, *Quake* is most instructive on this point). It's all here; sex, violence and even a little love, albeit between the two teenage stars (perhaps reflecting the novels intended market).

Set in disaster-torn LA and peopled with all those weirdoes so beloved of low-budget American horror movies, it's like a contemporary *Lord of the Flies* – but without the subtext to drag it down. Layman displays a pretty crude, pessimistic view of the world: the rule of law is the only thing that keeps the lid on society. If we don't have a criminal justice system and a police force and, most of all, a government to structure and order our lives; if all this were wiped away by a disaster of some kind (say, an earthquake), then society would just fall apart. We would all disintegrate into the muggers, murderers and rapists that lie at the heart of us all. Don't you believe it.

Tanith Lee *A Heroine of the World*

Headline, 1994, 375pp, £16.99
Reviewed by Andy Mills

This novel was first published in the United States in 1989. Why it has taken five years to see the light of day in Britain, goodness only knows. It is a marvellous book: rich, poetic, romantic. The only reason I can think of for the delay in publication is that it falls awkwardly between genre categories. Set in imaginary lands, it is a fantasy, but if Lee had chosen eighteenth century Europe as her locale, it could more easily be termed a historical romance. But never mind the nomenclature, feel the quality.

A Heroine of the World is the story of Aradia. When we first meet her she is thirteen years old, and a young thirteen at that. By the time the book ends she is

seventeen, an old seventeen, a woman whose life has been turned upside down and inside out. At the beginning, in a society which seems to be middle-European salted with a touch of ancient Rome, Aradia's father and mother go off to war. It's an adventure to them, it seems; meanwhile they leave their child in the care of her cold aunt. The aunt isn't interested in Aradia, nor Aradia in her; the girl keeps to her room. But events take a further turn for the worst when the war against Kronia goes wrong. Aradia becomes an orphan, the aunt dies, and the house becomes a billet for a Kronian general who likes his girls young. When the occupying army is forced to quit the City, he takes Aradia with him. The retreat becomes a rout as the Kronian army battles not only its enemies but also the weather.

Aradia loses not only her country but her name (Ara, Aara, Ayaira – she is redefined as her circumstances change) and her language. It is the start of a series of adventures – physical, political and spiritual – from which she learns and grows. Desired by some, hated by others, she becomes a survivor. And the ending of this rollercoaster ride is as dramatic a cliffhanger as you could ask for ...

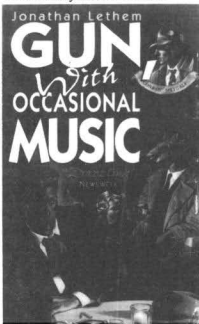
So – this is a rite of passage. It is also a story told by an artist, for Lee is just that. She paints her pictures in prose, and tells her tale in a rich, evocative language which brings every scene to life: the horrors of a starvation march through snow contrasted, later, with the pleasure of seeing a fertile land in bloom. Lee's characters too are, for the most part, ambiguous: if Aradia is a heroine, the men with whom she engages are not heroes; even her love, Thenser, her only link to her childhood, is as much sinner as sinned against. As with Aradia, he is shaped by fate and struggles to make sense of the world, but in a much different way. Whether fantasy or romance,

Tanith Lee has created a superb book which thoroughly deserves your time.

Jonathan Lethem Gun with Occasional Music

NEL, 1995, 262pp, £4.99

Reviewed by Mark Plummer



A novel like this really had to be published as a paperback original; it just wouldn't look right as a hardcover. The cover has been designed to make the edges look tatty, even while the book remains pristine – a wonderful piece of pulp imagery by a (regrettably) uncredited artist.

Jonathan Lethem's first novel fuses two genres: science fiction and detective story. This is hardly a novelty, as Robert K.J. Killheffer points out in *Fantasy and Science Fiction* (December 1994): the genres share a common origin in the pulp magazines, and a founding father in Edgar Allan Poe. Here the detective element is conventional. A private investigator, Conrad Metcalf, works out of a run-down office suite shared with a dentist. He has been engaged on a domestic surveillance matter by Maynard Stanhunt, to check out the activities of Stanhunt's wife. But Stanhunt expects a bit more than some routine spying and when

Metcalf refuses to deliver he's fired. Then Stanhunt turns up dead.

The main suspect approaches Metcalf in desperation to help him clear his name, and the investigator sets out to discover the truth behind the crime, despite the fact that several other parties seem determined to keep him out of the affair. This is all traditional hard-boiled stuff, delivered in an impressive noir tone.

However, this conventional crime story plot is set in a bleak future world where everybody snorts their own blend of 'make', a powdered drug containing a combination of ingredients such as Forgettol, Acceptol, Regrettol, but always with Addictol, mixed to the desired proportions of the user. It is a world full of genetically evolved animals, so when Metcalf says 'I pulled over to the curb and bought an evening edition of the Oakland Photographic from a crabby old goat working a news-stand' it's not entirely clear whether he's speaking metaphorically. Metcalf himself is more accurately a private inquisitor, licensed to ask questions by his former employers, The Inquisitor's Office, who are not too keen on his activities and who are possibly involved in the conspiracy behind Stanhunt's murder. The inhabitants of this society carry Karmic Cards, displaying the owner's current karmic level, which can be electronically docked by the Inquisitor's Office for real or perceived infringements. Metcalf's level is getting pretty low, and when your karma drops to zero...

It's probably not giving anything away to say that Metcalf manages to bring the whole affair to a tidy resolution in best detective story fashion, yet the science fictional elements are central and don't just provide a colourful backdrop. This is an impressive debut, humorous in places and unashamed of its pulp

roots, yet with a gritty modern feel.

Michael Moorcock Blood

Millennium, 1995, 247pp, £15.99, pb £9.99

Reviewed by Steve Jeffrey

Quite what Moorcock is up to in this novel, subtitled *A Southern Fantasy*, remains something of a mystery. It is, essentially, a fix-up novel, comprising parts of Moorcock's named and pseudonymous contributions to the Dave Garnett incarnation of *New Worlds*. The first eleven chapters are, indeed, almost wholly lifted from the short story 'Colour' in *New Worlds 1*. This first section introduces a select band of jugaderos, high rolling gamblers and players in a complex game of skill and chance. In this world 'colour', a tapping into the fabric of the Universe itself, has been mined for its promise of infinite energy, but it has broken out, releasing chaos across the landscape. As a result, technology fails, transport and communications are thrown back to an age of giant riverboats, paddle steamers that travel the Mississippi from New Orleans to Memphis. It is only at the gamblers' haven of the Terminal Cafe, sited on the chaotic waw of the original Biloxi Fault, that electricity still functions in the glare of neon lights and the electrok bands that play the club. There is a second thread to 'colour'. In this collapsed world, the despised 'whiteys' are now the servant class. The jugadors, Jack Karaquazian, Colinda Dovero and Sam Oakenhurst are the new aristocracy. The games they play at the Terminal Cafe involve the creation and manipulation of entire virtual worlds, charged somehow by the intense possibilities from the Fault. On an expedition upriver with Jack,

Colinda discovers, and disappears into, a patch of almost pure colour. But Jack is unready; he holds back from following, and thus loses her. Later, with Sam and Rose von Bek, and with the aid of the semi-human machinoid Sam is involved with, Jack resolves to go in search of his lost love. At this point the novel veers alarmingly into a second section that appeared in *New Worlds* as the rather silly space opera/comic 'Corsairs of the Second Ether', by Warwick Colvin Jnr. This is almost incomprehensible in its confusing cast of characters and races, striplings, skimplings, swiplings and humes, all engaged in a baffling exotic quest between the forces of Chaos and Singularity for the Lost Universe of Ko-O-Ko. Or something. I really couldn't make very much out of this mish-mash of names and alliances at all. But, we are invited to believe, this cartoon world of Captains Billy-Bob Begg, Horace Quelch and Pearl Peru, is somehow linked to the game the jugadors play for such high stakes. To the extent that, as Moorcock tries to weld these disparate and seemingly incompatible plot lines together, the various players are obliged to enter their own game and take on the personae of the champions of Chaos and Singularity to complete the game. It's the old Entropy Tango over again, with Chaos and Order in the new (and rather unconvincing) dressing of fractal geometries and chaos theory, with the Mandelbrot Set as an infinite board game. At this point it all got very silly, with Moorcock tracking the game as a series of moves, counters and eventual sacrifice that resolve the game in Cosmic Balance. It smacks a little of *Through the Looking Glass* or *Jeff Noon's Vurt*, but without the saving humour or the familiarity of the rules and structure. Or, if it had either, then I'm afraid it all went rather beyond me. There are, apparently, to be two further volumes to this tale, *Fabulous*

Harbours and War Among the Angels. But, to be honest, I'm not really tempted to pursue it.

Melanie Rawn Skybowl

Macmillan, 1995, 672pp, £15.99

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

Skybowl is the third and final volume in the *Dragon Star* trilogy which follows on from Rawn's hugely popular *Dragon Prince* trilogy. Generations of peace, interrupted only by sporadic political machinations and attempted take-over bids by renegade sorcerers, has finally been shattered by a barbarian race from across the ocean: a dark force bent on revenge and total conquest. The invading Vellant'im army is massing for the final push that will utterly defeat the people of the Desert. High Prince Pol struggles to find a way of beating the invaders, while rescuing his wife, the High Princess Meiglan, who is a prisoner of the Vellant'im's High Warlord.

As if Pol hasn't got enough problems, he also has to find a way of enlisting the aid of Andry, Lord of Goddess Keep and Lord of the Sunrunners, for only their combined powers hold any hope of victory. Andry proves to be the most difficult obstacle. Although on the same side as Pol, Andry's 'new broom' approach to decades of Sunrunner tradition and law means that the Sunrunners can no longer be counted on for support without 'strings'. Andry has embarked on a crusade to eradicate all Sorcerers, the ancient enemy of the Sunrunners, and has found a way to justify using Sunrunning to kill them: Sunrunner Golden Rule number 1 – thou shalt not kill using Sunrunning! Pol, by a convoluted and cruel set of circumstances explained in the *Dragon Prince* trilogy, is a Sorcerer as well as a Sunrunner. This is known only to a very select

group of trusted family and friends and is not even fully understood by Pol himself at this stage. It is Pol's powers as a Sorcerer/Sunrunner as well as Andry's powers of Sunrunning that are needed to combine in order to defeat the Vellant'im.

At the start of *Skybowl* is a summary of the first two books in this trilogy, *Stronghold* and *Dragon Token*. This is in the form of a list of casualties, who died, how and where. Not having read the previous two volumes, but having read the Dragon Prince trilogy, I chose not to read this first in case it gave too much away. I'm still not sure whether or not this was a mistake. I thought Rawn's constant updates on who is related to whom would help me to keep track, but I forgot to allow for the amazing fecundity of her female characters. References to people who died, whom I didn't even know had been born, were often confusing, but frequently gave Rawn an excuse to indulge in an obvious passion of hers – the family tree! This passion reached orgasmic proportions at one point when a spirit trapped in a sorcerous mirror turns out to be the perfect opportunity to attach names down the full length of a Giant Redwood.

Despite the huge list of characters in all of Rawn's books and the seeming plot device of 'I'll need another few characters soon so someone should have some more kids', she weaves an engaging tale of war, passion and politics. *Skybowl* is a page-turner. The tale is made complex by all the little family sub-plots, but Rawn never loses her grip on all these strands and brings them all together for an interesting and somewhat surprising end. I shall go back and read the other two volumes sometime because, although I think this book stands alone well enough, I'd like to know more of the whole.

Ed Regis Nano!

Bantam Press, 1995, 307pp.
£16.99

Reviewed by Simon Bisson

We're all familiar with the machines that both make up and manufacture our 20th century world. The engines of industry are large and visible. Now take a step into tomorrow, where a box in the corner of the room provides all your daily needs. Tomorrow's engines of creation are going to be so small as to be invisible: the nanotechnological dreams of the young American scientist K. Eric Drexler. Nanotechnology is the science of molecular machines: molecules moulded into devices that can manipulate individual atoms. If Drexler is to be believed, nanotechnology promises a future of unlimited plenty and almost eternal life. His is a possible future that could exceed the boundaries of even the wildest science fictional speculations.

Ed Regis is a science writer fascinated by the fringes of science and technology. His previous book, *Great Mambo Chicken And The Transhuman Condition*, was a voyage through the wilder Californian extremes of science – from cryogenically frozen heads to the strange edges of advanced robotics. With *Nano!* Regis is focusing in, pointing his journalistic microscope at the developing science of molecular nanotechnology. Like his fellow science journalist James Gleick, Regis uses the tool of biography to explore the history of a science. In the acclaimed *Genius* Gleick used Richard Feynman's life to illustrate the development of quantum electro-dynamics, with *Nano!* Regis explores the short history of nanotechnology in tandem with the life of its prophet and theorist, Drexler, from his early days as part of Gerard O'Neill's space study group, to his

testimony before a US senate commission.

In this exploration of the young scientist's motivations (Drexler is not yet 40), Regis returns again and again to the Club of Rome's pessimistic futurological study *The Limits To Growth*. Here is the heart of Drexler's dreams – a desire to save the world from stasis and decay. But nanotechnology isn't an instant techno-fix, and Regis isn't afraid to show the dangers of the technology, amongst them the possibility of a world eating swarm of rogue nanomachines.

The controversial nature of nanotechnology means that Drexler has many vocal critics across many different fields, and *Nano!* is happy to look at their ideas as well as Drexler's supporters. As there are many physical obstacles to the development of nanomachines and Regis uses the criticisms to plead for more research into the problems and their possible solutions. Drexler's conflicts with heterodox science make interesting reading, and their resolutions and explanations cast light onto the mechanisms that drive the physical sciences. Of course no modern day work of scientific journalism, especially one dealing with the physical sciences, can escape the obligatory reference to Richard Feynman. In *Nano!*, however, Feynman's place is deserved: in a nine-days wonder speech in the 1950s Feynman challenged scientists to think about constructing atomic scale devices. Twenty years later, that speech encouraged Drexler to publish his early nanotechnology speculations.

Regis's *Nano!* is an entertaining look at the development of what could be a truly revolutionary science, one that has inspired many recent works of sf by authors spanning the alphabet from Poul Anderson to George Zebrowski. This book is a worthy overview of a complex

topic, giving a solid grounding in the scientific background of nanotechnology, and the interested reader can then take the next step into Drexler's own works: the polemical *The Engines Of Creation* and his textbook of molecular nanotechnology, *Nanosystems*.

Robert Silverberg Beyond the Safe Zone

HarperCollins, 1994, 605pp, £6.99

Reviewed by Benedict Cullum

The third volume in Silverberg's 'Collected Stories', this collection ostensibly covers the period 1968 to 1974, when, after completing the novel *Shadrach in the Furnace*, he stopped writing sf until his return to the genre with *Lord Valentine's Castle* in 1980.

Despite the period covered, however, 14 of the 26 stories included here are from 1972-73. Already known for his recurrent themes of millennial madnes and/or alienation, it is probably unwise to attribute the disenchanting tone of some of these tales exclusively to Silverberg's then markedly negative feelings towards sf. It was during this period, however, that he produced the highly regarded novel *Dying Inside* about a telepath gradually losing his gift ...

The candid notes which introduce each story are of interest, and they positively shine when compared to the more self-serving offerings of his fellow highly-anthologised-multi-award-winning-but-troubled writer, Harlan Ellison. The period of the collection covers the New Wave and, classing certain of his works as 'fragmentary and elliptical', Silverberg does not seek to disassociate himself from that movement. For this reader, though, the nonlinear stories such as 'Breckenridge and the Continuum', 'The Science Fiction Hall of Fame' and 'Schwartz

Between the Galaxies' are among the least successful in the volume. I often feel that 'experimental' fiction is more for the writer than the reader and rather resent having it forced upon me.

High points, on the other hand, include 'In Entropy's Jaws', an assured tale of time/reality breakdown caused by lightspeed space travel and 'This is the Road' which tells of a spiritual journey, both literal and metaphorical. I also enjoyed the humorous 'The Dybbuk of Mazel Tov IV'; Silverberg has a dry, ironic touch that can be most effective. Notable omissions of much anthologised stories from both the beginning and the end of this period include 'Passengers' and 'Born with the Dead'.

Having read half a dozen of his novels I know that Silverberg is a versatile and highly accomplished writer. At this point in his career, though, he was writing almost entirely on commission, and his notes indicate that he found it hard going. For those particularly interested in Silverberg's work – or in the art of writing generally – this is a worthwhile collection. But the first two volumes in this series, when Silverberg was ploughing a more fertile furrow, might prove an easier read.

Dan Simmons

Fires of Eden

Headline, 1994, 375pp, £16.99

Reviewed by Chris Amies

The versatile Simmons, author of *Hyperion* and *Carrion Comfort*, is in full horror mode in his latest novel. Byron Trumbo, American millionaire and full-time degenerate, has built an expensive resort between the volcanoes of Kilauea and Mauna Loa on Hawaii. One or other of these volcanoes is generally active at any given time; but not since 1868, we are informed solemnly,

have they both blown. So, as you might expect, they do. There is, however, a lot more to it than that. For the Mauna Pele resort is built on the site of ancient Hawaiian fishponds and a petroglyph (rock-carving) field, a place sacred to the volcano goddess Pele. It is, as one of the characters points out, the old hotel-built-on-an-Indian-burial ground story. By the time the story opens, six people have vanished mysteriously, body parts turn up on the golf course, and the guests are staying away in droves.

To this island come two travellers, both American women. The first is Eleanor Perry, a history teacher following the trail of her Aunt who, in the previous century, travelled to Hawaii in the company of Samuel Langhorne Clements, better known as Mark Twain. Aunt Kidder's diary is Eleanor's guide. The second is Cordie Stumpf, who won an all-expenses-paid trip to the Mauna Pele and doesn't see why a few disappearances and the owner's general obnoxiousness should put her off her holiday.

The disappearances build up. A man vanishes from his office through a blood-spattered crack in the wall. A giant dog with human teeth appears on the petroglyph field with a human hand in its mouth. A weird figure, half-shark, half-man, attacks a child in the sea. The gods and demons of ancestral Hawaii are awake, and are they pissed off. Woken from their slumber, Pele the volcano goddess and Kamapua'a the hog-god resume their ancient fight, though since Kamapua'a raped Pele centuries before, the fight is no longer in balance.

Kamapua'a has a control over Hawaii which is aided by the rapacity of the haoles (foreigners) to obliterate the old ways. 'You and I are alike,' he tells Trumbo. 'We were born to dominate. Born to subdue.' So it is hardly surprising that the hog-god (who appears as a gigantic pig with

sharp teeth and eight eyes) offers to do a deal with Trumbo; and almost surprising when the billionaire contemptuously refuses.

Sometimes the research tends to overwhelm the narrative. Simmons never wastes research and will probably get a few more stories out of his Hawaiian studies ('once having found such a rich vein, had no intention of not mining it to death', as he has Clemens say). The vast amount of Hawaiian vocabulary, names of gods and spirits, quotes from ancestral chants, and long descriptions of the mechanisms of volcanic action, do tend to pump up the word count. We don't need to know the temperature of lava or the commonly-repeated factoid that Mauna Loa is actually the highest mountain on Earth (32,000 feet, but most of it is under water). The cultural references however are another matter. Because it is a society which is both real and very little known in the West, a lot of explanation and description does seem necessary, though perhaps not quite as much as we get: we are told the difference between the levels of supernatural creatures (gods, demons, elementals, ghosts, and spirits) that the Hawaiians believed in, but this information is never really relevant to the story. Paul Kukali, curator of Trumbo's personal collection of Polynesian artefacts, spends a lot of time conveniently describing Hawaiian history and culture to the two haole women. He doesn't even get to save the day in the end (as the incautious reader might expect).

Aunt Kidder's diary is instrumental in finding a solution to the events racking the island, but also the story of Aunt Kidder and Sam Clements provides an almost light relief from the main story, a glimpse into an apparently gentler time when the Pacific was practically devoid of foreign exploitation, though far from an unmitigated paradise: in Hawaii,

as elsewhere in Oceania, there was a heavily stratified society where despotic kings ruled with the assistance of secret societies sworn to the worship of one or other of the many gods. The missionaries had already started their crusade to wipe out the old ways, some of which were barbaric, while others were better than anything that replaced them.

This is partly a fable of male dominance over the world, and partly of its corollary, the unremitting Americanisation of Hawaii. At first the deaths and disappearances are attributed to Hawaiian separatists, whose representative, the giant Jimmy Kalekili, makes a convenient suspect. The Hawaiian separatists are no figment of Simmons's imagination; they see no reason why their country, which is nowhere near the United States, should be part of the USA. The supernatural aspects are, however, unambiguous. There are ancient spirits awake and ravaging the land; Pele and Kamapua'a are about to resume their battle for the control of Hawaii. The kahuna who raised the ancient spirits have restarted the war in the underworld of Milu, the shadowy place where the souls of the dead are kept. Fires of Eden is about interference: with nature, with the gods (whatever they may represent), and with native cultures. And about, in the end, redemption.

Alison Sinclair

Legacies

Millennium, 1995, 330pp, £16.99

Reviewed by Gary Dalkin

Alison Sinclair's first novel is a tale of two worlds: even-numbered chapters set on Taridwyn, odd-numbered chapters occurring, seven years later, on Burdania.

A small colony of Burdanians – aliens as near human as makes no difference – survive on

Taridwyn, guilt-racked that the 'chaos drive' which brought them here may have destroyed Burdania as they left, generations before. Among them is Lian, left aphasic by an accident, constantly struggling with memory and language, and deeply alienated from homeland, colony, his very identity. Nevertheless, partly through his unique closeness to the *Kinder'el'ain*, Taridwyn's native sentient race, and partly through his friendship with Thovalt, Lian becomes central to a move to convince the colony to sanction an expedition to Burdania.

In the odd-numbered chapters Lian and his companions arrive at a Burdania less ecologically damaged than they feared. Lian is drawn into a small group of 'restorers' who are working around the site of a now flawed archive in the hope of finding knowledge lost in the disaster and the anti-technology purges which followed. Passing for a traveller, Lian begins a tentative romance with the autocratic, self-confessed murderer Daisainia Travassa – the regional leader or *Isk'dar* – only to save the life of the one man who guesses his origin. When a crisis demands superior medical knowledge, Lian summons his companions, who have been observing from a hidden shuttle, and conflict becomes inevitable.

Legacies is thematically rich: ecology versus technology – the *Kinder'el'ain* live in harmony with their environment having, 100,000 generations past, renounced technology for meditative peace and tranquility; the search for identity, personal and cultural; the guilt of exile; the nature of disability and the prejudices which disable. But the alternate chapter back-story, current-story structure is problematic because we *know* from the start that Lian and his companions will succeed in initiating their expedition. That they take almost half the book to do so, debating in minute detail every possible implication of the

expedition, eventually becomes tiresome. *Legacies* is a novel in which no one can do anything without the '... single high note of anguish ...' which haunts the lives of its honourable, angst-ridden characters. So much so that naming their homeworld Burdania is one awkward piece of symbolism in an otherwise subtle narrative.

As the book progresses and the conflict on Burdania gathers pace, the Taridwyn chapters become ever more an unwelcome intrusion. Probably Sinclair realised this herself, as they do become successively shorter towards the climax.

The Burdanian chapters are more involving, partly because we do not know how they will turn out. Even so, drama is a long time coming, and the plotting – the same basic events catalysed more than one *Star Trek* – is at odds with the characterisation and literary quality of the writing, for Alison Sinclair is a very gifted writer. At its best, *Legacies* reads like a 19th century social novel, while the integration of its themes is almost Shakespearean; yet it is too narratively under-powered to grip as strongly as it should.

I really wanted to be able to recommend this highly. It is obvious that great love, care and intelligence have gone into the writing. But 300 pages of relentless self-pity and recrimination – the legacies in question – wore my patience thin, blunting the undeniable power and tension of an ending which yearns towards mature reconciliation, forgiveness and redemption.

With a coldly elegant use of language which places meaning as much between and behind the words as in them, the reader may feel as alienated as Lian himself. The book is claustrophobic, joyless and repetitive. It does re-cycle genre tropes and situations in lieu of original plotting. Yet any new writer this talented must be welcomed. *Legacies* is so

accomplished in many ways that if it concerned itself with mainstream subject-matter it would have a strong chance of scooping major literary awards. As sf, however, for all its virtues, there is nothing not found in better, more involving books written decades past. As the Burdadians begin to restore their lost technology, *Legacies* reinvents the wheel.

Ironically, considering a credit for 'guiding the manuscript (and the writer) through ... copy editing, typesetting and beyond', there are many typographical errors. To note these is not pedantry, particularly when *Legacies* retails at £16.99. They distract, jarring the reader into awareness of reading. When books were mechanically composed such mistakes were rare; now books are set in software they appear almost obligatory – so much for spellcheckers, and progress through technology.

Sue Thomas *Water*

Overlook Press, 1994, 235pp,
\$21.95

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

In her first novel, *Correspondence*, Sue Thomas mingled postmodernism and science fiction in a way that took the book onto the shortlist for the Arthur C. Clarke Award. Her new novel, *Water*, mingles postmodernism and feminism, with vague elements of fantasy drifting in to disturb the picture.

The feminism is stronger and more strident than in the first book, with passages that are likely to make most male readers feel uncomfortable, but which come across so violently that they give the impression more of propaganda than feeling. This impression isn't helped by the apparent straightforwardness of the story. Where *Correspondence*

presented a mosaic of time frames and perspectives, *Water* offers only two viewpoints, both seemingly conventional. But appearances can be deceptive, still waters, as they say, run deep.

In the opening pages of the book we learn how Julie murdered her father by drowning him at sea. Simon divorced Julie's mother, Ruth, while Julie was still very young, that, we are led to imagine, is motive enough. Then that sudden violence is forgotten for most of the book, indeed it is made to seem unlikely since Julie, we are told, is afraid of water. Instead, with that strange threat hanging over us, we are told about a holiday Ruth and Julie take in Scotland, a holiday during which Julie comes to sexual awareness and Ruth, long celibate, takes a fantasy lover. The two are unusually close – happy, supportive, who needs men – but sex tears them apart. A furtive encounter with a stranger opens Julie to self-awareness and self-doubt, more than ever needing to question her relationship with her mother yet more than ever unable to do so. While Ruth's secret lover, a handsome chimera conjured out of sea water who



seems to have too physical an effect upon the world around him to be entirely imaginary, reminds her of her own needs and desires

and takes her deeper into herself so she is unable to respond to her daughter at this of all times.

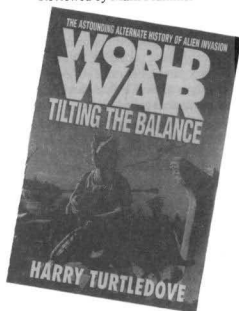
The two drift apart. Ruth buys a country cottage by a stream, an idyll which is shattered when the stream floods and her life and livelihood are threatened. Julie, meanwhile, gets a job in a hotel where, all of a sudden she hears from her father again. In his absence, Simon has come to represent all the problems created by men, sex and the break-up with her mother, so when she visits him and, during a yachting accident, contrives to kill him, the long-promised violence becomes suddenly low-key and anti-climactic.

Punctuated with facts and legends and images of water (a central metaphor which is, to say the least, over-extended) and hovering between realism and imaginative play, *Water* is neither as controlled nor as compelling as *Correspondence*. It is, nevertheless, sharp, edgy, humorous, bitter, lyrical and always readable.

Harry Turtledove World War: Tilting the Balance

Hodder & Stoughton, 1995,
482pp, £16.99

Reviewed by Mark Plummer



There was a time, about twenty years ago, when aliens attempted to take over the earth on a regular basis, usually early on Saturday evenings. But *Dr Who* was lagging behind written sf, where alien invasions had fallen from popularity some time before. There have been a few exceptions, notably Niven and Pournelle's *Footfall*, but by-and-large this particular type of plot has been rare in the last couple of decades. Now Harry Turtledove has resurrected it on a grand scale, and as an alternative history to boot (two sub-genres for the price of one).

In 1942, at the height of the Second World War, an alien invasion force attacks earth. The battlefleet is supposed to subdue the inhabitants in preparation for the arrival of the colony ships a few decades hence. However, whilst the aliens, The Race, have considerable technical superiority over mid-twentieth century earth, the occupation proves more difficult than expected. This ground is covered in *World War: In the Balance* (1994), the first volume in the sequence.

World War: Tilting the Balance opens with The Race encountering unexpected resistance: their technical superiority, while extensive, is not quite as extensive as they'd expected and this, coupled with general human stubbornness and inventiveness, is delaying the total subjugation of the planet. The invasion has forced the warring factions of earth into uneasy alliance against the common enemy and new and better weapons – including atomic weapons – are being developed to fight the invaders. Unsurprisingly, the situation is not significantly different by the end of the book: this is, after all, the second in a projected five book sequence.

Turtledove shows us the occupation and resistance from a number of viewpoints, human and alien. Sam Yeager, an American

minor-league baseball player, is better prepared for an alien invasion than most as a result of a thorough grounding in Campbell's *Astounding*. Moishe Ruscic, a spokesman for the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto, initially allies himself with The Race because they must surely be less inhuman than his Nazi oppressors. Heinrich Jäger is a German tank commander, fighting in northern-eastern France. Ludmila Gorbonova is a Russian pilot, fighting alongside an assorted, and not entirely allied, force of Russians and Germans on the eastern front. There are many, many more – the Dramatis Personae at the beginning of the book lists over 100 real and fictional human characters and a further twenty aliens – and while the first volume established links between most of these seemingly unconnected viewpoints, a number of sections could be stripped out of the novel without any significant impact on the overall plot. This multi-national cast are prone to using odd words and phrases in their native tongues, and as this almost always requires the speaker or somebody else to translate it into English there seems little point in including it in the first place. The frequent changes of viewpoint and extensive cast result in frequent reminders being included in the text, just to recap who's who.

The Race are in many ways traditional alien invaders, their lizard-like appearance invokes images of *V* for instance, yet they don't come across as being particularly alien. Granted, they do have difficulties with some human concepts – the idea that 'empires' can exist without an hereditary monarchy or, worse, that the people might actually depose the monarch is entirely, err, alien to them – and the physical differences are constantly reinforced by references to their 'eye turrets' or to 'claws' instead of hands. Without this reinforcement

it's easy to forget that we're talking about an ancient civilisation from the second planet of Tau Ceti. The passages describing Race military activities around Belmont and Besançon could almost be lifted straight out of the Vietnam War: motorised units supported by helicopters, the crews more often than not doped up to the 'eye turrets', attempting to fight against an opponent who fights from ambush and can't be distinguished from the local civilian population (humans all look the same to the Race).

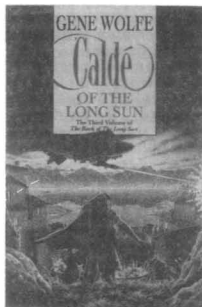
Ultimately, this is a fun book. It will conform to many non-fans' perceptions of the sf genre, and may well appeal to an enthusiast of the Second World War thriller with plenty of discussions on the merits and capabilities of various weapons and armoured vehicles. However there are doubtless many sf fans out there who wish that the genre contained more work of this kind.

Gene Wolfe

Calde of the Long Sun

NEL, 1994, 291pp, £16.99

Reviewed by Dave Langford



If you haven't yet caught up on Wolfe's new generation-starship

series (*Nightside the Long Sun* and *Lake of the Long Sun*, reviewed together in *Vector* 177), where have you been?

Book three of *The Book of the Long Sun* is as crammed as the first two. All the action to date happens over a remarkably brief span of days, and thus it really should be no surprise that our intensely devout priest-hero Patera Silk has taken so many pages even to weaken in some of his observances. He remains a compulsive truth-teller and rigidly moral in his own probing way, a man who commits only justifiable burglaries and kills only in self-defence as he feels his way through the mutating moral labyrinths of his world's political upheaval. His gods have let him down by proving to be mere ghosts in the machine heaven called Mainframe, and (for the most part) not nice ghosts either: Pas the father has already been murdered by his family, Echidna the mother forcibly possesses one of the most sympathetic characters and conducts a nasty human sacrifice to herself, and Scylla – one of the several offspring – is a monstrous bully. Only the enigmatic god called the Outsider, here tentatively identified with the forgotten 'Ah Lah', might be the real thing....

The action fragments into multiple viewpoints in addition to Silk's, as war and revolution break loose in and around his city of Viron. These include Maytera Mint from Silk's own manteon or temple, who becomes the inspired general of the rebel forces hoping to overthrow the corrupt Ayuntamiento or council and instal Silk as caldé or mayor; her fellow-'nuns' Maytera Marble and Maytera Rose, whose mysterious affinity (a tantalizing point since the opening of book one) is finally actualized; the prostitute Chenille, briefly possessed by Scylla; the thief Auk, now brain-damaged and communing with the blind

night-god Tartarus; Prolocutor Quetzal, scornor of gods and Silk's churchly superior, about whom mystery still clings (why must he hide his face in thick cosmetics? how do his unexplained folding fangs and hinted power of flight connect with the unresolved vampire mystery of book one?); the aged fencing-master Xiphias; even Silk's engaging pet, the talking night-chough Oreb. This splintered narration reflects the fact that the clash of forces is no easy struggle but a tortuous multi-sided fight between rebels, outcasts, criminals and crime-lords, the divided city Guard, Viron's mechanical defenders from underground, the Ayuntamiento, the religious hierarchy, and forces from a second city whose colossal airship intermittently blots out the sky and eclipses the Long Sun.

The whole thing is both thoroughly exciting and demanding of close attention. Wolfe continues to move sure-footed, detailing both violent action and moments of transcendence in the same deceptively transparent prose where much of importance is conveyed through omissions, casual modifiers or unobtrusive throwaway clauses. Some characteristic deceptions and family-tree secrets are laid bare. At the end there is a kind of peace, and (as the title promises, and despite some possibly ominous noises off) Silk is caldé of his city. Further games, however, are afoot. The focus on such a short though action-packed period invites contrast with the leisurely centuries of this starcrosser's voyage so far; it implies that these are important times, perhaps great times; and the fourth book is to be *Exodus from the Long Sun*. I hope I don't have to wait on the edge of my seat for too many more months.