

Loren trying to cope with all these different circumstances in the same bluff masculine way. Sometimes it works better than others, but finally, he cannot live: he oversteps the mark too far. Nevertheless death holds redemption and a new chance, in this tightly plotted, hugely complex, but ultimately very satisfying novel.

So what of repetition? Well, along with this book came an earlier novel, **Voice of the Whirlwind** (Orbit, £3.99). It is set in what might be described as a cyberpunk milieu of a complex spacegoing culture based firmly on Earth with lots of space travel and hardware, and future weaponry. It is as good as his more recent *Angel Station* (I haven't read *Hardwired* yet, but you can bet I will, real soon), which is to say it is adequate hard science fiction. But the overall plot, down to details like the central character's providing for the safety of his family before the final shootout, is uncannily similar to *Days of Atonement*. In fact, I would go so far as to say that, discounting the differences of location and related characters, the same story is told in both books. This is a fascinating idea, and draws my mind back to both books constantly, to compare and contrast. Kim Stanley Robinson has done something very similar with his trilogy *The Wild Shore*, *The Gold Coast*, and *Pacific's Edge*, where the dense overlaying of the three tellings of the exact same story in three very different futures reveals all kinds of subtleties not so easily expressed in a linear narrative. And this kind of repetition – be various, but be the same – is the heart of great rhetoric. If Walter Jon Williams only appeared to be a competent writer before, then the publication of *Days of Atonement* has revealed a greater talent, and I look forward to the third telling of this story with great interest.

(Paul Brazier)

## Rhymers and Cobblers Wendy Bradley

Ellen Kushner, whose first novel *Swordspoint* I liked enormously, has produced a very different but equally successful novel in **Thomas the Rhymers** (Gollancz, £13.95), a story apparently based on a well-known (although not to me) folk tale. Thomas is a minstrel enchanted into spending seven years with the queen of faery and he returns with the dubious gift of truth, which means he cannot tell a lie, but also he can answer any direct question accurately. The first three-quarters of the book, covering the abduction to and return from faery, are

splendid and the last section which deals with his adventures after his return is touching and tender if a trifle underwritten. Each of the four sections is written in the first person by a participant in or observer of the story and there is great technical skill in the way Kushner recreates the lyrical atmosphere of a folk tale by both distancing us from the story and yet drawing into it as we see through the characters' loving as well as sceptical eyes. The whole book cries out to be read aloud – Radio 4 please note.

In contrast, I was trying to explain the plot of S.P. Somtow's **Moon Dance** (Gollancz, £14.95) to my father who asked me what I was reading. Well, I explained, basically there are these aristocratic European werewolves in the nineteenth century trying to found a city in the wild west where they can be left in peace only they find there is already a tribe of native American werewolves. These Indians are all ecologically sound and only kill and eat people who want to be killed but the Europeans are all decadent and enjoy killing for the sake of it. And then there is this child who is the son of a werewolf father and a human mother, only he has a multiple personality and he has funny turns where he is taken over by the psychopathic persona and both the Indian and the European werewolves believe if he can integrate his personality he can somehow be a werewolf saviour...

"Cobblers!" my father commented.

"I still need 250 words about it."

"Write cobblers 250 times?"

Sensible suggestion.

If you want horror, go instead to Dan Simmons' exemplary **Summer of Night** (Headline, £14.95) in which something nasty lurking in an old school building menaces a gang of children during the summer holidays. Simmons does early adolescence brilliantly and the children are both resourceful and convincing; we may have seen water pistols full of holy water before but these kids are ready to back them up with stolen shotguns. The book is especially strong on everyday life going on around the plot: strategies for coping with drunken fathers, memories of a grandmother before her stroke, a day off to play baseball, and the bullying, sexual awakening and other common elements of pre-teen life loom as large as one could realistically expect. The plot is, to coin a phrase, cobblers, but it is hugely entertaining cobblers with enough pace and detail to wheel you over the improbability of it all.

Gene Wolfe's latest, **Castleview** (New English Library, £13.95) left me feeling both completely inadequate and extremely pissed-off. The blurb led me to expect a retelling of the

Arthurian mythos in a contemporary American setting and sure enough there was a contemporary American setting, the inevitable small town of Castleview, named for the phantom castle which appears on its outskirts and may be some sort of mirage or of course some sort of connection to another world. A new family in town get tangled up in mysterious visions and apparitions but Will Shields (oh come on!), his wife Ann Schindler and their daughter Mercedes Schindler-Shields are split up for most of the book and the plot cuts with bewildering rapidity between them.

They meet up with Vivian Morgan – I can handle that one without recourse to Malory – but Dr von Madadh, Mr Fee, King Geimhreadh are so obviously fraught with symbolism I was left wondering whether I was being stupid or obtuse or whether there was some key text that would give me the clue and which I had failed to read. But no, a good ten minutes research in *The Arthurian Encyclopedia* and a consultation with a handy world authority on Malory confirm that, whatever the blurb may have to say, Wolfe is not playing games solely with the *Morte d'Arthur*. Without the key to the story I still don't know what happened to whom or why – answers on a postcard care of *Interzone* – but who can love a book that makes them feel dumb?

And finally there is **Black Trillium** (Grafton, £13.99) in which Marion Bradley, Julian May and Andre Norton jointly write a fantasy tale of three princesses prophesied to be the saviours of their kingdom and the destroyers of its usurpers. Each pursues a magical quest and acquires a magical object and these objects build into a sceptre of power. In accordance with the Rule of Three there are of course three things wrong with this book: the characters, the plot and the writing.

The characters are utterly predictable; wise elder sister, tomboyish middle and sweetly soppy youngest and they are even for goodness' sake blonde, redhead and brunette, like some medieval Andrews Sisters. The plot is laid out at their birth when the leadenly literal prophecy is made and they then have to trudge around fulfilling it exactly according to plan, depriving the story of any interest. However the fatal flaw is the writing, which shows none of the skill of any of the three authors but rather reads as if composed by a committee, a camel where it should have been a racehorse. *Black Trillium* is not a book, it is a marketing concept – take three leading brand names, three tired old products, stud with pegs for the sequels, games and sharecroppings which are no doubt even now in production... Can three major fantasy talents have

simultaneously been replaced by their evil twin sisters? Are the pods taking over? Great Scott, even Weiss and Hickman do this sort of thing better!!!  
(Wendy Bradley)

## Horrors That You Pay For Jones & McIntosh

**Fantasy Tales** (Robinson, £2.95) has come a long way since it began life back in 1977 as a small-press publishing venture, with considerably more issues behind it than you'd think from the number 5 on this latest one. The magazine was originally modelled (quite deliberately) on the old pulp magazines of the 1930s and 40s – in particular, *Weird Tales* – and went through 17 issues as a semi-prozine, winning awards for its mix of fantasy and horror. Then in 1988 Robinson Publishing fairy-godmothered it into fully professional status and a new paperback format, starting with issue 1 (not to be confused with issue 1 circa 1977). It appears twice yearly (which is how we get up to the current number 5) and if something of the old pulp ambience has been sacrificed to give it more the appearance of an original anthology than a magazine, then editors Steven Jones and David Sutton have managed to keep the basic feel of the stories much the same as in the small-press days. They have set out to provide a collection of varied, entertaining and accessible stories in the fantasy/horror genres and – very largely – they've succeeded.

The featured writers are a mix of new and established, including some from the US, and the subject matter ranges from the routine but readable sword and sorcery of Ramsey Campbell's "The Changer of Names" (apparently a sequel to an earlier story here) to the various paranoid of Garry Kilworth's "Networks" (urban) and Lisa Beckett's "Family Ties" (something-nasty-in-the-woodshed). "Invisible Boy" by Roberta Lannes is ultimately more sad than scary, while David J. Schow's chilling "Night Bloomer" is likely to put anyone off gardening. Rather against the odds, one of the best stories here is Lee Barwood's "Honour Bright," a tale of unshamed heroic wish-fulfillment, which succeeds due to the single-minded conviction with which the writer tells her tale.

There are a number of rough edges, and quite a few of the stories are little more than makeweight, but then, with the range of styles on offer, *Fantasy Tales* is never likely to please all of the people all of the time. It is, however, unquestionably good value for money.

**Best New Horror** (Robinson, £6.99), edited by Stephen Jones (again) and Ramsey Campbell, is altogether more substantial. It's bigger (390 pages, 20 stories) more expensive (£7.95) and, as the title suggests, it creams off some of the best stories published in the genre in 1989. Regular IZ readers will remember Kim Newman's "Twitch Technicolor" and Ian Watson's "The Eye of the Ayatollah," whilst Stephen Gallagher's excellent story "The Horn" and Nicholas Royle's "Archway" both appeared in recent UK anthologies. Good stuff, all.

Most stories here, though, are likely to be new to most British readers. There's Robert R. McCammon's short, sharp shock of an opener, "The Pin," and Alex Quiroba's nervy, unsettling "Breaking Up," both of which deal, convincingly, with the theme of people going insane. Laurence Staig's "Closed Circuit" is creepy urban paranoia in a multi-storey car-park, and Donald R. Burleson's "Snow Cancellations" is pretty much what its title claims. Ramsey Campbell's "It Helps if You Sing" is somewhat minor-league by his own standards, but nonetheless keeps you reading right to the end, and Brian Lumley's story of a holiday-turned-nightmare, "No Sharks in the Med," pulls few surprises but is well-detailed enough to make it a thoroughly satisfying read.

Cherry Wilder reaches back to the holocaust for the horror in "The House on Cemetery Street" while Gregory Frost, in "Lizaveta" shifts even further back, to pre-revolutionary Russia. "...To Feel another's Woe" by Chet Williamson, transposes the vampire legend to the world of the modern New York stage – but it's not blood the vampire of the story sucks from her artist-lovers. Thomas Tessier's "Blanca" is a stylish excursion to a vaguely Latin American country of the imagination where there's "nothing to do except disappear" whereas Robert Westall's "The Last Day of Miss Dorinda Molyneaux" takes us to a very English, very haunted church. Richard Laymon's "Bad News" perhaps the most straightforward horror yarn here, about a sort of mini-Alien transplanted into downtown America. Fast and fearsome.

Cloudier, more atmospheric horror tales are offered by D.F. Lewis' "Mort Au Monde" and Thomas Ligotti's "The Strange Design of Master Rignolo." Both are strange indeed, but will have an undoubted appeal to some readers, as well as providing an interesting counterpoint to the more conventional horror yarns.

It's a pity though that the longest story here, "At First Just Ghostly" by Karl Edward Wagner, while readable enough, is otherwise a fairly hackneyed tale of an sf convention, alcohol and saving the universe.

Nevertheless, overall the stories come out high on both readability and quality; there's an introduction from the editors that gives a useful overview of horror in 1989, and right at the end, just when you thought it was safe, comes an eight page "Necrology" section detailing those who didn't see the year out. If you like horror fiction, you'll find that *Best Horror* delivers the goods.

The obvious comment to make in comparing this book with *Fantasy Tales* would be to say that you get what you pay for – *Best Horror* is undeniably the better collection – but then with the range of material at the editors' disposal, that's only to be expected. Our advice, if you've the cash and the inclination, would be to try both.

(Neil Jones & Neil McIntosh)

## Not This, Not That Gwyneth Jones

Two opposing pairs of paperbacks: a short-story collection and a novel each, from on the one hand an avowedly feminist list; on the other from the Warhammer stable, which – for reasons too numerous to mention – is not required to explain its position on sexual politics. What unites these four books, however, is not so much sexual chauvinism – or any insight, intentional or otherwise, on the great divide – instead it is the way they're all equally self-consciously, distanced from real live science fiction.

On this showing, the new Star Wars decor has not energized the dirtied-down LOTR clones of Warhammer. The anthology *Deathwing* edited by David Pringle and Neil Jones (GW Books, £4.99) is passable but there's no story I could single out as rising above the simplest war-comic formula. Ian Watson's novel *Inquisitor* (also £4.99) is somewhat more entertaining. But in spite of Watson's fun and games with a kind of Militant Tendency gloom that threatens the Imperium from within (is this a *roman à clef*?), this is no *Drachenfels*. But if you are still reading war comics, and you like lovingly graphic descriptions of The Thing That Died In My Fridge And Then Took Over The Universe (as one might hope, Watson does a good line in these) – Well, in that case, either book is overpriced but probably worth a try.

Much the same, with a little search and replace, can be said for Jane Palmer's *Moving Moosevan* (Women's Press, £4.95). This is a sequel to Palmer's debut novel *The Planet Dweller*, and is the same kind of mildly amusing romp – a sixties British B movie about Things From Outer Space,