

spilled and Jules has learned his lesson in unlife, there's little of real substance to sink your teeth into. *Agent, Dan Hooker*. (July TK)

**Forecast:** John Kennedy Toole fans looking for more of the same, and willing to settle for less than a masterpiece, should give a boost to this vampire variant.

## BAD DREAM

JOHN CHRISTOPHER. *Severn*, \$26.99 (256p) ISBN 0-7278-5960-9

★ Veteran Christopher, best known for his recent young adult fiction (the *Tripods* and *Sword of the Spirits* trilogies), is at the top of his form in a near-future SF novel that calls to mind his adult classic, *No Blade of Grass* (1956). Thanks to quiet British restraint, the glimpses of increasingly violent wrongness are more disturbing than entire planets being zapped in a routine space opera. Michael Frodsham is part of an influential Anglo-German family involved in producing virtual reality programs for mass entertainment, now also developing VR into a tool for psychological therapy. As a minor bureaucrat in the British hospital system, however, Michael uneasily begins to suspect that the technology could have more sinister uses as the oppressive European union aims to devour Britain whole. And so he must resist. Christopher avoids standard thriller formula with sharp attention to detail and his refusal to oversimplify the characters. Even people who behave the worst have their reasons—some of which they try to explain, some of which readers can figure out for themselves. The villains are convincing in their moral slovenliness. Likewise, Michael reveals himself as a man of honor without being unbelievably priggish or noble; he's just someone who can't take the easy way out by ignoring his sympathies and principles. He turns out to be unexpectedly admirable, and so does this subtle novel. (June)

## KUNMA

FRANK CORSARO. *Forge*, \$24.95 (336p) ISBN 0-765-30472-4

Reincarnation and karmic destiny direct the adventures of a psychiatrist hero in Corsaro's earnest but gawky horror debut. David Sussman, an unorthodox Manhattan shrink who incorporates Buddhist principles into his practice, receives a request from wealthy Laurel Hunt to treat her art dealer husband, Hugh, who's been hospitalized after a psychotic break that has him convinced he's "burning up." Uninterested, David fobs Laurel off on a colleague who, after interviewing her, utters the cryptic word "Kunma" and then dies in spectacularly gruesome fashion. Drawn ineluctably into the intrigue—and all too eagerly into Laurel's bed—David investigates and begins turning up clues about Hugh, Laurel and their son Chris that resonate strangely with his own religious beliefs.

When a bookseller friend apprises David that "the Kunma is a thief of the soul" from Tibetan mythology, David is galvanized into spiritual self-examination to find answers to the increasingly bizarre puzzle in a possible past life. Corsaro makes the most of his novel's unusual Buddhist angle, giving the reader just enough mystical instruction at key points to make sense of events without dispelling their supernatural aura. Inevitably, though, he inflicts lengthy, literal dreams on David to explain exactly what's happening. Once the mystery is demystified, the novel shifts to conventional thriller mode, replete with a bloody shoot-out in a protracted climax. Readers won't have to believe in déjà vu to feel that they've seen most of this tale's surprises before. (June 2)

**Forecast:** The well-connected author, a stage director on the Julliard faculty with a long-standing association with New York City Opera, has secured blurbs from the disparate likes of Maurice Sendak, soprano Renée Fleming and Chelsea Quinn Yarbro. The greater community of artists and performers may partially offset weak sales among horror fans.

## IN THE FORESTS OF SERRE

PATRICIA A. MCKILLIP. *Ace*, \$22.95 (304p) ISBN 0-441-01011-3

In a twist on the Biblical adage "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also," McKillip (*Ombria in Shadow*) presents a mystical, eerie fantasy about the flight from love—and the haphazard progress toward love. The efforts of a kingdom to prevent war by sacrificing its princess, Sidonie, to a loveless marriage are complicated by the refusal of the intended bridegroom, Prince Ronan of Serre, to cooperate. Sidonie obeys to save her country from sure destruction. Ronan flees from his fate with the magical interference of the Forests of Serre, the mysterious witch Brume and a firebird whose song becomes a pied piper-like enchantment. Meetings with Brume exact a dear price, and nearly every character encounters her at some point. To some, Brume can be death itself; others merely have to give her something of great value. Ronan offers "what of all such things he valued least, and would not miss if he did not return for it. 'Take my heart.'" And indeed, Brume does take his heart. Ronan doesn't seem to miss what he felt he lacked to begin with, but Sidonie does, and so do his parents. This novel is similar in style and content to McKillip's World Fantasy Award-winning story, "The Forgotten Beasts of Eld," which is not to say it's a rehash. A skillfully told adult fairy tale, it stands perfectly well on its own. (June 3)

## FORGE OF THE TITANS

STEVE WHITE. *Baen*, \$22 (288p) ISBN 0-7434-3611-3

In this refreshingly different science fan-

tasy by White (*Eagle Against the Stars*), Naval Aviation Officer Candidate Derek Secrest is distressed to be pulled away from flight training to undergo testing by a top-secret government organization. When the testing reveals he's a natural telepath, his entire world is turned upside down. An attempt to use his powers to interdict a terrorist plot succeeds, but the plot's masterminds prove to be survivors of Greece's Heroic Age, who not only possess technology superior to our own but also wield magic derived from mass human sacrifices. In addition, they're in league with the malevolent beings known to us through myth as the Titans. Derek and his telepathic friends join the opposition, including the gods of Olympus, who are themselves shaken by the discovery that psionic humans possess abilities beyond both god and magician. The basic plot device—that of evil alien gods who once possessed our world trying to regain a foothold—suggests a Lovecraftian horror, but beyond some lip service about the intradimensional realms controlled by the Titans inducing madness, there's an optimism, if not a teleological evangelism, about humans' place in the cosmos that recalls the best of the John Campbell era of SF. White's core audience of hard SF fans will be pleased, as will fantasy readers who enjoy convincing explanations of how such things as magic and psi powers work. (June)

**FYI:** White is the co-author with David Weber of last year's bestseller *The Shiva Option*.

## Mass Market

### TO SIR PHILLIP, WITH LOVE

JULIA QUINN. *Avon*, \$6.99 (384p) ISBN 0-380-82085-4

★ After reading this superb post-Renaissance-era romance, the fifth in Quinn's *Bridgerton* siblings series, it's easy to see why the author's previous book, *Romancing Mr. Bridgerton*, landed on RWA's Top 10 Favorite Books of 2002 list. Quinn is a consummate storyteller. Her prose is spry and assured, and she excels at creating indelible characters like chatty Eloise Bridgerton and Sir Phillip Crane, the protagonists of this unconventional effort. The novel opens as Eloise, a 28-year-old "spinster," flees London to visit her secret pen pal, Phillip, a troubled botanist and widower. The two plan to see if they are compatible, but Eloise's hopes plummet when she discovers that Phillip is not the romantic charmer of her dreams, but a grumpy father of twins. She agrees to remain for a fortnight, however, and as she interacts with him and his unruly children, she learns that he has a good heart, even if he is an emotionally distant father. Weighty issues such as abuse and discipline threaten to overshadow their rela-