

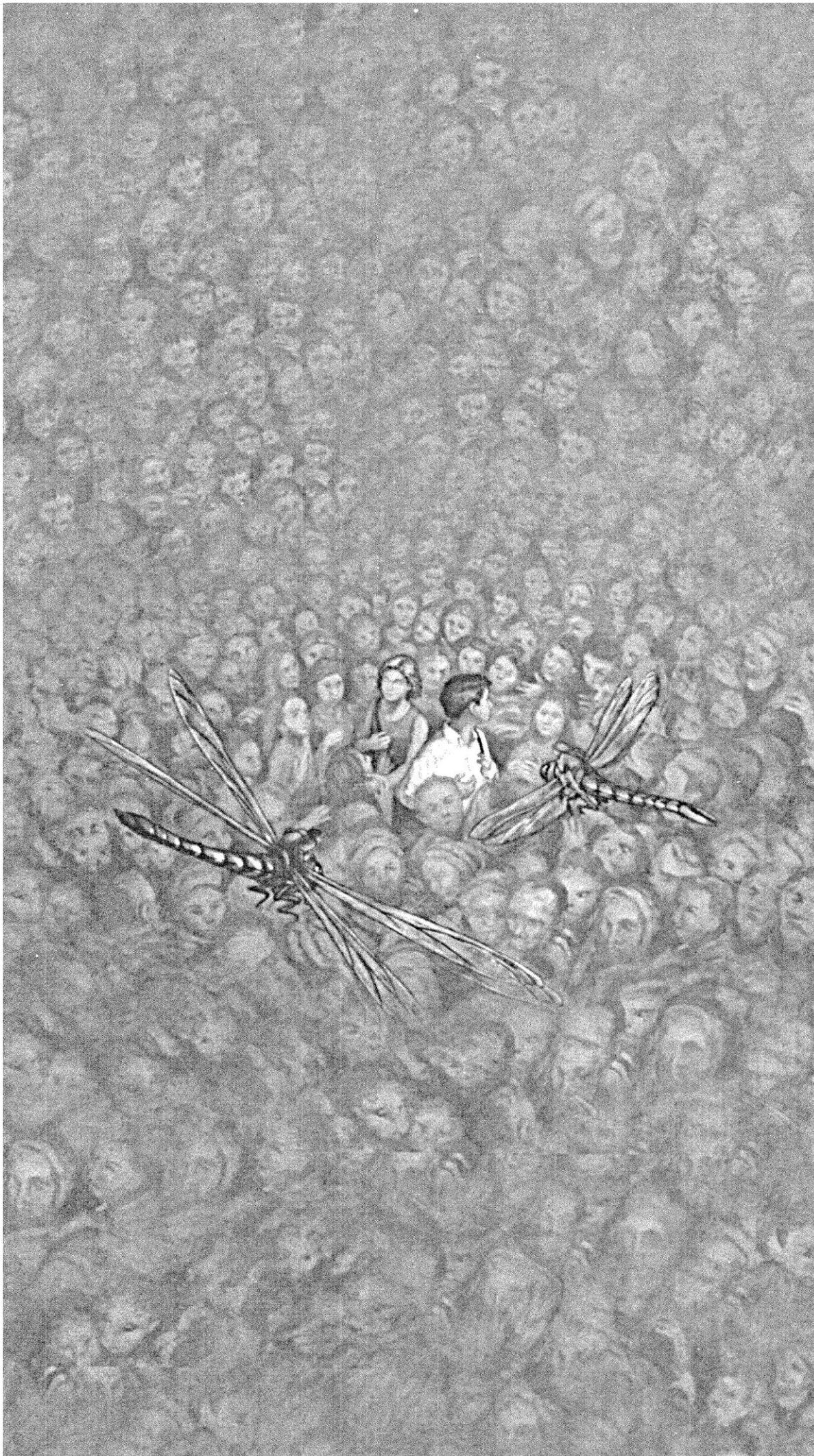
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The Critical
Journal of
the BSFA



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THE CRITICAL JOURNAL OF THE BSFA

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COVER: Detail from the cover of the American edition of Philip Pullman's *The Amber Spyglass*. © Eric Rohmann 2000

VECTOR

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Editorial • Editorial • Editorial

Editors come, editors go, and most of us couldn't care less. I know I couldn't when one changes on one of the magazines I read regularly. They are, after all, just like the names one doesn't pay any attention to in the front of books and on the end of films. It's been 30 issues and five years, which for someone who even today might not really exist is really is rather astonishing. I mean, no one fired me, and unless "namby pamby" isn't a compliment, no one seriously grumbled. When I volunteered to edit *Vector* I hadn't a clue what I was doing. Which may be why the magazine has improved over the last half-decade. That and the hard work of everyone else, Andrew, Paul, Steve, Tony, Vix and everyone who slaved away to conduct the interviews and write the articles and reviews. Thanks everyone.

So why am I leaving now? Five years ago I was unemployed, and officially unemployable (I have the tribunal adjudication to prove it), so I had lots of time. Today, in no small part due to the experience and confidence gained through factoring many a *Vector* (the other part involves the invention of modern civilisation, a.k.a. the internet) I'm a reasonably successful freelance writer with very little time. Combine that with increased family responsibilities and an offer which I'm not yet at liberty to disclose and which it would have been foolish in the extreme to refuse, and something just had to give. Truth be told, for the last several issues Andrew Butler has been doing at least 90% of what was supposed to be equal shares, and I've just been sitting back claiming at least 50% of the credit. Andrew is happy to carry on editing, so it's only fair to pass over my share of the reins and let him have all the glory. I'm sure he'll do a fine job. He already has.

I shall still be around, writing about DVD in *Matrix* and when time permits delivering the occasional article. I shall certainly still be writing book reviews for *Vector*, hopefully rather more than at present once my stint as a judge of the Arthur C. Clarke Award is over. And of course I can get back to such pleasures as writing cumbrous letters to the editor, some of them even under my own name. Those of you who wish to follow my further adventures may easily do so with the aid of any reasonable search engine, but I'd be particularly gratified if you would at least once point your browsers at www.musicweb.uk.net/ or www.FilmMusic.uk.net.

And now, as the new millennium finally nears and we all get ready for the re-release of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, I'd like to end by saying as they do in the movies, "I'll be back." But a) I don't know if they'll have me, and b) I never learnt how to drive. "Hasta la vista, baby" will have to do instead.

Gary S. Dalkin © 2000

Andrew M. Butler adds: There are those *Vector* readers who think that Gary S Dalkin is a pseudonym, maintained by me for nefarious reasons, and the appearance of an actual body adding to that name at Clarke ceremonies or committee meetings was put down to my hiring an actor. Such things are expensive, of course, and I can't afford to keep the fictional Gary going.

But seriously, I first learned about Gary in an email from Maureen Kincaid Speller in the summer of 1995. She'd offered the editorship of *Vector* to both of us, and we both agreed to do features for the magazine. Come September I was dispatched to the Worldcon in Glasgow, with instructions to make sure the Delany interview was taped and Gary set about writing his first article. At Worldcon John Brunner died, and with empty address book we set about putting a tribute issue together. For the first couple of years we co-edited by phone and post, and I soon came to recognise the sharp red pen in the margin of whatever article I'd slung together. (I think he must have been a teacher in a previous life). Those hours-long phone calls gave way to email, and editing proceeded more smoothly. And in five years we've shifted from a third of the magazine to 18,000 words per issue. We've disagreed, disputed, compromised and agreed, and I think that our different tastes (it was three years before we found a film we both liked) have helped the magazine rather than hindered it.

Gary has retained a sharp editorial eye, even at times of personal difficulties, and whilst he says he's been taking my credit for recent *Vectors*, there have been many times where I was the weak link. I don't think we can replace him, and so until such time as I hang up the red pen, I'll continue to edit features alone. I hope there will be no drop in quality. Gary will be a hard act to follow, and I'll certainly be asking him to contribute in future issues.

by Gary Dalkin & Andrew M Butler



From China Miéville:

I'm extremely grateful to *Vector* for such a lot of coverage – review, interview and Andrew Butler's editorial. I hope it doesn't seem churlish or greedy to want to add anything – just one tiny point of clarification. Andrew's (very funny and open-minded) editorial might have given the impression that (as a Marxist) I'm interested in fantasy mainly because 'given the huge sales of fantasy, it is a [mass cultural] phenomenon'.

That's true, but the main reason I'm interested in fantasy (or what I prefer to call Weird Fiction, thereby subsuming SF and horror too) is because I grew up on it and I love the pants off it and I think it's fucking great.

Just wanted to clear that up.

Andrew M Butler replies: I should have been clearer in my

ruminations, and suggested that the mass cultural nature of fantasy was one factor among many in China's suggestion that Marxists should pay attention to fantasy, as a counter-balance to a traditional distrust of 'escapism'. His own interest is clearly nothing as cynical as trying to be aware of or tap into a mass audience.

From Jack Tyler:

Do people really take Freud seriously anymore? Surely on any scientific basis, the theories of Freud and his even more lunatic disciples ought to be dismissed, and their adherents locked up for extreme stupidity. Andrew M Butler's article on *The Thing* [V213] was priceless and I suspect a spoof – all the stuff about the skin on the top of the milk hardly seems enough to build a theory of human behaviour on. Religious dietary laws aren't, by the way, psychological litmus papers but sensible hygiene precautions.

There was some merit in Butler's analysis of *The Thing*, but how about something more sensible about the nature of trust and relationships, and how our fellow humans can appear 'alien'? That would be more readable than disappearing up the orifice of one's choice (and Butler mentioned enough of them in his piece) into Lit Crit.

From Ray Bradbury:

During all that time L. J Hurst speaks of with Heinlein, Anthony Boucher and similar people ['Where, Not When, Was Ray Bradbury?' V213 – Eds.], I was a teenager of 17, 18, 19, and finally 20, selling newspapers on a street corner and had yet to

make my first sale in the Science Fiction World; so I was around the outside of those groups. I was invited up to Heinlein's house only on occasion to have a Coca Cola. I didn't meet Boucher until 1950, when I was thirty years old. We got to be great friends and when he died some of the spirit went out of Berkeley and San Francisco.

My first short story sale was accomplished through Robert Heinlein who read a humorous piece by me and sent it on his own to *Script Magazine* in Beverly Hills; so I had my first non-Science Fiction publication right after my twentieth birthday, but there was no more publishing activity until the next year, when on my 21st birthday my first Science Fiction short story, written with Henry Hasse, was published. It took a long while before I was accepted into the group, which was Heinlein, Boucher, and the others. They were wonderfully kind and helpful to me over the years.

(With thanks to Sir Arthur C. Clarke – Eds)

name in the letters column as Fraser. Our apologies to Mr Fraser.

Please let us know of any factual errors or misrepresentations in Vector: email ambutler@enterprise.net or write to Andrew M Butler, 33 Brookview Drive Keyworth, Nottingham, NG12 5JN

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In the last *Vector* we inadvertently misspelt Paul Fraser's

Dæmons and Fetters

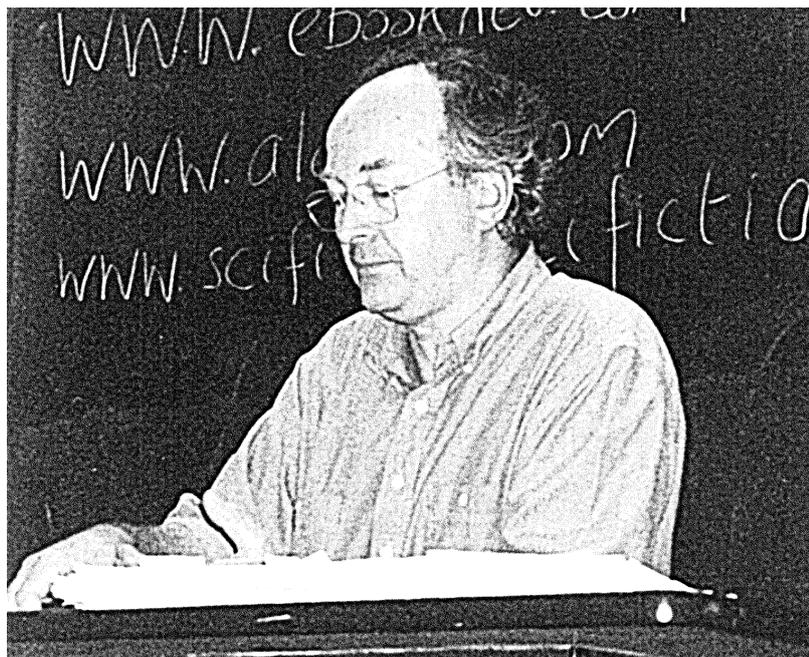
A Provisional Reading of Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights*

by Andrew M

Butler

Perhaps by now we will have been put out of our misery. The much anticipated third volume of Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, *The Amber Spyglass* is scheduled for publication in November 2000, and for some of us the wait has seemed eternal. Long before Harry Potter became the children's writer to be seen reading, Pullman's *Northern Lights* (1995) seemed to be the book that adults could appreciate too. In *Vector* 191 (January/February 1997), Justina Robson wrote: "No matter how old a savage you are, if you don't set aside some time for this one I have to tell you that your life just got that bit poorer".

In *Northern Lights* the orphan Lyra lives at Jordan College,



Philip Pullman at the recent Lexicon convention (photo: Paul Billinger)

Oxford, and observes the Master of the college trying to poison her uncle, Lord Asriel. She is able to warn him and he survives, gaining finances to travel north in to research something called Dust and a strange city glimpsed in the air, and to locate a lost expedition. Lyra finds herself being fostered by Mrs Coulter, apparently Asriel's sister-in-law, but runs away. She is taken in by a band of gypsies, who have been wrongly blamed for the kidnapping of

hundreds of children. All answers seem to lie north, and Lyra travels towards Lapland with the gypsies, meeting witches and polar bears along the way. In *The Subtle Knife* Lyra meets a boy named Will, and travels between universes with him, trying to

avoid a number of enemies who are after objects that the two of them are carrying. And lying behind this is a bigger narrative, in which Asriel appears to want to restage the war against heaven, as described by John Milton in *Paradise Lost*. Every human character from Lyra's universe has a *dæmon*, which is usually is the opposite sex, and which can change form until the human reaches their teens. The *dæmon* when fixed represents the true nature of the human, and in *The Amber Spyglass* we will presumably learn Lyra's true nature.

One way into understanding the trilogy is to consider using the sort of criticism which has been applied to analysing folk and fairy-tales – to which fantasy is a close cousin – and narratives in general. Vladimar Propp, a key Russian critic from the early twentieth century, located thirty-one different narrative events or functions which occurred in stories. Some might be omitted, some might be combined or contemporaneous with each other, but the same basic order is used. The events are triggered by particular characters, who are defined by their function, and Propp suggested that there are seven of these: the villain, the donor, the helper, the princess or a sought-for person and her father, the dispatcher, the hero, and the false hero. In the case of *Star Wars* these characters might respectively be located as Darth Vader, Obi-Wan Kenobi, R2D2 and C3PO, Princess Leia and Darth Vader, R2D2 (again, or Leia herself), Luke Skywalker and Han Solo (and presumably Chewbacca). Immediately it should be clear that the system is flexible (or woolly) enough to allow two characters to fulfil one function, or one character to fulfil several functions.

But Propp's system quickly runs into difficulties when we look at the specifics of the narrative of *Northern Lights*. The donor is someone who provides the protagonist with a tool that will be essential to their quest: in this case it is the Master of Jordan College, who gives the tomboy heroine Lyra an alethiometer, a device for gleaning information. The helper is Pantalaimon, Lyra's *dæmon*. The dispatcher, who sends Lyra on her quest, could be seen as the King of the Gypsies, John Faa, who allows Lyra to travel north. Lee Scoresby might be seen as the false hero, the basically decent chap who requires to be paid for his services, although when the chips are down his conscience means he will act morally (rather like Han Solo, in fact).

But who is the villain? At first it would appear to be the Master who "poured a thin stream of white powder into the decanter... [then] took a pencil from his pocket and stirred the wine until the powder had dissolved" (6). Our instinct is surely to be wary of anyone who is trying to murder someone – even if that someone is Lyra's rather severe uncle, Lord Asriel. But we as readers are subsequently made aware that the Master has perfectly good reasons for his act, and by the end of the novel we might question whether he is in fact the villain.

Equally Mrs Coulter, later revealed to be Lyra's mother, is presented at first as dangerous, as she kidnaps a child from Limehouse, but when we next see her, she seems to show a genuine concern and care for Lyra. Her evilness is posited on the evilness of her experiments to separate children from their *dæmons*, and thus her villainy is dependent upon how you interpret the *dæmons*. This is a point I will return to.

The sought-for person is sometimes Roger, who has been kidnapped by the Gobblers, and sometimes Lord Asriel, neither of which are female, and Asriel himself transpires to be Lyra's father. Equally Lyra is rather female to be a hero, but that is clearly her function within the narrative. She is described as "a half-wild, half-civilised girl" (19), who begins the novel with no parents and ends it with two, both of whom have betrayed her. As a female, she doesn't quite fit in the all-male world of the scholars of Jordan College, nor is she quite in their social class, her education having been fairly chaotic. On the other hand, by birth she is clearly a notch above the utility staff of the college – cleaners, cooks and so on. Lyra's gift is that she is able to communicate to some extent with both sides of the social divide; she is also able to persuade people to action. It has to be admitted that this is more or less as active as she gets as a hero; much of the time she ends up in the right place for the action by accident, or just happens to overhear

a conversation. Of course, it might be objected, there is a limit to how much a young girl is actually capable of doing. (Rather uncomfortably, Lyra becomes very domesticated in *The Subtle Knife*, cooking for Will, as if she's shifted from being George to Anne of the Famous Five).

Northern Lights emerges as a very contemporary children's book, with characters who die, a female hero and a morality that is far from black and white. Characters we assume to be evil turn out to have good motives, and characters who we take to be good may not live up to our moral standards. This is perhaps best summed up by Lyra's slight fear of John Faa: "what she was most afraid of was his kindness" (120). We have to remember that much of the narrative is told from the point of view of Lyra, albeit not in the first person, but Pullman allows himself to draw back from the main focus on occasions to let us in on extra information. We have to remember that simply because Lyra believes something, she may not be right.

For example, she is attached (literally) to a *dæmon*, Pantalaimon, a name which translates from the Greek for "many mouthed" or "all mouth". Pantalaimon is her friend, her guide, her advisor, her confessor and her conscience. Since Pantalaimon is male, in Jungian terms he might represent her animus, the masculine part of her personality (and this thought might be developed in relation to the spectres/shadows of *The Subtle Knife*). Certainly there seems to be an association of *dæmons* with sexuality, as they become fixed when the child goes through puberty. As the Able-Seaman tells her "[Dæmons] have always settled, and they always will. That's part of growing up. They'll come a time when you'll be tired of his changing about, and you'll want a settled kind of form for him" (167). The child is full of latent possibilities, endless potential, but when she matures she is limited, her path is laid out, her future fixed.

Lyra is horrified by the thought of her *dæmon* being fixed (the child's fear of growing up?) or of being separated from a *dæmon*: "Her first impulse was to turn and run, or to be sick. A human being with no *dæmon* was like someone without a face, or their ribs laid open and their heart torn out" (214). Mrs Coulter represents the operation as a good action:

"[Y]our *dæmon*'s a wonderful friend and companion when you're young, but at the age we call puberty, the age you're coming to very soon, darling, *dæmons* bring all sort of troublesome thoughts and feelings, and that's what lets Dust in. A quick little operation before that, and you're never troubled again. And your *dæmon* stays with you, only... just not connected. Like a... like a wonderful pet, if you like." (285).

So the *dæmon* is associated with sexuality, with sexual maturity, and the expulsion from the innocent world of the child into the experienced, post-Lapsarian world of the adult. Might it not indeed be better to be without a *dæmon*, and remain innocent?

The sexual association is further emphasised when we are given an extract from the book of Genesis in this universe. After the Serpent has persuaded Eve to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge:

"[T]he eyes of them both were opened, and they saw the true form of their *dæmons*, and spoke with them.

"But when the man and the woman knew their own *dæmons*, they knew that a great change had come upon them, for until that moment it had seemed that they were at one with all the creatures of the earth and the air, and there was no difference between them" (372).

Adam and Eve realise that they are naked, and sew together fig leaves to cover their nakedness. The rewritten extract from Genesis 3 breaks off here, but there are of course further consequences for the couple:

"Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy

sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life" (Genesis 3: 16-17)

The couple are then expelled from the Garden of Eden. It would appear that there is a link with dæmons, sexuality, gender inequalities and the demand for men to labour. This is not the only reference to Genesis in the book. One of the early descriptions of Lyra is how the Scholars "chased her away from the fruit trees in the Garden" (19). The choice of "Jordan" as a college name also guides us to think of the Holy Land.

The Genesis references should bring us back to *Paradise Lost*, Milton's epic poem designed to "justify the ways of God to men" (l.26). The poem is an account of Satan recovering from his failure in the war against Heaven and his discussion with other fallen angels as to whether to return to battle. Satan descends to Earth, alone, and enters the Garden of Eden. He overhears Raphael, sent to warn

Adam and Eve about Satan, tell the two humans that they were created to replace the fallen angels. The fallen angels were those who were jealous of the Son of God and who had been led by Satan, the hitherto the most favoured of the angels, in a revolt against Heaven. Satan tempts Eve to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, and Adam and Eve are expelled from paradise.

Milton was a revolutionary figure, allying himself with the commonwealth cause through the period of the execution of Charles I and the Restoration. In fact, Milton was explicitly in favour of the removal of kings who weren't tyrants: "since the King or Magistrate holds his authority of the people, both originally and naturally for their good in the first place, and not his own, then may the people as oft as they shall judge it for the best, either choose him or reject him, retain him or depose him though no Tyrant, merely by the liberty and right of free born Men, to be governed as seems to them best." Since God is represented by a king on Earth, it seems but a small step to think about the overthrow of God. Milton may have intended to justify the ways of God to man, but he could well have failed.

The poet William Blake argues that Satan is the hero of the poem, and that sympathies should lie with him: "[I]n the Book of Job Miltons [*sic*] Messiah is call'd Satan." Blake goes on to reason that "The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devils party without knowing it". It's not quite a case of "Lucifer fell for me", but in post-Romantic views of Milton it comes quite. It is necessary that there be a Fall, in order to have redemption, but this Blakean view of Milton's

Satan situates him as a hero who failed. Blake also writes of two states of human existence: "innocence" and "experience", the idyllic and idealised world of the child and the Fallen cynical world of the adult, who creates an evil father figure God (tagged Nobodaddy). Coming back to Pullman with this in mind, should we be pleased that the quasi-Satanic Asriel is going to refight the war in heaven?

At this point we have to remind ourselves that the universe in Pullman's *Northern Lights* is not our world, and if we read it as an alternate world we have been given no indication as to where the split has come. The Catholic church is very different in the present, and there has been a Calvin. We know that there is a Texas. We also know that the Bible is different. But what we don't

know is the crucial fact: given that history is written by the winning side, who won the war in Heaven? If Asriel wins, it might bring a new Golden Age to Earth. Alternatively, he might be Satan and bring a new dark age. Or Pullman's Asriel/Satan may be the Messiah... And if he loses...

All of these issues remain to be resolved in *The Amber Spyglass*, but it remains to be seen whether they will be. Mrs Coulter's comments on the nature of dæmons and the necessity to be liberated from them might be right, or it might be a new Puritanism, or the self-justification of an evil figure. Lyra

might be the true hero of the sequence, temporarily eclipsed by Will, or she might be a false hero, even an Eve – we know after all that "she will be the betrayer" (33).

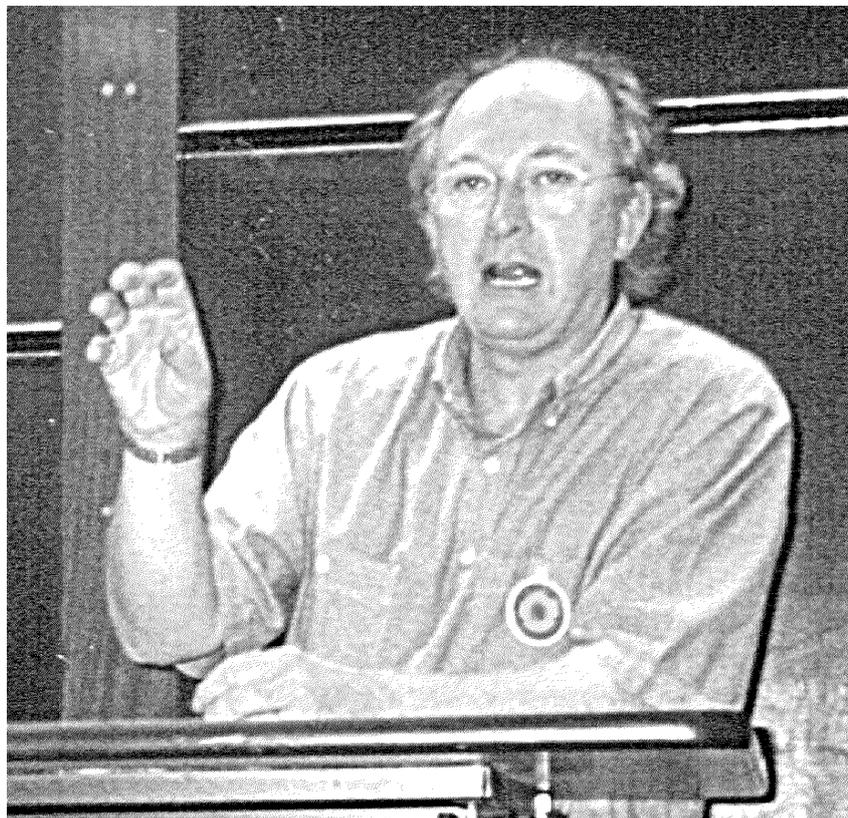
One more factor needs to be taken into account: in his public pronouncements, Pullman has noted that he doesn't want there be a kingdom of heaven. Instead, echoing the republican Milton, he wants a republic of heaven. There is no other realm of heaven and hell, there is only Earth. And whilst it might seem strange for a fantasy writer to be a materialist of this kind, it's one way of distinguishing from the theological fantasies of C S Lewis with their dubious uncles, travels between realms and Christ analogues. Somehow I think the *His Dark Materials* trilogy will keep us pondering for decades to come.

Page references from Northern Lights are taken from the Point Scholastic edition, 1998. References to the Bible (Authorised Version), Blake and Milton were taken from online editions.

Paradise Lost is available in an edition published by Penguin (edited with an introduction by Christopher Ricks; Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1989). The Prose is less easy to find, especially Tenure of Kings and Magistrates; try John Milton, Political Writings (edited by Martin Dzelzainis; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

The Blake quotations were taken from The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, which is in most selected editions. A facsimile edition is The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (edited by Geoffrey Keynes; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975); a good collected edition is The Complete Poems – Second Edition (edited by W. H. Stevenson; Harlow: Longman, 1989).

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Philip Pullman, again at Lexicon (photo: Paul Billinger)

ONE OF THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL NOVELS OF 1999 WAS A DOORSTEP OF A BOOK BY NEAL STEPHENSON, WHICH DIVIDED PEOPLE (WHO'D READ IT) BETWEEN THOSE WHO THOUGHT IT WAS AN EXCELLENT SF NOVEL (JOHN CLUTE LISTED IT AS ONE OF THE FIVE BEST OF THE MILLENNIUM) AND THOSE WHO THOUGHT IT WAS AN EXCELLENT NOVEL, BUT *NOT* SCIENCE FICTION. WHILST SOME OF US ARE STILL WONDERING WHETHER SCIENCE FICTION IS WHATEVER JOHN CLUTE POINTS AT WHEN HE SAYS "SCIENCE FICTION", IT'S TIME TO SPEND SOME TIME LOOKING AT THE BOOK ITSELF. A CHARACTER TYPE CENTRAL TO STEPHENSON'S FICTION IS THE NERD OR GEEK. JULIETTE WOODS EXPLORES THE TYPE IN RELATION TO *CRYPTONOMICON*.

The Geek as Holy Warrior

in Neal Stephenson's *Cryptonomicon*

by Juliette Woods

The 'geek' is often discussed as a modern phenomenon, in which the socially inept find solace amongst their hi-tech paraphernalia. Success with machines is somehow equated to failure with human beings, suggesting a withdrawal from such human concerns as morality and history. The geek is presumed to be motivated solely by a sense of aesthetics, searching only for the next "neat hack", and Tech-for-Tech's-sake is now viewed as least as suspiciously by non-geeks as Art-for-Art's-sake once was. Few now seem to remember the benevolent boffin, the geek's ancestor from only a generation ago. But then, the boffin could be treated something like a pet, you would "set your boffins to have a go at it", while the modern-day geek is frighteningly autonomous, selling out to the suits only temporarily when in need of cash, for geeks resent bureaucracy and resist any rules not founded on logic. And in Neal Stephenson's *Cryptonomicon* (1999) these traits are enough to lift them from their presumed moral vacuum to the role of holy warriors. The geek is placed in a pivotal position in history. And Geek is good.

The novel – a vast work of more than nine hundred pages with at least one sequel to come – consists of two interlinked storylines set in different periods. One takes place in the 1930s and 1940s and concerns the rôle played by cryptanalysis during World War II; the other concerns a present-day attempt to set up a data haven on the fictional island of Kinakuta. The storylines are linked; the protagonists of the World War II storyline either survive through to the present day or provide descendants who will become characters; the plots converge to become treasure hunts for the same horde of gold; and the themes are always those of the power of information, the horror of war and the geek's rôle in history. For Stephenson identifies the modern computer geek as culturally belonging to an ancient lineage of scientists, engineers, technocrats, and all those who live by logic, observation and the use of their wits.

This depiction of the geek relies on two key metaphors, both of which are outlined by Enoch Root in his conversations with Randy Waterhouse. These metaphors, although based on Greek mythology, are held to have counterparts in most societies because they represent themes which Root believes are almost universal. The first of these is the war between Athena and Ares. Athena is described as the goddess of cunning (*metis*) and technology, and she stands in opposition to Ares, the god of wanton destruction, cruelty and mindless viciousness. The second metaphor is that of the *Titanomachia*, or the eating of the old gods: old, disproven theories must be destroyed so that new ones can take their place. The example of Titanomachy which Root mentions is the demolition and reconstruction of mathematics which took place in the first half of the twentieth century, but a better-known one might be the overthrow of the Newtonian universe with the advent of quantum and relativistic physics.

The central argument of *Cryptonomicon* is that Ares societies cannot achieve Titanomachia, while geek-driven Athenian ones can. Freedom is held to be essential to technological progress and the Titanomachia becomes a kind of holy destruction in the battle between Tech and Evil. In essence, Stephenson is simply giving a

martial twist to Thomas Kuhn's ideas on the nature of science. Kuhn argues that science progresses in two ways: usually through a process of "normal science" in which advances are made within an agreed framework, and also through paradigm change whenever the existing framework is found wanting. The Titanomachia is thus just a particularly violent metaphor for the changing of paradigms.

Consider critically his account of the Second World War. In the context of *Cryptonomicon*, it is easy to cast the Axis as Ares and the Allies as Athena, as this is an account of the war in which the actions of generals and the fighting ability of battalions seem to make no difference whatsoever: it is only the technology which counts. Scientific freedom becomes conflated with freedom of speech and hence with political and social freedom. Thus, Root asserts, the freer countries produce better technology and hence win the wars. Randy grumbles something about "proclaiming a sort of Manifest Destiny", but the rest of the novel bears out Root's theory. Randy's grandfather, Lawrence Waterhouse, is involved with two of the greatest cryptanalytic success stories in history: Indigo and Enigma. Once the Japanese codes and the German U-Boat codes have been cracked, the War in the East and the Battle of the Atlantic both seem to become foregone conclusions. Similarly, the importance of social freedoms is illustrated most baldly through the invention of an Axis counterpart of Alan Turing (Turing is also a character in the novel). Rudolf von Hacklheber is a homosexual German mathematician, who chooses to leave Nazi Germany after his lover is tortured, and so the Axis lose his valuable cryptographic expertise. The failure of the Japanese is depicted as a failure to self-criticise or adapt: the supremely adaptable, "unkillable Nip engineer" Goto Dengo provides a contrast to his dying, inflexible and unlucky fellow countrymen.

Some of the historical accuracy of this account can be disputed. For example, cryptanalysis certainly was vital in the Battle of the Atlantic, but Allied success was never a foregone conclusion even with it. There were many weeks and months when Bletchley Park could not decipher the intercepted messages. Much of their success relied on the insecure use of the codes by the German Navy, and they also had to rely on Nazi hubris preventing the Germans realising that the codes had been broken. In fact, during the last week of the war, the German Navy finally did achieve cryptographic security.¹ In short, if the Nazis had consistently and carefully used their existing codes (let alone developed new ones) then much of the geek ingenuity of Bletchley Park would have been wasted.

Stephenson is on firmer ground in his speculations about what would have happened to a Teutonic Turing. While Turing's war years are described by his biographer as "a sexual desert,"² he was always doggedly honest about his sexual preferences, which would have made him a target for any security service which seriously cared about such things. Despite (or because of) his openness, nobody ever thought to mention his sexuality to the authorities. But his counterpart von Hacklheber lives in fear of the Gestapo and his life. In a truly nightmarish sequence, he comes face to face with Goering and all that Germany has sunk to, and

we are made to feel two things: firstly, the revulsion that Rudy feels for the Reich, and secondly, the loss that Germany suffers when Rudy decides to leave. After all, Turing will change the post-war world through his rôle in the invention of the electronic computer, while von Hacklheber gets within a fictional gnat's whisker of changing the post-war world through refinancing Asia. Moreover, we are reminded later by Root of all the Jewish and other scientists who also left the Reich to its detriment. Before the war, Germany led the world in the sciences, but its excellence moved westwards with its exiles to start anew in the United States.

But of course, in 1952 Turing did finally fall foul of British law and two years later he killed himself. According to his biographer, his suicide may have been linked to the advent of McCarthyism in the States and its knock-on effect on British Security, for Turing was still engaged in classified projects well after the war. Although this is not directly alluded to by Stephenson, it is presaged by the interest some of the Allies take in Rudy's sexuality toward the end of the novel. "Old Man Comstock", who is strongly identified with the Cold War, ludicrously surmises that the aristocratic von Hacklheber must have communist sympathies because he is gay. This foreshadows the retreat from open debate that takes place within McCarthyism a decade later. McCarthyism is a restriction of social freedom made in the name of improvement: in this scheme it is Ares in drag, wearing a wig and waggling a tin-pot shield.

Yet while there is some truth in Stephenson's depiction of the war, it must be said that there are equally plausible interpretations available. Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel* could provide one starting point. A biogeographer's account might describe the war as essentially unwinnable by Europeans alone because of "Europe's geographic balkanisation". The entrance of the United States and the USSR, countries of enormous natural resources, determines the course of the conflict. One need not mention scientific advance or political or economic freedom at all.

But perhaps the most obvious weakness in Stephenson's argument is his conflation of scientific and political freedoms. To what extent is political freedom essential to technological progress? Certainly, the Soviet Union made much less progress scientifically than the United States during the Cold War period. Some of this was due to political pressures (Lysenkoism,³ for example) but some of it was due to the nation's economic quarantine as imposed from the West. There is the argument, of course, that only in a truly egalitarian society are we able to make use of all the finest talents, be they gay, Jewish, black or female, but this usually assumes that talent is innate, whereas much modern research into high-achievers stresses that talent is trained into people during their early years.⁴ Because of its undemocratic structures, a repressive régime misses out on many existing talented people, who might have risen through their own merit in a freer society. It can, nevertheless, decide to train an élite out of whatever social group is deemed appropriate. But would a society with such an élite have less scientific success than a democracy or meritocracy? Or does political tyranny, such as Stalin's, inevitably lead to scientific failure? Is paradigm change truly impossible under such régimes or merely much more difficult?

Stephenson also conflates scientific and economic freedoms. There is a libertarian aspect to the Kinakuta data haven, for example. Also, when Epiphyte's economic freedom is checked by legal requirements (including those of the unconvincingly maniacal lawyer Andy Loeb) this is held to be detrimental to the company's functioning: Randy and his fellow hackers become so constrained by legalese that they have important conversations only in twos, encrypt their every business communication and in

other ways function much like the World War II conspiracy which they parallel. They also go to ridiculous lengths, abetted by gun-toting freelance libertarians, to prevent "the Feds" from reading their files. It seems that it is acceptable when geeks snoop other people's mail, but not when peacetime governments do so.

The emphasis on the importance of free trade to scientific advance is not convincing: one simply considers the effect that economic "rationalism" has had on research cultures throughout the world. There is an inherent difference between commercial companies, which need to hoard information to profit by it, and the exchange of information required to advance knowledge. Free-market economics has led to the devaluation of "pure" and "blue-sky" research as this is not immediately financially valuable.

This conflation of the scientific, the political and the economic arises because Stephenson describes them all in terms of a particular kind of Darwinism. Stephenson appears to believe in Progress, and that Progress is best served through an evolutionary process of competition (with a little cooperation). While biologists such as Stephen Jay Gould have argued against the notion of progress in evolutionary biology, this idea remains central to many views of science, politics and economics, through the works of Kuhn, Mill and others. This may well be a reasonable view of science – the forces driving biological evolution may essentially be random, while the (trying-to-be-rational) human brain is not – but it is doubtful how well this analogy matches politics and economics.⁵

This emphasis on freedom (and to a lesser extent, competition)

betrays a distrust of government which is central to the novel. It provides, for example, the wellspring of the present-day plot. The data haven's only purpose is to keep governments and the law out of people's mail and their purses. Stephenson admits that this has sinister implications, in the form of General Wing and others, but this is held to be outweighed by its possibilities for good. The good in this case is the HEAP: the Holocaust Education and Avoidance Pod. This has the entirely laudable aim of preventing the genocide of any group. Back in World War II, the conspirators are equally distrustful of government and have equally laudable

aims: Rudy would rather die than give the location of Golgotha to the Allies.

But Stephenson narrowly avoids espousing pure technological libertarianism. While there are a fair number of *Übermensch* in the novel, he makes clear that the strong must also look after the weak: while Goto Dengo and Randy argue that hard work will solve all the world's problems, Root and Avi persuade them otherwise. Root asks of Goto, "What of the man who cannot get out of bed and work, because he has no legs? What of the widow who has no husband to work, no children to support her? What of children who cannot improve their minds because they lack books and schoolhouses?" What is unclear is *how* this social justice is to be administered. It seems that if they distrust governments so badly, the geeks will have to do it themselves.

It is at this point that we struggle with some political naïveté. Are these people really so much better than their governments? Wouldn't the success of either conspiracy lead to the protagonists becoming de facto governments in themselves? The implications are deeply undemocratic. The conspirators' plans are not described in much detail and it is unclear how Avi and Randy's HEAP would actually work, or whether Root and von Hacklheber would be setting themselves up as some sort of World-Bank-with-scruples. Or are we back with that beloved vision of Wells: that of the benevolent, technocratic governing élite? We do not find out in *Cryptonomicon* and we can only hope that such issues will be dealt with adequately in the promised sequel.

Perhaps Stephenson is arguing that the technocratic élite is innately better than their governments. Is the geek desire to have "every statement in a conversation be literally true" more worthy

Rudy would rather die than give the location of Golgotha to the Allies

than it is to “put a higher priority on social graces”? My worry here is that Stephenson is providing a beguiling daydream for the modern geek, that our obsessions are somehow worthy in themselves and relieve us of any other moral responsibility.⁶ The modern nerd has always seemed to me to be a politically inert creature, possessing strong opinions which are never actually acted on, even as we bewail the irrationalities of our governments and argue that things really ought to be better run. We have taken “the personal is political” to heart and decided that as long as we are nice to each other and kind to non-nerds that no other actions are necessary. Is this insularity really justifiable, as we switch off the television news to play *PodRacer*?

Stephenson seems to be arguing that, yes, this is the case, that number theorists and UNIX gurus alike will have their chance to improve humanity’s lot. But it still requires a mediating class of people (Enoch Root and Avi) to bridge the gap between pure nerdism and worldly usefulness. In this context, it is depressing to see that a huge horde of stolen gold needs to be discovered before anything substantial can be achieved – there is a strong scent of wish-fulfilment in the air.

The novel closes with the threat of the next battle with Ares still looming. Root again: “The next time... the conflict is going to revolve around bio-, micro-, and nanotechnology. Who’s going to win?” If freedom-loving Athenian civilisations almost by definition have the best technology, then why worry? The good guys will always win – provided that there are any good guys left.

Perhaps this is what we geeks are being asked to worry about: the encroachment of Ares on Athena-worshipping civilisations. Sitting here within the embattled Australian university system – which has so far endured a decade of crippling cutbacks and departmental closures – it is easy to feel that the barbarians are at the gate, and that we must take up metaphorical arms against our oppressors. Here we find ourselves in the same territory as Bruce Sterling’s recent *Distraction* (1999), in which the spin-doctor Oscar Valparaiso mobilises a group of scientists into political action to ultimately not much effect.

But then there is the question of whether absolute geek freedom is even desirable. Should pure curiosity ever be curtailed? Perhaps some nerd, on devising a bomb to destroy the universe, really would want to test it to see if it worked. These are concerns which Stephenson does not address. His is a world where the geek must roam free for the betterment of society.

One final blind spot of *Cryptonomicon* (a book I enjoyed immensely) is the Rôle of the Art Student. Technology is good, the novel seems to say, but education isn’t always. “Educated men created this cemetery,” Goto Dengo comments. Randy is likewise contemptuous of many of the educated people he meets, principally those he thinks of as hobbits: those who spend their sheltered lives arguing about nothing and devising ill-informed metaphors such as the “Internet Superhighway”. In Randy’s parlance, he and Goto Dengo are not hobbits but dwarves: educated people who do stuff and build things. Technical people. Perhaps Art Students merely exist to chronicle the great exploits of the geek.

But Stephenson’s criticism of arts academia is not justifiable. Certainly, as presented, Charlene and her fellow hobbits could easily have found themselves on the B-Ark from Golgafrincham: they are ignorant of the subjects they purport to discuss, and prefer stock arguments to reasoned thought. They lack that quality of rational self-criticism which is essential to Athena, for they truly believe that everything is relative, that all arguments are equal, and that black is white. But despite this, it is still possible to work out what it is they are trying to do. It is even worthy, not that Randy has much time for it. For I wish to argue that there is another way of combating Ares which Stephenson does not deal

with explicitly in the novel: the way of the semiotic warrior, or meme artist. If Charlene and G.E.B. Kivistik were less sloppy in their scholarship, they could at least be armed hobbits or even elves preparing themselves for the next Arian battle.

The fact is that no human being, not even a geek, can ever be entirely rational. We cannot be perfectly informed about every field of endeavour, so we have to rely on hearsay, good reference works, and mental shortcuts. The most powerful of these mental shortcuts are myths. Enoch uses them: they are a powerful technology in themselves.

Meme warfare is at its most obvious in propaganda. But even here there are clearly Arian memes and Athenian memes. Racism, for example, is surely an Arian meme, one which allowed Hitler to forge a supposedly unified Greater Germany. But it weakened the Reich in at least two ways. The first has already been alluded to, in the loss of ready talent, and the second relates to Hitler’s disastrous invasion of the USSR. Many Soviet citizens were willing to look upon him as their liberator from Stalin, but by stressing Aryan racial superiority Hitler had made it impossible for his Greater Germans to view Slavs with anything less than contempt. Once the news spread that Soviet prisoners were being massacred rather than enlisted, the people of the USSR fought the Germans as ferociously as they could.

An Athenian meme would stress the importance of cunning and technology in society, or promote social and egalitarian freedoms. A powerful example of such a meme in this century is feminism. In this context, it is sad to note that there is not a single example of the female geek in *Cryptonomicon* and that the chief female character can all too easily be dismissed as a “spunky love interest”.

However, Charlene and her friends do understand the power of memes. If they had been more sympathetically portrayed, we could see that what they are trying to achieve is their own Titanomachia: they wish to tear down the old, destructive memes and build up new ones, for memes shape history (of course, this idea far predates Richard Dawkins and can be found in Oscar Wilde and Michel Foucault amongst many others). However, for a meme to be successful it must spread outside of academia – you have to be populist – and it is at this point that Charlene’s efforts will fail. G.E.B. Kivistik *is* populist, but sadly, he doesn’t know what he’s talking about. His crime is stupidity, nothing more. But that doesn’t mean that meme war is necessarily useless: indeed, it is essential to freeing up society in the way that Stephenson longs for.

One must now consider Stephenson’s own rôle in the wars of Athena and Ares. He is, after all, an author now rather than a techie. Thus in some sense his work is closer to Kivistik’s than to the heroic technocrats who populate his pages. Stephenson is himself a meme artist, forging new myths for the technocracy to carry into battle. His overarching myth is that of scientism and libertarianism tempered by a sense of social justice. He argues that the smart guys are not only smarter, but innately more good as well. This is “survival of the group” selection in which intelligence and altruism ultimately pay off. After reading *Cryptonomicon* one is left with a vision of the technocracy as holy warriors, whose mere existence shapes the future for the better. For we geeks are portrayed as not unambitious: we desire not only freedom and truth (well, technical correctness) but also, as Goto says, “that we do not have any more wars like this one.” The portrait is flattering, but its accuracy is in doubt.

1. Andrew Hodges, *Turing: the Enigma* (London: Burnett Books/Hutchinson, 1983).

2. *Ibid.*

3. Doctrine in biology that environmental factors are more significant than genetic ones in evolution, with acquired characteristics being passed

The fact is that no human being, not even a geek, can ever be entirely rational.

one between generations. It was proposed by the leading Soviet and Stalinist scientist Trofim Denisovich Lysenko at the expense of Gregor Mendel's ideas.

4. For example, see Brian Butterworth's *The Mathematical Brain* (London: Macmillan, 1999) or Michael J. A. Howe's *The Psychology of High Abilities* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999).

5. Yes, I'm assuming here that scientific discourse is more rational than most political and economic discussions – call it a prejudice of mine.

6. I write "we" here because I work in computational fluid dynamics: I am a geek myself.

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IN THE SECOND OF A SERIES OF ARTICLES TO MARK RAY BRADBURY'S EIGHTIETH BIRTHDAY, DAVID SOMERSET EXAMINES THE STORY WHICH CLOSSES ONE OF HIS BEST KNOWN WORKS.

Bradbury's Martian Dreams

by David Somerset

The Mars of Ray Bradbury owes more to the dreams of centuries than it does to any astronomy. It is a red planet criss-crossed by canals and inhabited by Martians. The title which the collection is most often known by – *The Martian Chronicles* – reflects this: a series of vignettes representing twenty-seven years in the life of the Martians, from the first rocket from Earth to the last humans staring down at themselves in a canal, the new Martians, in 'The Million-Year Picnic'.

By that point, Martian has become a mindset, a place that will define its inhabitants. But ironically it is also the latest working out of the American Dream. The Dream is the ideology that characterises and drives the inhabitants of the United States. It is an ideology which derives from the optimism of the late eighteenth century, the period known as the Enlightenment, during which the USA and France set up constitutions guaranteeing freedoms on what they saw as a rational basis, with the powers of the state limited by the rights of people as individuals and collectives.

The first part of the Dream is space – America is a big country, especially when compared to the United Kingdom. There is space to expand into, people don't have to be on top of each other. There is also the romance of the open road. In 'The Million Year Picnic', the family gets to choose their own space: "They passed six cities in twenty minutes [...] Michael liked the first city they passed, but this was vetoed because everyone makes quick first judgements. The second nobody liked [...] the sixth brought acclaim from everyone" (217). Of course, they will have to modify the choices of the Earthmen who have gone before them, but this is all part of the choice.

Ownership of where you live is a key aspiration of the Dream, and even more than that, the ownership of a plot of land which is your own, and on which you can build your own home. This is clearly a legacy of the pioneer years of the United States, a move back to nature when life was less complicated. At the risk of being politically correct, we might ponder whether the American settlers didn't take the land from the native people, as part of centuries of witting and unwitting genocide. In 'The Million-Year Picnic' there has already been a genocide of the Martians, and most Earth people seem to have left. The family is taking what has been abandoned.

Americans are given a number of freedom and rights under the Constitution, such as the right to bear arms and practice their own religion. Free speech is also a constitutionally protected right. There is a certain amount of resentment among many at the interference of central government into local affairs, and at taxes going to the centre. Whether this constitution will hold on Mars remains to be seen, but given the post-atomic nature of the enclave the family is setting up, presumably weapons would be treated with some suspicion. It is unclear who they would need to protect themselves from, as long as they get on with their new neighbours, the Edwards family. But the burning of various papers and documents from Earth perhaps suggest it would be left behind. Within the family group there is the illusion at least of

democracy – although the children clearly don't know what the father has planned.

Another element of the American Dream is Individuality or Self-Determination: people should be treated for who they are, not who their ancestors were, and people are able to compete and take part in society within their own terms. Given the smallness of the new society, it is difficult to see that there would be anything other than such individualism, since they are share the same background.

At the same time, the father seems to display some measure of control and is certainly treated with respect. This brings us onto Equality as a factor of the dream. Any American can rise to become president, any individual can set up a business and make money and become a respected pillar of society. This does have to be disputed: class was and still is an issue in the United States, and racial prejudice is also a factor. Unsurprisingly a majority of white people believe that progress has been made towards equality and a majority of black people dispute this. In the world of this family, as in the wider America, all men are born equal. But to quote George Orwell, some men are more equal than others.

America is a materialist society, built upon the apotheosis of consumerism. There is the very real sense that owning things will somehow make you a better and happier person, whether it be getting the very latest model of car, a large refrigerator or a state of the art colour television. Anything you can't afford you can pay for by hire purchase or loans, and your name should be enough to guarantee that you are good to loan the money to. For the Martian family, all of this must be left behind, since there are no factories to manufacture the goods, nor more than a handful of Joneses to keep up with. The family will have to be self-sufficient, and make its own psychological models of themselves.

Finally there is an image of America as a garden where anyone can start over. The past should not be held against you. Anyone can start over, and try again, rather than being blamed for their mistakes for the rest of their lives. With the American Dream, the United States is viewed as a garden of Eden, but an Eden which gives you a number of second chances. The coming of the family to Mars is a second chance, but probably their only second chance.

But how much of a chance do they have? There is a moment of transformation at the end, when they see that they are the Martians, and the father refers to things his children will say to their own grandchildren. The mood is one of optimism, of breakthrough.

And yet there is a sense of apocalypse: "Later, after it was all over and things had settled, he could go off by himself and cry for ten minutes" (218). The characters may simply be putting on a brave face. We have this family, including a number of boys and a yet to be born daughter. We have the Edwards family, all girls. This is going to be fine for one generation, but unless someone else comes along, this is going to be a genetic dead end. They can only dream of a glorious future; the reality is much darker.

MICHAEL MOORCOCK, WILLIAM F TEMPLE, HARRY HARRISON, JOHN WYNDHAM, AND MANY OTHERS WERE REGULAR CONTRIBUTORS TO A NEGLECTED LITERARY SUB-GENRE OF FICTION WHICH APPEARED – FREQUENTLY UNCREDITED AND SUBSEQUENTLY UNACKNOWLEDGED, IN A LOST GALAXY OF LONG-EXTINCT PUBLICATIONS. NOW, DECADES LATER, PIECING TOGETHER ITS HISTORY IS A FASCINATING ENTERPRISE RIDDLED WITH CONTRADICTIONS, FALSE LEADS ... AND SOMETIMES, UNDISCOVERED CLASSICS TOO! ANDREW DARLINGTON REVISITS THE FORGOTTEN WORLDS OF COMIC-BOOK SF

The Hidden SF

The Juvenile Science Fiction of Mainstream SF Writers by Andrew Darlington

NEW READERS START HERE ...

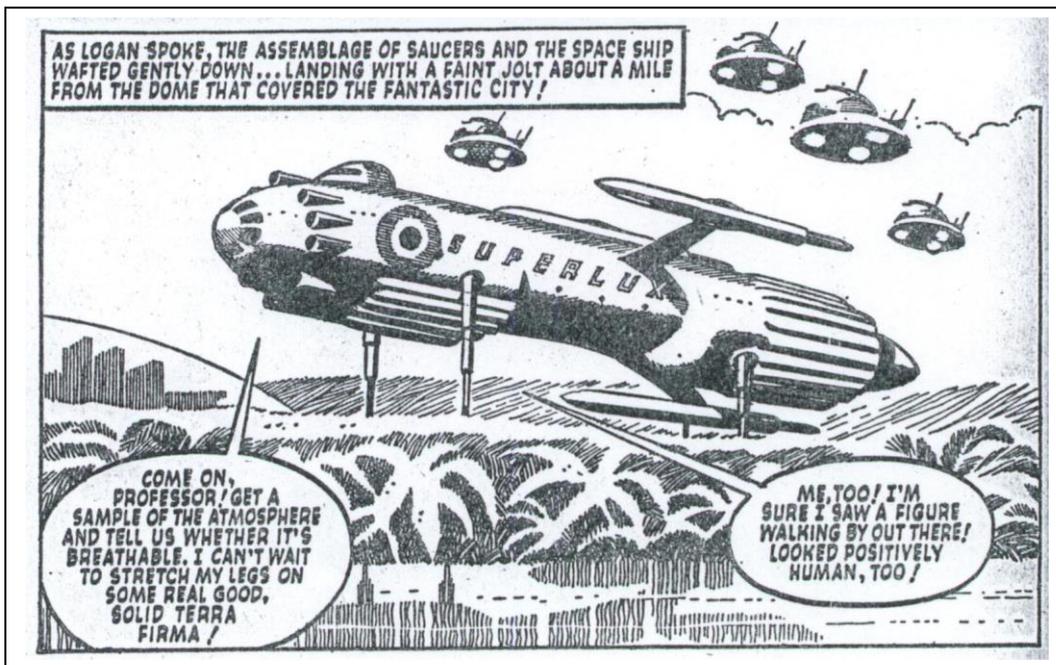
“Reichert had finally reached the point of blind panic... he was beyond reason. He knew only that he must get away from these horrific beasts! With a wild yell he dodged the tip of a tentacle and plunged into a nearby lake. Despite the menace of the searching tentacles, Jet-Ace stood momentarily transfixed with horror... as Reichert’s body hit the liquid a great plume of fumes spouted skywards, and boiled and bubbled like a vast witches cauldron.” Jet-Ace Logan grimaces, “that lake must be acid! Poor Reichert!”

Then “as Reichert disappeared and the lake of vitriolic liquid quietly bubbled and fumed to itself, Jet-Ace turned to face the flickering phosphorescence of the monster’s eyes... The first tentacle had barely made contact with Jet-Ace’s spacesuit, when he heard the faint whirr of motors above him and he looked up to the most welcome sight he had so far seen on this abysmal planet. The flying saucer hovering overhead – and brilliantly lit...”

This sequence of frame-by-frame picture-strip excitement is featured in *The Power From Beyond*, issued as no.442 of Fleetway’s *Thriller Picture Library* in January 1963. Meticulously illustrated by Ron Turner, it is one of two Jet-Ace Logan books scripted – according to a letter to me from Turner himself “by a young Michael Moorcock”. Logan, daredevil pilot of the twenty-first century RAF Space Command, joins the crew of the *Superlux*,

an experimental starship which is soon “crashing the C-barrier, passing the speed of light”, and accelerating out of control “doomed to travel on for ever out to the edge of creation” until it is rescued by the saucers of friendly aliens from a ‘Transluxian’ world. But unknown to Logan, the criminal Reichert has smuggled himself aboard, and after he murders the alien pilot – Londa, the Earthmen are exiled, pending judgement, to the Dark Planet – where they’re set upon by the huge, monstrously tentacled crustacea depicted in this brief excerpt. It’s a fast-paced cleverly

plotted story, at least as imaginative as much SF then available in the adult magazines. And the suggestion that ‘a young Moorcock’ was responsible seemed eminently reasonable, after all it’s no secret that he scripted massively for stories which emerged anonymously through



juvenile publications throughout the 1960s. Indeed, his 1996 fictionalised autobiographical novel *The War Amongst the Angels* even playfully lists comic-strip characters he’s supposedly scripted for – “Robin Hood, Billy The Kid, Buckskin Annie, Strongbow The Mohawk, Karl The Viking, Buck Jones, Hereward The Wake, Sam Bass, Kit Carson, Olac The Gladiator, Tom Mix, *Jet-Ace Logan*, Jesse James, Sexton Blake, Wulf The Briton, Tarzan Of The Apes, and a dozen other stars of screen and strip, before burning himself out on twenty different serials a week...” [my italics].

And yet, and yet, when I tentatively published my discovery of this ‘newly identified’ work of Moorcockiana no less an authority than Moorcock himself wrote from Texas to present a slightly different genealogy. “It’s very kind and flattering” he explains, “but I never wrote a *full-length* Jet-Ace Logan to my knowledge (unless it appeared in parts in *Tiger*). I have great memories of my early years in pulps and comics and made some great friends during those days, but I can’t remember all the stuff I wrote. I definitely wrote *African Safari*, *Danny Jones: Time Traveller* and a few others around that period, and I did a lot of annual work, but I think Ron Turner misremembers the amount of Jet-Ace Logan I did. That *could* have been Harry Harrison, or possibly Ken Bulmer.” So yes, he *had* scripted for *Jet-Ace Logan* – predominantly in volumes of the *Tiger Annual*. But no, not this one. Getting back to Ron Turner with this new evidence he then revised his recollections – if not Moorcock, perhaps it *had* been Harry Harrison? Again a reasonable assumption as Turner had worked extensively with Harrison scripts for the long-running *Rick Random: First Detective of the Space Age* adventures. But unfortunately this intriguing and frustrating correspondence was brought to an untimely and inconclusive end by Ron Turner’s death. And meanwhile it leaves fresh questions, which of the many *Jet-Ace Logan* stories *did* Moorcock write?

While... consider this, one of Science Fiction’s most academically respected authors – Ray Bradbury, once confided to a *San Francisco Review of Books* interviewer that “when *Buck Rogers* came along it was the most amazing thing I’d ever seen”. His discovery of such SF comics brought about a ‘transformation of consciousness... when I was nine I began to collect comic strips. *Buck Rogers*, *Flash Gordon*, *Tarzan*... I went absolutely crazy. I lived hysterically waiting for that hour when *Buck Rogers* came into the house”. And he was hardly alone in his enthusiastic prepubertal taste for this adult-scorned trash-fiction. Indeed, oscillating between SF and comic books there was an impressive cross-over cast of American writers, artists, editors, publishers and scripters operating in both spheres active throughout the 1930s to the 1950s, including Edmond Hamilton, Alfred Bester (*Green Lantern* scripts), Manly Wade Wellman, Henry Kuttner, Leigh Brackett (scripting for *Mystery in Space*), L. Ron Hubbard, Harlan Ellison, Virgil Finlay, Edd Cartier, Alex Schomburg, Frank R. Paul – and later, perhaps inevitably, even Bradbury himself. Some, like Theodore Sturgeon, only wrote “comicbook continuations to survive”, while others – like Otto Binder – found strip-fiction even more lucrative than prose. Although a prolific and respected early SF fictioneer whose Adam Link story survived to become the ‘I, Robot’ episode of the 1990s *Outer Limits* TV relaunch, featuring Leonard Nimoy, his incursions into strip-fiction led to in excess of 50,000 pages of comicbook script produced across 30 years. And while he was well capable of concocting routine superheroics for *Captain Marvel* to his brother Jack’s illustration, he could also adapt the graphic medium as a vehicle for advanced ideas of great originality – using ‘Close Shave’ to infiltrate a daringly sympathetic story of interracial marriage into 1950’s segregated America (in EC’s *Weird Science Fantasy* February 1955).

While significantly, in another corner of the comic-strip multiverse, from April 1950, with the launch of *Eagle*, announcing Arthur C Clarke as ‘scientific adviser’ for *Dan Dare*, through into the late 1980s with Sydney J. Bounds and Brian Stableford contributing scripts to DC Thomson’s *Starblazer* pocket library,

“a space-hero in every sense of the word. An astronomer might well question some of the discoveries made by Magnus on Venus and the Moon, but few boys are likely to do so”

Michael Moorcock and Harry Harrison were far from alone in selling to the British end of this voracious market. Both Moorcock (and perhaps Harrison?) and Ken Bulmer – at different times, scripted for Jet-Ace Logan. But Bulmer also wrote the impressive ‘Karl The Viking’ fantasies for *Lion* and ‘The Steel Claw’ for *Valiant*. While E.C. Tubb and Sydney Bounds were churning out

gritty World War II combat yarns for the likes of *Air Ace* or *Battle Picture Library*. And William F Temple, John Wyndham and Barrington J. Bayley were there too, contributing to ‘a hidden literature’, a highly influential but largely forgotten subgenre of SF that remains not only neglected – but totally unsuspected by most historians and academics of the genre.

During the late-1950s and early 1960s conditions converged to positively encourage such genre cross-over adventures. After the paper-rationing and amateur publishing games of the immediate post-war years the number and circulations of established weekly and

monthly titles expanded to match the demographics of the baby-boom. Higher standards forced the worst excesses of the genre into extinction, with a rising curve of demand for more structured, more literate stories, hence it provided a window of opportunity that a surprising number of SF writers were uniquely suited to fill. But even before that time, when boy’s weeklies largely consisted of text stories, SF-pioneers were equally quick to exploit its potential. Both John Wyndham (as John Beynon’s *Martians On Earth*) and John Russell Fearn were heavily featured in *Modern Wonder* – an ambitious magazine launched in May 1937. A colour weekly from Oldham’s Press, it ran Alex Raymond’s original *Flash Gordon* strip as a back-page serial, while the Beynon story, oddly, was an abridged version of one run still earlier in a magazine called *The Passing Show*. The reprint even reproduces basically the same illustrations, only retouched to take into account the fact that Joan – the original space stowaway, has switched gender to become John! The curious can check out the book edition of Wyndham’s *Stowaway to Mars* to investigate which sexual identity makes it into the final draft.

Elsewhere the *Boy’s Own Paper* Anniversary issue – dated March 1954, celebrates its seventy-five years of regularly featuring writers of the calibre of Jules Verne, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Capt WE Johns by publishing a new short story – ‘Space Saboteurs’. William F. Temple, its creator, was the author of the *Martin Magnus: Planet Rover* juvenile SF novel series praised by no less an authority than TV-astronomer Patrick Moore – *Martin Magnus*, he says, was “a space-hero in every sense of the word. An astronomer might well question some of the discoveries made by Magnus on Venus and the Moon, but few boys are likely to do so” (in his book *Science and Fiction* [1957]). Indeed – there’s a persistent story that Temple was originally approached by Hulton to edit their first *Dan Dare Annual*, towards which he subsequently devoted much time and effort. He also prepared a commissioned *Dan Dare* novel for them, but – as SF anthologist and historian Mike Ashley relates (in his *The History of the Science Fiction Magazine Vol.3*): “Hulton’s plans went awry, through no fault of Temple who had met the publisher’s initial requirements to the full. Everything then went wrong, and when the final *Dan Dare’s Spacebook* appeared it was no longer the work of Temple and was a mere shadow of its original conception”. But fortunately, Ashley adds, “Temple was able to rework his [Dan Dare] novel into his later *Martin Magnus* series”.

Nevertheless, Temple was also a writer already known to



'Rick Random and the Terror From Space' (*Super Detective Library* Jan 1959). Script by Harry Harrison

Boy's Own Paper readers from previous contributions (including "Moon Wreck" in November 1953). A one-time Stock Exchange staffer, Temple was now by-lined as a member of 'The British Interplanetary Society', and would go on supplying text SF for boys for many years to come, including a short story called 'Explorers of Mars' in *Authentic SF* magazine's single-shot juvenile spin-off *Authentic Book of Space* (foreword by Arthur C. Clarke, also featuring E.C. Tubb and H.K. (Ken) Bulmer). "A tale of two boys who went to Mars" it tells of a world of real canals and dead Martian cities which the brothers accidentally become the first humans to enter. Temple's 'Science College Of The Future' tales followed in various issues of the short-lived *Rocket* (1956) – a 4½d 'Space Adventure Weekly'. For such stories his preferred style is near-future 'factoid', infotainment in which technical problems are overcome with technical solutions. An impressively typical example, 'Earth Satellite Charlie-One' in *Boy's Own Paper* Vol.78 no.4 (January 1956), is a story illuminated by sharp cover and inner art by Redmill, relating how "the first satellites were tiny globes packed with tele-metering gear, radiating back to Earth information about atmospheric conditions 250 miles up. Ten of them – Able One to Able Ten, were launched in the International Geophysical Year between 1957 and 1958". His hero is First-Man-In-Space Bill Lock (a reassuringly Anglo-Saxon name at odds to the soon-come *real*/Soviet cosmonaut who'd claim that role), an "engineer, pilot and born leader", but the adventure is told through the experiences of young Vic Harding's first trip into space for the construction of a space station "in the form of a 250ft revolving wheel". There are neat details such as each floating component "sprayed with aluminium to catch the sunlight" and powerfully descriptive panorama-views of the planet they'd left, as "the great curve of the Earth reared up, bearing the Pacific Ocean as though it were a convex mirror". Comparing fact

with fiction, cause and effect, science journalist Andrew Davidson now writes "perhaps NASA's designers were keen pulp readers, perhaps they got their inspiration for their space rockets from the fantasy covers of comic books like *Boy's Own Paper* and *Startling Stories?*" And just possibly they did. Meanwhile, given 'Anniversary Special' cover status, Temple's earlier 'Space Saboteur' – set on another space station 1075 miles above Earth, provokes an enthusiastic reader's letter earning young Brian Coombe of Cardiff five shillings for declaring "space flight is the coming thing and the majority of the younger generation read this kind of fiction...". Where – one wonders, is Mr Coombe now, and have his tastes in reading material survived the passage of years, and decades...?

Simultaneously, and as if to confirm Brian's younger generational assertion, Harry Harrison states emphatically in the introduction to his *Blast Off* that "Science Fiction is for boys...". He was writing from experience, for Harry was already involved in the New York boom-time comics scene supplying 'that kind of fiction' to the 'younger generation', an area in which he was to operate in every capacity for four decades. His autobiographical contribution to *Hell's Cartographers* explains how he started out as a graphic artist in 1946, well before his first adult fiction sale. Soon his energy and strict expertise in the field propelled him to a status enabling him to work from his own studio employing additional illustrators to produce all manner of visuals, lettering, book jackets, and spot-art, but predominantly hack comicbooks. His 'Only Time Will Tell' was visualised by Wally Wood for EC's ambitious *Weird Fantasy* no.1 whereas the *Captain Rocket* series – credited to Premier Publishing (in Nov 1951) was almost completely put together by Harrison, "I edited, wrote what I could, drew and inked it". He also contributed a *Captain Science* story to *Fantastic*. While confessing "I know that all those hours at

the drawing board have helped the visual sense in my writing" he later conceded that "the kind of modified science fiction that sells well in comics is action rather than ideas. And whatever ideas *are* there are usually physical basics, Zip, Bang, Boppo ...!" Yet it was through contributing his artwork to Damon Knight's SF magazine *Worlds Beyond* that his first adult fiction sale – 'Rock Diver', achieved publication (in the February 1951 issue). Yet despite such a promising career-diversion comics continued to be his primary concern, progressing from excitingly 'realistic' draughtsmanship to editorial "packaging, assembling pages, doing continuity, inking, lettering and writing" – until the imposition of the censorious 'Comics Code' caused a subsequent retraction of the American market, putting him out of business.

The second phase of his comics career begins quite by chance a few years later while the much-travelled Harrison was staying in Capri. Here he meets Dan Barry, a comics artist who'd just begun working on the *Flash Gordon* daily and Sunday newspaper strip for King Features. "He needed a writer and since there were very few ex-comic artist American Science Fiction script writers living in Europe, I got the job". The gig lasted ten years, until Harrison "was so choked up with loathing for comics I could not type a word more. (Although this is *my* hang-up and not the fault of either Dan or Flash". This brief and humorous self-history omits a constellation of related visual fiction that flowed from Harrison's inventive pen, work which not only supplemented his income but provided an intriguing fund of uncredited work for the SF researchers to haggle over.

Boy's World was launched on 26th January 1963, a rich gravure colour comic very much in the style of *Eagle* – with which it was merged after a mere eighty-nine issues. But during its brief life, splashed lavishly across the centre-spread, was *The Angry Planet* translating and re-plotting Harry Harrison's *Deathworld* novels into brashly extravagant picture form, with Ken Bulmer's dialogue and narrative conveying the action effectively. "On the planet Pyrrus" opens the 19th October episode "Brett and Grif, a young Pyrran, discover a sealed valley. The valley is filled with savage ironjaws...". Then, as the two adventurers watch, strange shovel-nosed creatures release the animals imprisoned in the valley. "Grif runs ... but he is in the path of the charging ironjaws...". Escaping through a deep tunnel system they later discover plants that not only produce ready-woven cloth but – "Great Scot, if I didn't know better, I would say they were *SHOES!*" The episode closes as our heroes encounter a whistling Birdmen who seems to control the valley's bizarre fauna and odd flora. Exciting stuff, but a creative team as inventive as Harrison and Bulmer, combining on such powerful sourcework, should have achieved a better end-product. Unfortunately the strip is flawed by often inadequate artwork. And although not without interest the bland characterisation fails to ignite.

Better by far is Harrison's script for 'Out Of Touch' in the *Jeff Hawke Daily Express* series – benefiting from Sydney Jordan's immaculate art (4 October 1957 to 5 April '58), or his input to *The Saint* picture-strip spin-offs based on the Leslie Charteris Detective. But best of all, and Harrison's greatest contribution to UK comics, comes with his inspired scripts for *Rick Random*, a series of megatales and hyperfictions which runs through twenty-seven pocket-books issued through the Super Detective Library imprint, at least five of which are authenticated as Harry Harrison originals. The 'Library' consists of what would now be called Graphic Novels, successive editions of which are crammed with fiction that functions like beautifully designed machines. For eight years from 1954's 'Crime Rides the Spaceways', and at their best illustrated by the expressive Ron Turner, Random is seldom less than a mature and tightly-plotted creation. Space Heroes aimed at the juvenile market generally do not smoke and aren't allowed girlfriends, but *Detectives* do ... well, Flash Gordon was allowed a girlfriend in the form of Dale Arden, and while Dan Dare's relationship with Prof Jocelyn Peabody (or with Digby for that matter!) remains relentlessly celibate, he *does* manage to smoke an occasionally avuncular pipe. But Rick Random is prime-time crime, and as part of a monthly comic-book series which also features Sherlock Holmes, Bulldog Drummond, Dick Barton, The

Saint and Sexton Blake, such sophistication *is* admissible (SF writer Fredric Brown's adult crime story 'The Dead Ringer' became 'The Phantom Of The Fun-Fair' – a non-Random contribution to no.17 of the same series).

But such considerations aside, as "Top Trouble-Shooter For The Interplanetary Bureau Of Investigations" under its foppishly bearded chairman Dr Marius Fisher, and often in conjunction with girlfriend Detective Superintendent Andi Andrews, Rick Random solves a succession of crimes located in cosmic setting. Among the titles positively identified as Harrison's are *S.O.S From Space* (no.115) with Random and Myla on planet Qont, involved with its horned rebels riding eight-legged 'Weltas', perfectly imaged by Turner. While *Rick Random and the Space Pirates* (no.127) is essentially a crime mystery set on the isolated 'Queen of Space' speeding towards the star Merak II with a vitally important cargo of iridium – and four suspects. Its trail of false clues and unexpected plot twists makes it a detection tale of classic construction shoved out into a galactic setting. *Rick Random's Perilous Mission* (No.129), by contrast, is located in the 'inner space' of a Pacific Oceanic Food Farm with typically Ron Turneresque architectural statuary, and Random infiltrating the sub-aquatic workforce to uncover a murdering saboteur. There's a malevolently nasty Virus-DD and some inventive technology used as ingredients in a taut mystery thriller – "then, like the flying fish it was named after, the powerful rocket-sub hurled itself up out of the sea... the wings snapped into place, and like an immense arrow the ship sped towards the southern waters". But my favourite Harrison-penned Random is *The Terror From Space* (No.143) in which the long-range exploration ship 'North Star' returns to Earth after "a fantastic five-year journey, spanning the vast distances of outer space", during which its crew have been replaced by shape-shifting Kreggari, aliens who quickly gain control of Earth by replicating the appearance of World Leaders. To combat this 'unseen invasion' Random recruits a resistance group, which gravitates to the forgotten stronghold of Gibraltar, a "giant stone fortress" still occupied by its curator Sergeant Jones, who's been left there to care-take its antique arsenal, which includes Labs in which the rebels discover the true molecular identity of the Kreggari, and a conveniently useful atomic submarine which they then use to re-take London from the alien nasties. It's powerful stuff indeed, as SF academic Kenneth F Slater concurrently observes – while reviewing Capt WE Johns' juvenile SF hardback *The Edge of Beyond*, "I fear that to try to convert a *Rick Random* enthusiast with such a pedestrian work as this would be an impossible task" (*Nebula* no. 34 – September 1958).

Following the demise of *Super Detective Library* the Random tales have been frequently reprinted in a variety of formats, including 'The Terror From Space' in the *Buster Annual 1963*, '...Perilous Mission' retitled 'Red Q Emergency' for the *Space Picture Library Holiday Special 1981* and 'SOS From Space' as part of the *2000AD Summer Special 1978*, where Rick is not only joined by a similarly resuscitated Dan Dare, but achieves a minor reincarnation himself when Ron Turner is brought in to ink a newly created Random strip – 'Riddle of the Astral Assassin' serialised through *2000AD Progs* 113-118 (19 May – 23 June 1979). Oddly enough, around this time – and in the same publication, Harry Harrison's *Stainless Steel Rat* stories were being similarly magiked into picture strip form through Kelvin Gosnell script-adaptations, but this time embellished with exquisitely apt art by Carlos Ezquerro. Slippery Jim diGriz's first exploits run from Progs 140 to 151 in *2000AD* (from 24 November 1979) set in "the rich union of worlds that will be the Galactic Empire of the far future". *The Stainless Steel Rat Saves the World* runs to a further twelve episodes from Prog.166, while *Stainless Steel Rat For President* completes the trilogy from 24 November 1984, running to 62 fine pages.

For Harry Harrison such exploits in the comic-strip multiverse "underwrote the slow years of getting established, until I could actually live on the income from my books and stories...". But getting back to the authorship of Jet-Ace Logan? Michael Moorcock's letter to me concerning the dubious genealogy of the *Thriller Picture Library* volumes mentions that "I suspect that the

one that sounds so good – featuring (a character called) Aldis, is actually by Harry Harrison". He is referring to the *other* Ron Turner-illustrated Jet-Ace Logan *Thriller Picture Library* edition – the one called 'Times Five', in which the high-spirited RAF Space Command pilot tricks the pompous 'egg-head' scientist he's assigned to 'liaise' with, by devising an entirely circular course for their ship, because "I do nothing but run round in circles for you, so I thought that if the ship went round in circles I could stand still!" The scientist is called 'Aldis'.

And bearing in mind that Harry Harrison has a long and productive association with one of Britain's finest SF writers, Brian Aldiss, perhaps this teasing reference is an in-joke. Providing a

further clue to the story's authorship...?

THE ADVENTURE CONTINUES ...

I gratefully acknowledge the kind and generous assistance of:

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Brian W Aldiss and Harry Harrison, eds., *Hell's Cartographers*
(London: Orbit, 1975)

Patrick Moore, *Science and Fiction* (London: George G Harrap, 1957)

Ron Turner/John Lawrence, Michael Moorcock.

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Cognitive Mapping 20: Mars

by Paul Kincaid

In 1898, when H.G. Wells subverted the popular invasion story by turning the attacking fiends into literal aliens, it was almost inevitable that the invaders should be Martians – in fact, for a long time 'alien' and 'Martian' were practically synonymous. Mars was our neighbour, the red planet symbolically linked with

war; through optical telescopes astronomers had detected areas of blue-green amid the red and in 1877 Giovanni Schiaparelli had identified *canali* which the popular imagination continues to translate as 'canals'. Only two years before Wells's story of invasion, the American astronomer Percival Lowell had published a book (*Mars*, 1896) which completed the image of Mars as a hospitable, survivable world, a world suitable for humanity, or for its own indigenous life.

The image of Mars imperfectly absorbed from the ideas of Schiaparelli and Lowell turned the planet initially into the setting for colourful, romantic adventures. George Griffiths's *A Honeymoon in Space* (1901) was typical in that it portrayed Martian society as both decadent and extremely rationalist; it became common to present Mars as a much older world but one whose people had become weary, in need of the sort of gung-ho American enthusiasm brought to them by Edgar Rice Burroughs's John Carter. Starting with *A Princess of Mars* (magazine serialisation 1912, novel 1917), Burroughs's series of eleven Barsoom novels featured exotic landscapes, beautiful princesses, evil opponents, an upright dependable hero and all the other trappings of swashbuckling adventure. It may have owed little to the Mars known to science, but in its rôle as a second Earth it wasn't that far from what Lowell and his fellows had been looking for.

During the 1930s there developed a contrasting view to the Wellsian model of implacable, inexplicably hostile aliens, stories that presented Martians as loyal and friendly, and as a contrast to

Barsoom these same stories were rather more conscious of how Mars did differ from Earth. Examples include Raymond Z. Gallun's 'Old Faithful' (1934) and Stanley G. Weinbaum's 'A Martian Odyssey'. This latter shared many of the characteristics of the romantic vision of Mars: the planet, imagined by its first Earth

"There'd been water in it sometime, though. The ditch was covered with what looked like a nice green lawn. Only, as I approached, the lawn moved out of my way!"

"Eh?" said Leroy.

"Yeah. it was a relative of your biopods. I caught one – a little grass-like blade about as long as my finger, with two thin, stemmy legs."

Stanley G. Weinbaum – 'A Martian Odyssey' (1934)

visitors as a desert, is in fact bursting with colourful and exotic life. Life that is at the same time intelligent and funny (the ostrich-like Tweel), curious (the silicon creatures that inhabit pyramids of their own rock-like excreta), and threatening (the black, tentacled beast from whose clutches the narrator first rescues Tweel). This short story is actually quite important in the development of science fiction, exulting as it did in the sheer variety and mystery of possible alien life; it was one of the first stories that suggested

alien life forms could be very, very different from the human form, and that they might be mysterious or even incomprehensible to humankind. But beyond this playful odyssey through a wonderland of alien creatures, the story also paid careful attention to the nature of Mars as we knew it at the time. The lower gravity, thinner atmosphere, lack of water and lower temperature are all taken into account, anticipating the more realistic approach to scientific principles and understanding demanded by John W. Campbell's *Astounding*.

This approach, perhaps best exemplified by Arthur C. Clarke's *The Sands of Mars* (1951), still didn't end the more romantic vision of Mars. In fact, the red planet started to acquire a religious or spiritual symbolism. In *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938) by C.S. Lewis it was a platform for a Christian passion play; in Ray Bradbury's collection of stories, *The Martian Chronicles* (1946-50), it provided a haunted landscape for tales of loss and memory; in Roger Zelazny's 'A Rose for Ecclesiastes' (1963) it provides the spirituality necessary for a poet's cultural rebirth; in Ian Watson's *The Martian Inca* (1976) its dust wrought visions and miracles.

In fact, in stories from Ian McDonald's *Desolation Road* (1988) to Terry Bisson's *Voyage to the Red Planet* (1990) to Paul J. McAuley's *Red Dust* (1993) Mars has continued to provide a primarily romantic, non-realistic backdrop closer to fable than fact. But, in one of the rare instances of scientific discovery feeding directly into science fiction, the detailed information about the Martian surface and atmosphere provided by the Mariner and Viking missions, and the studies which concluded in 1985 that enough water might exist to sustain prolonged missions, have prompted a rebirth of more realistic, factually-based fictions about Mars. These have tended to focus on the establishment of a colony (as in Ben Bova's description of the first manned mission to the planet, *Mars* [1992]) or on the politics of the relationship between an established Martian colony and distant Earth (as in Greg Bear's *Moving Mars* [1993]).

However the work which has done most to re-establish Mars as an important landscape for science fiction writers to explore has been Kim Stanley Robinson's trilogy, *Red Mars* (1992), *Green Mars* (1993) and *Blue Mars* (1996). This is a huge work which encompasses the first two hundred years of the Martian colony, from the landing of the First Hundred to a time when colonists can breathe without assistance and sail across Martian seas. At first glance, the Martian trilogy is firmly in the mould of the factually-based hard sf approach to Mars fiction. It describes in minute detail the measures taken to terraform the planet, records with extraordinary even-handedness the political arguments between the Reds who wish to preserve the Martian wilderness and the Greens who want to transform the planet, and explains each new scientific development from particle physics to longevity treatment in a manner to suggest that we are getting insights into scientific research two hundred years before it happens. Indeed, at times the scientific extrapolation can be breathtaking in its daring. It conforms to the pattern also in using as a trigger for most of the drama in the three books the worsening relations between Mars and Earth resulting in violence and armed conflict.

But what makes Robinson's Martian trilogy such a resonant work is that it re-works and updates the romance of Mars (Robinson follows what has become a familiar science fictional tradition of naming his Martian settlements after sf writers who

romanticised the planet, from Lasswitz and Burroughs to Bradbury and Clarke). What we witness across three volumes and getting on for 2,000 pages is the slow but inexorable transformation of Mars from the bleak, unwelcoming desert that NASA has shown us into the exotic landscape of canals and forests and seas that has been the dream of science fiction for the last century. By the closing pages of *Blue Mars*, when much of Earth has been flooded by a

series of natural disasters and half of Mars is under the waters of a new sea, the two planets are almost literal twins, Mars has become a second Earth where romantic adventures can indeed be played out – and the scientists, the explorers, the rational hard thinkers of rational hard sf have already set forth for the next terraforming challenges among the asteroids and the outer planets and on to neighbouring stars.

This homage to the sf writers who have already explored Mars in their imaginations is also present in Robinson's 'Exploring Fossil Canyon', one of the early stories which set the scene for his trilogy. Here, in what is effectively a hymn to the sterility of Mars, he recounts all the forms of life that these writers have imagined on our neighbour. Although Robinson is saying, very firmly, that such creatures do not and cannot exist in the real Mars, the long list of impossible creatures emphasises how much we want our neighbour to be inhabited. We do not want to be all alone in the night, and we look to Mars first of all for the fellow

creatures we want to meet out there. Whether they are Wells's invaders or Weinbaum's comical allies does not matter, what matters is that they should exist. So when NASA declared that it had found signs of life in a Martian asteroid discovered in the Antarctic it was as if a dream had come true: our loneliness was at an end, and life was (or at least had been) there on the very place we had always looked to find it: Mars. Already, this new excitement at the idea of Mars bearing life is beginning to seep into the literature, notably in stories such as 'A Cold, Dry Cradle' (1997) by Gregory Benford and Elisabeth Malartre. Whether or not Mars does prove to contain life, it always will in our imaginations; we can never get away from the need for that intelligence watching us from space.

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They would never find remnants of Martian life; no one ever would. She knew that was true in every cell of her. All the so-called discoveries, all the Martians in her books – they were all part of a simple case of projection, nothing more. Humans wanted Martians, that was all there was to it. But there were not, and never had been, any canal builders; no lamppost creatures with heat-beam eyes, no brilliant lizards or grasshoppers, no manta ray intelligences, no angels and no devils; there were no four-armed races battling in blue jungles, no big-headed skinny thirsty folk, no sloe-eyed dusky beauties dying for Terran sperm, no wise little Bleekmen wandering stunned in the desert, no golden-eyed golden-skinned telepaths, no doppelganger race – not a funhouse mirror-image of any kind; there weren't any ruined adobe palaces, no dried oasis castles, no mysterious cliff dwellings packed like a museum, no hologrammatic towers waiting to drive humans mad, no intricate canal systems with their locks all filled with sand, no, not a single canal; there were not even any mosses creeping down from the polar caps every summer, nor any rabbitlike animals living far underground; no plastic windmill-creatures, no lichen capable of casting dangerous electrical fields, no lichen of any kind; no algae in the hot springs, no microbes in the soil, no microbacteria in the regolith, no stromatolites, no nanobacteria in the deep bedrock... no primeval soup.

*Kim Stanley Robinson – 'Exploring Fossil Canyon'
(1982)*



First Impressions

Book Reviews

edited by
Steve Jeffery

All novels marked:  are eligible for the 2000 BSFA Award for Best Novel.

All collections marked:  contain stories that are eligible for the 2000 BSFA Award for Best Short Fiction.

Mike Alsford – *What If? Religious Themes in Science Fiction*

Darton, Longman and Todd, Ltd, 2000, 164pp, £9.95 ISBN: 0232523479

Reviewed by Farah Mendlesohn

The *Sunday Programme* on Radio 4 is one of those programmes which defy their apparent categorisation. Marketed as a round up of religious news, it just happens to provide the best world news coverage outside the World Service and *From Our Own Correspondent*. It also provides book reviews of the type of quirky material that isn't going to make it into mainstream literary programming. Consequently, I'm hooked. Listening last week (Sunday 5th August) I was tickled to hear a discussion of science fiction and what it can offer to the religious reader. The discussion was between John Clute and Mike Alsford, a Senior Lecturer in Religious history from the University of Greenwich, who had just published his new book on religious themes in sf. At the very beginning of his book, Alsford explains that he has no intention of simply outlining science fiction religions or discussing how sf authors have tackled the place of religion in society – although he does outline the general hostility. Instead, Alsford's project is to consider how science fiction has helped us think about "the big issues". His big issues are the nature of ourselves, ideas of alienness, and where we belong, and encompass discussions of human rationality, of the place of the soul and the body/spirit divide, of the idea of utopia and of the meaning of unalienable rights. What he doesn't seem to do is discuss much religion or much science fiction.

The structure of the book is to spend approximately ten

pages outlining an area of philosophy or the debates surrounding a philosophical question in very broad historical terms. This is rather useful if you want a survey of European philosophy, but then this isn't the book you would buy for that. Each section then includes a list of novels or short stories in which these ideas can be found. Occasionally we get a rather too long quotation from these examples (*Star Trek* is ubiquitous), but there is an almost complete absence of analysis. The choice of examples is rather arbitrary, and puzzlingly, does not correspond to his list of Further Reading at the end of the book. It also isn't clear which texts listed under Further Reading which have not been discussed elsewhere would illustrate which of his categories.

Alston also seems to be writing in an academic vacuum. Even given his declaration that he isn't writing about "religion in" sf, there are several books on philosophy and anthropology and sf of which he is seemingly oblivious: the only book on religion and sf he mentions is S. May, *Star Dust and Ashes*, published by SPCK, which I have never come across (but will now try to get a copy). Within the wider field of science fiction it gets worse. Alsford, quite sensibly, declines to provide a general history of the genre, but chooses instead to spend twelve pages on its enlightenment origins and three on the emergence of genre sf publishing. These three pages are astoundingly bad. Whereas in the section on the

enlightenment Alsford has been keen to provide a clear sense of chronology and affiliative networks, in this section chronology becomes an irrelevance, anecdote dominates and it is impossible to derive Gernsback's importance to the genre from the comment that he was "the editor of a number of pulp magazines" (p.19). More generally, Alsford's choice of recommended general history texts is bizarre. His only recommendations are Aldiss's *Billion Year Spree* (1973), long superseded by *Trillion Year Spree* (1986), and Clute and Nicholls's *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, which while brilliant is most definitely not where to start a beginner. The Panshins, Jameson, James, Westfahl and Moskowitz are nowhere to be seen. The Further Reading section is shockingly bad when it comes to criticism. Alsford seems to believe that no-one has ever tackled this subject before, recommendations might have included the Panshins' *The World Beyond the Hill*

(1989); *Many Worlds: The New Universe, Extra-Terrestrial Life and the Theological Implications* ed. Steven Dick (2000) and Stephen Clark's *How To Live Forever: Science Fiction and Philosophy* (1996). The most shocking part of these recommendations, however, are listed under 'Miscellaneous'. In place of a list of the academic journals we have references to *Starlog*, *SFX*, and *TV Zone*. I'm not decrying the usefulness of these magazines, but they are hardly likely to add depth a student's understanding of the subject.

And finally, Alsford gets things wrong. Apparently, Heinlein wrote a novel in 1941 called 'Logic of Empire'. I had to call home from the train to check my brain wasn't losing a few cells: it is, as I remembered, a thirty-odd page short story. All in all, this was a deeply disrespectful book: disrespectful in that it took very little notice of the field within which it would be contained.

James Barclay – *Noonshade*

Gollancz, 2000, 484pp, £9.99, ISBN 0-575-06895-7

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

Noonshade is the second book in the 'Chronicles of the Raven' and follows directly on from events at the end of Barclay's debut novel, *Dawnthief*.

Having defeated the Wytch Lords by releasing Dawnthief, "the spell to end all spells", Denser the Xeteskian Mage and the remains of the elite mercenary band known as The Raven face a seemingly insurmountable problem: the spell has left a dimensional rip in the sky, a fairly obvious patch of roiling nastiness which casts a shadow over the city of Parve every day at noon. Beyond the rip, unbeknown to all involved, a new threat to Balaia lurks...

On the other side of the rift the dragon Sha-Kaan is now ruing the theft of the amulet (a component part of *Dawnthief* stolen by Hiram Coldheart of The Raven). Incensed and afraid of the repercussions of Dawnthief, he enters Balaia through the rift to confront Hiram and The Raven and demand the rift's closure. Denser, of course, has no idea how to do it, and if he can't, then the skies of Balaia will fill with dragons and

humans as a race will soon cease to exist.

The Raven is now torn between two evils; despite having no magic since the demise of the Wytch Lords, the brutal Wesman armies are sweeping across Balaia on several fronts. Having suffered several huge defeats at the hands of the invaders, Balaia's own forces are scattered and hopelessly outnumbered. They also have to do something about the rift, and Denser, beset by melancholy, has problems of his own – when you have achieved that ultimate goal in life, the one thing your whole life has been dedicated to, what is their left?

Once again Barclay has produced a page-turning romp with engaging characters and bags of, often brutal, action. It's not the literary event of the year and certainly won't win any awards, but it is storytelling at its very best and provides a few hours of excellent entertainment. I'd highly recommend this series to fans of fantasy and look forward to the next instalment.

John Barnes – *Candle*

Tor, 2000, 237pp, \$22.95 ISBN 0-312-89077-X

Reviewed by Robert W. Hayler

Following massive global environmental chaos, various virus-type software installed themselves in the brains of humans then used these humans to wage war on one another for control of the most computational power. These battles were known as the Meme Wars. The victorious Meme, One True, is seemingly benign and cushions its users/subjects from the extremes of emotional experience with an interface, *resuna*, in a way similar to the caps fitted by John Christopher's Tripods.

The dwindling tribe of those who deliberately avoid *resuna* are known as 'cowboys' and Currie Curran, an ex-cowboy hunter, is called out of retirement to find one of the best and last. The tables are turned however when the hunter is caught and, literally, a battle of minds ensues.

The story features much extremely high technology, and does so convincingly. In fact some of it reads like a missing Earth-bound segment of Robinson's Mars Trilogy: the waters are rising, huge cables on the equator reach into the sky, and so on.

Despite these contemporary trimmings, however, the main thrust of the book belongs in another, simpler, era. The hunting and the scenery of the Rockies are lovingly portrayed, as in the best boys-own adventure, but after the two main

protagonists meet, the innocent machismo teeters over the edge into camp. One lengthy scene involves the guys drinking naked together in a makeshift hot tub, and the gruff but straight way it is played makes it unintentionally hilarious.

The book is not helped by a peculiar structure: one long hunting sequence followed by two similarly lengthy flashbacks. This makes it hard for the story to maintain any pace. When the ending comes it has been heavily telegraphed and falls flat.

(Spoiler alert: the following paragraph contains mention of the very end of the book!)

It is interesting to compare Barnes' conclusions to the end of William Gibson's zeitgeist-defining debut *Neuromancer* (1984). In Gibson's book the newly whole AI is asked if it is now God. Its reply is that it is now going to converse with its own kind. Humanity, having served its purpose, is left alone to carry on with whatever silliness it had planned. This inversion of the traditional apocalyptic ending was shocking and amusing. Well, John Barnes took the snub personally because the conclusion of *Candle* shows us how a planet wide AI could want to be loved. Ahh.

Terry Bisson – *In The Upper Room and other likely stories*

Tor, 2000, 284pp \$24.95 ISBN 0-312-87404-9

Reviewed by Andrew Seaman

Terry Bisson will be familiar to a majority of genre readers as the author of the 1990 story 'Bears Discover Fire', a Gary Larson-esque fable whose whimsical appeal is elegantly encapsulated in its three-word title. If none of the stories in this, his second collection, quite match that piece of work there is still much to amuse and entertain within its pages. The vast majority of the tales here plough an essentially light-hearted furrow, aided by Bisson's entertainingly slick reworkings of traditional sf-nal ideas.

Certain themes soon become evident, particularly the collision between modern technology, popular culture and sex. In the title story a VR addict finds himself trapped within the pages of a shopping catalogue made real, while 'An Office Romance' ingeniously chronicles the everyday life and loves of two office workers incarnated as icons on their computer desktops. Elsewhere, in 'The Joe Show', a woman receives a high-tech dirty 'phone call from a disembodied alien, and the narrator of the amusing 'He Loved Lucy' suffers the humiliation of being seduced and then dumped by the intelligent agent software managing his share portfolio. All four pieces display a worryingly extensive knowledge of lingerie and their perfectly serviceable sf ideas have been spiced up with a tasteful hint of the erotic (unsurprisingly they all were first published in *Playboy* magazine). However, the provocatively titled 'Tell Them They Are All Full of Shit and They Should Fuck Off', a First Contact story unlike any you've probably read before, could surely have only been published in a magazine like *Crank!*

With a nod to R. A. Lafferty, 'The Edge of the Universe'

and 'Get Me to the Church on Time' are a pair of playfully 'unlikely' stories featuring bizarre manifestations of cosmological phenomena in the environs of Alabama and New York City. A more obvious genre homage, this time to Clarke's 'The Nine Billion Names of God', is to be found in the penultimate line of 'First Fire', but this time, when the stars go out, no one notices.

Star of the collection is undoubtedly 'macs', a story 'inspired' by the Oklahoma City bombing. It's a mordant, blackly humorous take on the subjects of victims' rights and capital punishment, as clones of serial murderers are farmed (and farmed out) to the families of their victims for Old Testament-style retribution. Structured as a series of confessional interviews with the families, the story all-too accurately captures both the brutality and banality of the impulse for revenge. Running it close is 'Incident at Oak Ridge', a twisty tale of time-paradoxes in the form of a screenplay, in which two unwilling time-travelers stranded in 1944 find that enlisting the help of physics genius Richard Feynman may not be the smartest thing they've ever done.

In the course of nearly three hundred pages Bisson throws out enough ideas to keep several writers busy for at least a couple of years. Some stories, like 'Smoother', a tale of human indifference in the face of future global disaster, or '10:07:24' are frustratingly underdeveloped, but when he hits the mark (e.g. in 'macs') the results are powerful and unsettling. On balance, the slightest pieces in this varied collection are still entertaining enough to warrant your attention, even if you don't share Bisson's apparent obsession with lingerie.

James Blish – *A Case of Conscience*

Millennium, 2000, 192pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-924-4

Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

The Jesuit Ramon Ruiz-Sanchez's dilemma is whether to recommend further contact with the Lithians, intelligent reptiles whose Edenic existence without any concept of God or religion suggest a further problem: are they unFallen souls, or proof it is possible to live according to the systems of Christianity without Jesus or God, or a creation of the Devil? In fact, his problem is more subtle than that. Can Satan, in fact, 'create' or is Ruiz-Sanchez falling into the Manichean heresy? What, exactly, *is* the nature of the trap that is being set for him? It is approaching 50 years since the first part of *A Case of Conscience* was published in *If*, yet it is still one of the most powerful sf novels in existence, dramatising one of the crucial points involved in the possible discovery of alien intelligence elsewhere in the universe. How would it affect our religious beliefs?

To those for whom religion is part (note I do not say "merely part") of the pattern-making ability of the human mind, such a discovery would be shattering enough: for those who believe in a purpose revealed by a deity, what would be the result? If what Ruiz-Sanchez sees is correct, either his religion is *wrong* or he is being malevolently deceived. He chooses to believe the latter.

Blish's future-Catholicism (as I understand it) is not, as his

introduction makes clear, quite that of contemporary Catholicism (as I understand it). But interestingly, since the novel's first publication the rise in Creationist dogma in recent years makes the debate within it more topical: Ramon's analysis of Lithia is based upon how the existence of the planet's sapient race underpins Darwinian evolution, a concept anathema to his belief-system. I have always considered the second part of the novel, with the effect on the precarious stability of Earth society of the Lithian Egverchi, to be flawed in comparison with the first, but its further elucidation of the 'Shelter Economy' (we might remember the influence on the novel of the Cold War and the fear of nuclear holocaust) adds weight to Blish's carefully constructed ambiguity. Just as the climax of the novel *might* be one event *or* another, so it's possible to read the Catholicism of Blish's future as *part of* an underlying malaise rather than something ineffably set apart from it. Even if this is so, we still have the portrait of a man with an apparently insoluble spiritual dilemma. *A Case of Conscience* is as thought-provoking as when first written; beautifully imagined, intellectually challenging: a clear example of the exhilarating nature of science fiction at its best.

Suzanne Alles Blom – *Inca: The Scarlet Fringe*

Tor Forge, 2000, 352pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0-312-87434-0

Reviewed by Paul Billinger

Peru, 1527 and Exemplary Fortune is preparing to tell his father Unique Inca, the ruler of the Empire, the omens from the Priests' divinations. The signs are not good and three llamas had to be sacrificed to obtain an understandable answer. Exemplary Fortune's sense of unease only worsens when a messenger arrives with a quipu – a knotted string

message – with news of a strange boat with "three masts with sails and was shaped like a horse – forty strange men with beards and silver clothes were on it". Exemplary Fortune is sent to investigate.

Meanwhile at a coastal settlement, Hummingbird, an Incan youth, flees from the authorities over a mix-up with a gold cup

only to be picked up by this strange boat – the first contact of the Inca people with the Spanish Conquistadors. Hummingbird is kept captive by the Spanish to provide information for a planned invasion but first he must be returned to Spain where an army is being prepared.

And so starts an alternative history in which the Conquistadors' invasion failed and the Incan Empire rose to even greater heights. At least that's what I assume will happen as this story is set right at the start of the divergence, taking it up to the first battle between the two armies (unsurprisingly this book is the first of a series). That the Conquistadors lose is made clear from the very start of the preface and reinforced by short introductions to each chapter outlining "how actual history diverges" which takes away most of the interest, leaving you only to discover how the pre-determined event occurs.

This fundamental flaw is compounded by the events of the book simply not being interesting. Although the Inca world is

well realised very little is done with it apart from lots of running up and down mountains. The two lead characters are set up to show both sides, but Hummingbird is so weak and passive that we get very little insight into the Conquistadors' society. Exemplary Fortune (all names have been translated literally to rather clumsy effect with characters such as Esteemed Egg, Whence Grasping, and Beseeching Cotton) is at least distinctive and likeable but his interaction with two Spanish captives takes too long to become interesting.

The Inca world should be a fascinating culture for a story, as should the premise of the Conquistadors' failure, but Blom's book is dry, lacking any sense of the grandeur of the setting or the impact of the change. Had this divergence point been briefly covered in a prologue and the story itself set much later, then a very different world could have been explored. This, plus writing that makes the Inca culture and environment appear colourless and flat, makes for a very disappointing read.

N.M. Browne – *Warriors of Alavna*

Bloomsbury, 2000, 308pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-7475-4694-0

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

The two main characters of this novel, Dan and Ursula, are called by magic from the present day to the first century Britain of a parallel universe where the Roman conquerors burn, rape and pillage. Forced to accompany the Celtic tribesmen who called them, they learn to adapt to the warriors' way of life and discover aspects of themselves they never knew. In the end, as one might expect, they're responsible for the victory of the tribes, though not in quite the way the reader might expect, and although they finally return to their own world, enough loose ends are left for a possible sequel.

For me, the most interesting aspect of the work is the way that Ursula develops. Unattractive and unpopular in this world, she struggles with the changes in herself, in particular in the different aspects of her sexuality, and in her growing realisation of her own magic.

Unfortunately, I don't think the potential in this situation is fully realised. Ursula is never explored in depth. Though she has more of the writer's attention than any of the other characters, I never felt she really comes to life.

If the writer held back because this is a young adult novel,

I think it was a mistake. Though the issues in the book are serious, there's nothing beyond the capacity of young people. The book doesn't do the concept justice.

Part of the problem is the style. The vocabulary is fairly simple and tends to be flat. The sentences are largely short and uncomplicated. The choppy rhythms are awkward and work against any real engagement with the story. The richness of ideas – war, magic, the need to adapt to an alien culture – isn't matched by a richness in the writing. There's a tendency to shift viewpoint so that just as the reader begins to explore some aspect of the book, the focus slides away to something else.

In one sense the book is too good. It's much better than the kind of mass market fiction for young people which offers nothing but horror, violence, and a bit of adolescent sex. At the same time, it isn't well enough written to be classed as a literary novel. Falling between two stools, it will be too demanding for young readers who just want mind candy, while those looking for more depth in their fiction will find it unsatisfying, as I did.

Orson Scott Card – *Shadow of the Hegemon*

Tor, 2000, 366pp, \$25.95 (also in leather-bound limited edition for \$200) ISBN 0-312-87651-3

Reviewed by Claire Brialey

Shadow of the Hegemon is the sequel to *Ender's Shadow*, the companion novel to *Ender's Game* which itself spawned three direct sequels. *Ender's Shadow* presents the events of *Ender's Game* from a different perspective with a different protagonist, Ender's lieutenant Bean; and thus *Shadow of the Hegemon*, too, fills in part of the story previously glimpsed from a different perspective with another narrative focus.

I mention these linkages to ensure you get the maximum enjoyment from these books. If you've read neither *Ender's Game* nor *Ender's Shadow* it probably doesn't matter which order you read them in; Card believes that either should work and I suspect he's right. However, if you think you will ever want to read either novel, particularly *Ender's Shadow* – and reading *Shadow of the Hegemon* may well make you want to do so – then don't read this book first. In seeking to stand alone, it recaps too many previous events to leave you with any real surprises if you're reading out of sequence.

With this many caveats assuming that you'll want to read more, you'll anticipate that this is an enjoyable book, and yet

almost inevitably it can't quite match up to the impact of the novel it follows. *Ender's Shadow* is, I think, more interesting to a contemporary adult reader than *Ender's Game* would be now, since it features characters with more shades of grey and allows more complicity between the narrator, the characters and the reader than the earlier novel. *Shadow of the Hegemon* should benefit from a similar level of sophistication, focusing on Bean's relationship with his former Battle School colleagues and with 'Ender' Wiggin's older brother Peter near the beginning of Peter's political career. Peter has at least as many intriguing shades of grey as Bean, many tending towards the darker end of the spectrum. And stories of reconstruction should be intrinsically more complex and demanding than stories of battles, good vs. evil, and the last chance to save the world.

Yet as you read, the significance of the titles becomes clear. *Ender's Shadow* does not just refer to Bean's role but to the influence and impact Ender has on everyone who encounters him and on the whole story sequence. *Ender's*

Shadow focuses on Bean's obsession with Ender, and this sequel picks up how much a pivotal figure Ender has been – and Ender is no longer there. Thus the characters in this novel rely on memories of his presence and the novel itself is filled with reminders of his absence.

The visions of shifting global geopolitics are just as fascinating as Peter Wiggin always claimed they were. The

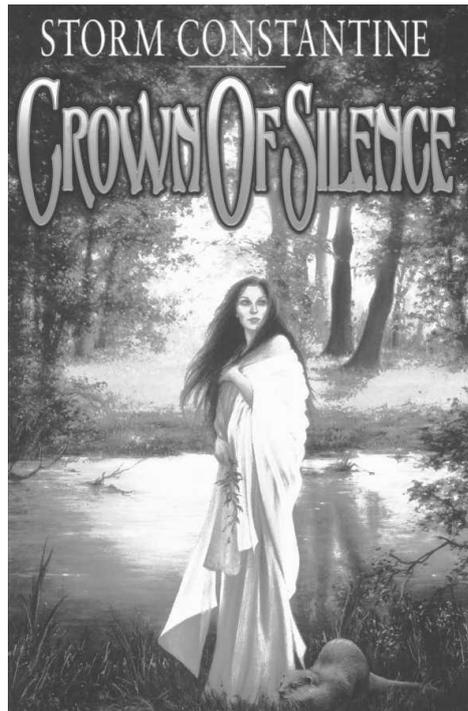
plot is well-paced, and the characters and their inter-relationships are developed with a light touch which nonetheless adds perspective to the earlier novels, particularly regarding the role and opinions of adults in a society which depends on brilliant children. It is an enjoyable novel; but it remains a sequel.

Storm Constantine – *Crown of Silence*

Gollancz, 2000, 344pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-575-06678-4

Reviewed by K. V. Bailey

Despite this being the successor to *Sea Dragon Heir*, the opening volume of 'The Chronicles of Magravandias' the putative Cadorean dragon-heir, Valraven Palindrake, figures only as a secondary character, although one towards whose ultimate destiny events appear to be heading. The opening chapters introduce a new character, a fifteen year old peasant boy, Shan, whose rites of passage constitute the novel's focus and to a considerable extent sustain its continuity. Orphaned physically and sexually abused in the course of the Magravandian army's subjugation of the land of Cos, he is rehabilitated and inducted into the ways and power of magic by Taropat, a mysterious hermit-mage. Taropat is actually Khaster Leckery, Valraven's one-time friend, but now implacable enemy, thought to be dead, but revived and psychically fused with an immortal whose name he now uses. In the years of his growing to adulthood, Shan is sent to be groomed by a succession of mages in various locations, culminating in his attendance at the court of Akahana, capital of Magravandias's vassal-state of Mewt. There Shan meets Khaster's brother, Merlan, and Tayven, Khaster's previous lover, another golden youth, abused and retrieved from near-death, who strangely mirrors Shan himself. Intrigue over kingly successions is rife in Akahana, and it is from there that a company comprising magus (Taropat), warrior (Shan) and bard (Tayven), with



Merlan as diplomat/protector, embarks on the quest of the Seven Lakes, the perilous last of which may yield the Crown of Silence. The last third of the book is the story of that quest and the implications of its outcome for the Magravandian (and Cadorean) future.

These plot contortions, seeming so formidable in summary, work out plausibly enough in a narrative which embodies many descriptive delights. Among them are accounts of cities, the quasi-Byzantine Magrast, the quasi-Pharonic Akahana, and of the Seven Lakes. Each of these lakes, symbolising some elemental energy, has its distinctive beauty or austerity, and a tutelary guardian with initiatory powers. To them the questers must give in order to receive. Certain of Shan's pre-quest initiations also mediate aspects of Constantine's esoteric philosophy, notably in his counselling by 'the Lady', who teaches of the universal life-force and how to live creatively in harmony with it. Shan's magically induced 'etheric' voyage through archetypally imaged landscapes and timescapes is a bravura piece of poetic writing. Through the novel as a whole, it is the intermeshing of deeply symbolic action and characterisation with intrigues of state and dynasty which enables the reader to experience the story on those two planes of realism and of fantasy, and then to recognise them as two sides of one coin (a recurring metaphor in the text). Anne Sudworth's sensitive cover illustration depicts both lakeside woodland and guardian spirit.

Greg Costikyan – *First Contract*

Tor, 2000, 287pp, \$23.95 ISBN 0-312-87396-4

Reviewed by Mark Plummer

The aliens that land on the White House lawn in 20— come not to fight but to trade. Placing a metal-rich asteroid in near-Earth orbit – 'All the metal you could possibly desire – as a free extra bonus, yours to keep whether or not you accept our offer!' – they tempt with the prospect of greatly advanced technology while asking only a seemingly useless resource in return.

For Johnson Mukerjii and Mukerjii Display Systems the potential does indeed seem great; until, that is, they realise that from the technological cutting edge they have been displaced to somewhere well back towards the blunt end almost overnight. The Earth economy cannot compete with these superior off-world goods and a catastrophic crash ensues, leaving Mukerjii homeless and unemployed. Still, all is not lost, and a clue to the way to recovery lies in the lessons of Earth's past.

This is Greg Costikyan's first science fiction novel – he has

written three earlier fantasies, although his greatest success has been in the field of games design – and it's billed as 'a novel of big business and alien invasion'. For all that this is a reasonably contemporary angle on the classic 'first contact' scenario and a plot seam rarely mined in earlier sf works, the book does seem curiously old-fashioned: a novel that would not have been out-of-place as a *Galaxy* serial in the Fifties, an impression that's reinforced by a light touch that invites comparison with Robert Sheckley. The classic fall-and-rise story, with Mukerjii seeking less to beat the aliens at their own game than to find a new game where he can excel, just cries out for some of those old Emsch line drawings.

All this is not necessarily a bad thing. This is a pacy action story: surprisingly short by modern standards, and which as a result does not outstay its welcome. The sort of book a non-sf reader expects of the genre, it does exactly what it says on the packet.

Perhaps a novel for those who believe they don't make sf like they used to.

Philip K. Dick – *Dr Bloodmoney*

Millennium (SF Masterworks No. 32), 2000, 304pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-952-X

Philip K. Dick – *Minority Report*

Millennium, 2000, 380pp, £7.99 ISBN 1-85798-947-3

Philip K. Dick – *We Can Remember It For You Wholesale*

Millennium, 2000, 395pp, £7.99 ISBN 1-85798-948-1

Reviewed By Andrew M. Butler

These three books between them tell of nearly thirty years of sf history. We begin with *Minority Report*, a short story collection which opens with 'Autofac' (written 1954, published in *Galaxy*, November 1955) and end with the short story in *We Can Remember It For You Wholesale*, 'The Alien Mind' (*Yuba City Times*, February 1981). By 1954 Dick had produced *The Cosmic Puppets* and *Solar Lottery*, a handful of mainstream novels, and enough short stories to eventually fill three volumes of the Collected Stories. The short story, the novella and the serial was the staple of sf in magazine form; Ace Doubles were a recent development and hardly any other American book company would touch genre sf. Dick felt free to raid these short stories for novels – 'Novelty Act' shows up edited as a section of *The Simulacra* (1964), *The Penultimate Truth* (1964) draws on 'The Mold Of Yancy' and 'The Unreconstructed M', and 'What the Dead Men Say' is a variant version of *Ubik* (1969). *We Can Remember It For You Wholesale*, spanning a period from 1964 to 1981, where the novel came to dominate, features materials that were to show up in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), *Counter-Clock World* (1967) and *The Divine Invasion* (1981). The 1960s was the period of the British and American New Waves, and so this contains Dick's story, 'Faith of our Fathers' from *Dangerous Visions*. It also contains, with remarkable recycling ingenuity, 'A Terran Odyssey', an oddly Kubrick-like title for selections from the novel *Dr Bloodmoney*.

Dr Bloodmoney, Or How We Got Along After The Bomb (w. 1963, published 1965) is a rare beast in the Dick oeuvre: a novel which confronts the nuclear war head on, rather than simply using it as a backdrop in front of which a new world may be erected. Life continues more or less as usual, nine years after an atmospheric nuclear accident, aside from the

odd person born with a birth defect, such as Hoppy Harrington, who lacks proper arms and legs, but has other powers. Then another bomb drops, and life has to start again, watched over by Walt Dangerfield, trapped in orbit. Whilst some characters struggle to survive, others try to profit, Dr Bluthgeld is consumed with grief, and Hoppy bides his time until he can gain power for himself. Of course, this all seems very Marin County, c.1962, and realism is the dominant tone. Except, of course, for Bill the unborn twin, which offers a strange reversal of Dick's life where his female twin died shortly after birth. This is the most autobiographical Dick gets in his sf until the 1970s, but he did include characters from real life in minor roles in his work. *Dr Bloodmoney* is an excellent novel from Dick's most fertile period.

Equally, no self-respecting fan should lack the Collected Stories of Philip K Dick. These Millennium reprints are reprints of the earlier Grafton editions, and reprints and retitlings of the Gollancz edition, with the change inspired by the possibility of movie tie-ins (*Minority Report*, apparently to be film by Spielberg, was previously *The Days of Perky Pat*, *We Can Remember...*, named for the story filmed as *Total Recall*, was previously *The Little Black Box*. At least the British paperbacks were spared the indignity of the shuffling of contents in the American counterparts). As well as the stories, there are brief notes on bibliographic matters, plus comments by Dick where they exist. The only omissions are a squib from *New Worlds* (to be found in *The Shifting Realities of Philip K Dick* and 'Goodbye, Vincent', a short story in a letter published in *The Dark-Haired Girl*. Even so Dick is on display at his mind-bending best: simulacra, reality games, Phil Dick ending up in ancient Rome and the importance of being kind to cats. Buy these books while you have the chance.

Steven Erikson – *Deadhouse Gates* 

Bantam Press, 2000, 684pp, £9.99, ISBN 0-593-04621-8

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

Deadhouse Gates is the second book in Steven Erikson's protracted 'The Malazan Book of the Fallen' series. It doesn't actually appear to follow on directly after events in the first book (*Gardens of the Moon*, reviewed in *Vector* 205) although the cover blurb implies it does, but it uses many of the same characters.

As in *Gardens of the Moon*, there are several main threads to this story, and it really is rather difficult at times to see them all in the context of each other.

All the action takes place in the land of the Seven Cities, specifically, in the Holy Desert Raraku. The seer Sha'ik is gathering a vast army in preparation for her people's uprising, prophesied as the Whirlwind, against the Malazan Empire. Coltaine, the young and untried commander of the Malazan 7th, is fighting a rearguard action, attempting not only to save his ever diminishing battle-weary troops, but the 30,000 or so refugees in his charge.

The scattered remains of the elite force known as The Bridgeburners are now outlawed and under sentence of death by the Malazan Empress Laseen. Fiddler and Kalam are thus attempting to reach the Empress to confront her – and kill her.

Entering the mix is the young Felisin, daughter of a disgraced Malazan Lord, who escapes imprisonment and

certain death in the mines of Otataral, along with a couple of fellow escapees. She winds up in the holy desert Raraku, and although she is bent on revenge – her sister was responsible for her imprisonment – Felisin will find that she has a destiny far greater than anything she could imagine.

And finally but not least, is Mappo the Trel and his half-Jaghut companion, Icarium, both of the non-human elder races.

I remember feeling exhausted after reading *Gardens of the Moon* last year, and not really feeling that I had a good grasp of what exactly was going on. I thought the second book would enlighten me, but this is not really the case. Once again Erikson has written a novel of unremitting war and violence, with various groups of people trogging around all with their own agendas. The various groups and the stories they are involved in work very well indeed on their own, but I never really get a sense of the whole picture and what any one group has to do with any of the others. This series so far lacks a sense of *place* for me – there is simply too much going on, and it jumps around all over the place from one group to another without ever really resolving anything. The retreat of the 7th may be the exception to this in that its survival (or not), and that of the refugees, is a story in itself and does get

satisfactorily resolved.

I am left once again wondering whether the fault is mine and am convinced there is a really good story in this book, but I am just *not* connecting to it at all. *Deadhouse Gates*, like

Gardens of the Moon for me, is a remorseless slog and certainly not rewarding in equal measure to the amount of effort it takes. Overall, a heavy and disappointing read.

Ann Halam – *Don't Open Your Eyes*

Dolphin, 2000, 183pp, £4.99 ISBN 1-85881-791-9

Reviewed by Penny Hill

Gwyneth Jones writes children's fantasy and science-fiction under the pen name Ann Halam. The books by Ann Halam are challenging and hover on the boundaries of fantasy and horror. *Don't Open Your Eyes* is possibly her most frightening yet. I would classify it as 'Juvenile Horror' but point out that it is so effective that I had trouble sleeping and wanted to hide the book where I wouldn't catch sight of the cover. Mind you, the idea of your dead boyfriend being transformed into a ghoul is scary enough, even without the cover quotation "Blood red eyes. Bare bone. Ragged, rotting flesh. No escape."

Diesel, our heroine, is a good black teenager – going to church with her parents and sharing in their dream to own a proper home. One of the ways Ann Halam subverts the juvenile genre while working within it, is to have Diesel react to her supernatural experiences by behaving like a typical troublesome teenager – hanging around with the wrong crowd, being moody and irritable.

Although quite bright, Diesel fails to comprehend some of

the events that are happening around her, to the extent that I felt tension mounting towards the climax, because I knew Jason (dead boyfriend's brother) had worked out one of possible solutions to the problem of Martin's transformation. I wasn't sure whether the intended audience would be expected to pick up on this or share Diesel's surprise and horror when she finally catches on.

The final resolution proved to be unexpectedly straightforward and yet easily overlooked both by myself and the characters. Although it was an interesting resolution, I am left with a lingering doubt as to whether it should have been that easy.

That one slight qualification aside, this was well-written and compelling, of the same high standard as all of her other books. Go out and buy all that you can find, because they can be surprisingly difficult to get hold of and if you don't buy them when you see them, you may not come across them again.

M. John Harrison – *The Centauri Device*

Millennium, 2000, 205pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-997-X

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

Time can change a book. In 1975, when *The Centauri Device* came out, it was a daring experiment, a radical take-over of the traditions of space opera by a darling of the New Wave. It felt very different from either of the fields that had spawned it. Today, what is most noticeable is how familiar so much of the book feels.

Harrison's future was not the usual space-operatic realm of body suits and chrome, but a depressed and depressing landscape of leather coats and run-down industrial estates (I can't help feeling that Harrison's future looks very much like the world of *Blade Runner*, even the weather is depressing). In fact it is clear that, despite moving between a half-dozen worlds, the scene Harrison is describing is essentially unchanged from that in 'Running Down' or 'A Young Man's Journey to Viriconium' or *The Course of the Heart*. One part of the book is explicitly set in Northern England, but whatever the names of the planets the whole book is really set there – and set in the 1960s too. Just listen to the music, just note the fashions, just recognise that the whole of galactic politics is no more than the Arab-Israeli conflicts of the late-60s and early-70s writ large.

Harrison's favourite characters have always been losers, the emotions he has fixed upon with the most exquisite detail are failure, disappointment, disillusion, regret. These are not the character traits or the emotions that one associates with space opera, for the wide open vistas are more normally the

home of heroes, of rugged individualists, of eternal optimists. What we find in *The Centauri Device* has all the trappings that one might expect, a lone pilot ploughing through the spaceways, a space battle described in vivid detail, one hugely mysterious alien object; but somehow it remains resolutely not what it sets out to be.

Our pilot, for instance, one John Truck, is a failure, a one-time drug dealer, when he's in a fight he loses, he has no wish to take on the moral responsibility of the role that is thrust upon him, and for the vast majority of the novel he is not a rugged individualist but an unwilling pawn of powers greater than him. Our space battle consists, essentially, of the good guys being suckered into a trap by the bad guys, and getting blasted for it: Harrison writes good fight scenes, but they are invariably painful and ignominious, no room for heroes here. And our big dumb object, the device of the title? Well, in the end it turns out to be pretty much what you expect it to be, and it does pretty much what you expect it to do, and everyone who has pursued it for the very worst of motives ends up getting exactly what they deserve.

To call this novel a New Wave space opera is misleading, though it is closer to New Wave than it is to space opera. What it is, is archetypal M. John Harrison, the poet of grim, despoiled characters in grim, despoiled landscapes. It is not the best thing he has written, but that still leaves it head and shoulders above so much else in the genre.

Cecilia Holland – *The Angel and the Sword*

Tor Forge, 2000, 304pp, \$23.95 ISBN 0-312-86890-1

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

Historical fantasy seems to be a popular combination of genres at present, and *The Angel and the Sword* is another example of it. It is set in ninth century France, when the empire established by Charlemagne was breaking up. Paris is beset by Norse invaders. Into the struggle comes Ragny, a young princess forced to flee and take on man's disguise to escape from her father. So far, so Shakespearean. However, more

interesting than the war – in which Ragny in her disguise as Roderick is spectacularly successful – is the way in which Holland explores her character, and the way in which she feels her masculine disguise is encroaching on her sense of who she really is.

In my view, the strengths of the book are the handling of the characters, who come across as realistic and authentic as

people of their time, and the style, which is thoughtful and precise with a strong visual sense. Another interesting area is the way Holland portrays value of the culture which is on the brink of being destroyed, epitomised in the importance of preserving and copying books. The parts of the novel which I found most moving were those where Brother John the scribe and scholar practises his craft.

The plot, based on a French legend with which I'm not familiar, is compelling up to the point when Ragny's true identity is discovered. After this, it becomes more conventional; even when she's threatened with being burnt as a witch, there's never a strong sense of her danger. It could be

argued that the divine protection which the angel of the title gives her works against any serious doubt of her eventual fate.

The fantasy elements, though important in Ragny's personal story, take up a relatively small part of the book. The angel is not always manifest, and is never clearly seen until John's glorious vision at the end of the novel. A reader who is prepared to admit the existence of angels could read *The Angel and the Sword* as 'straight' historical fiction, and it's unlikely to appeal to anyone who wants a large proportion of magic and the supernatural. However, for readers who appreciate the historical elements, I would recommend it.

Robert E. Howard – *The Conan Chronicles Volume 1: The People of the Black Circle*

Millennium Fantasy Masterworks No. 7, 2000, 548pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-996-1

Reviewed by Chris Hill

In the kingdoms of Hyboria, Conan the Cimmerian hacks his bloodthirsty way through a series of adventures, battling evil wizards and demons, drinking and wenching. This book, together with the forthcoming second volume, collects all of Howard's *Conan* stories in the correct chronological order, apparently for the first time. It also includes Howard's essay on the history of his land and a so-so biographical piece on the author by Stephen Jones.

It is difficult to consider the quality of the Conan stories without also looking at their influence on the genre.

Taking the second part first, there cannot be any doubt about the legacy of Howard's creation. One obvious descendant is Michael Moorcock's *Elric* cycle – the similarities of language and style are clear. But most memorable are Fritz Leiber's *Fafhrd* and the *Grey Mouser* tales which use the tropes with the most wit and style.

But what about the stories themselves? I had not read them before and was pleasantly surprised—they were much better written and more enjoyable than I had expected. One thing I had not realised was quite how much of an anti-hero Conan is. Occasionally, the only way he retains the reader's sympathy is

by being a little less unpleasant than the villains! Nevertheless, the gusto and good humour of the telling carries you along.

On the negative side, the tales are formulaic and in retrospect it is difficult to remember what incidents belong to which stories. Also, the sexual politics are laughably primitive (which may be a reflection of the original market for the stories). All the women Conan meets are young, beautiful, voluptuous and scantily clad. It seems that no matter how independent a woman is all she really wants is a strong man to look after her. More worryingly, Conan's approaches to women in some places come uncomfortably close to rape.

This Millennium Fantasy Masterworks edition also features some of the worst copy-editing I have ever seen, with frequent missing or swapped letters. This is a shame in such an otherwise attractive product (although I am unconvinced by the wisdom of including various fragments and draft versions).

In summary then, these stories are entertaining full-blooded adventures. But a little goes a long way, especially once the reader leaves adolescence behind him (the use of the male pronoun here is quite deliberate).

Katharine Kerr and Kate Daniel – *Polar City Nightmare*

Gollancz, 2000, 357pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-06860-4

Reviewed by Sue Thomason

Okay: it's a thriller, focusing on two groups of people who are intimately connected with a stolen alien artwork; the police authorities who are trying to prevent an interstellar war by recovering it, and the innocent bystanders who are duped into carrying it offworld, start to realise what's going on, and are faced with the problem of how to smuggle it back home. It's a baseball story, focusing on three groups of people; the up-and-coming local team facing their first really big match, the people who want them to win, and the people who want them to lose. It's a story about prejudice, and the problems faced by Yosef Mbaye – not because he's non-white, which puts him in Polar City's ethnic majority (I guess he's green, then), but because he's an (unregistered) psychic in a profession where psychics are distinctly unwelcome.

There's no reference anywhere in this edition to Kerr's earlier book, *Polar City Blues*, which I haven't read but assume

is set in the same location; you certainly don't need to have read the earlier book to enjoy this one. It's a fun, fast-paced, undemanding book (perfect summer reading), with plenty of sympathetic characters, a who-could-possibly-quarrel-with-this liberal perspective on events (I don't think I'm giving away anything crucial if I reveal that nothing Really Nasty happens to anybody important, one gruesome suicide excepted), and a reasonably detailed background world (it's basically an American city, which is alien enough to me to be interesting).

Niggles: the main characters are all-American; this includes the aliens. Also, it's glaringly obvious who stole the alien artwork from fairly early on – I wanted to *kick* a couple of characters for not working it out earlier. However this is not the spoiler it might otherwise be, because the book's main focus is not finding out whodunnit, but trying to get the artefact back where it belongs...

Ben Jeapes – *Winged Chariot*

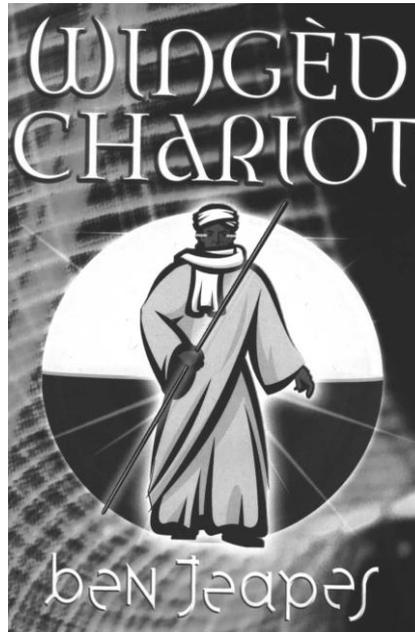
Scholastic, 2000, 357pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-439-01454-9

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

In this novel for young adults, Ben Jeapes presents a highly stratified and regulated future society, where 'social preparation' deals with most negative or criminal tendencies at the expense of initiative and self-reliance. Four hundred years previously the scientist Jean Morbern created the Home Time – the base from which time travel and travel between alternate time streams is possible – and the College which regulates it. But in 27 years the singularity on which the Home Time depends will vanish, and time travel will no longer be possible.

Against this background, Jeapes creates a clever, twisty plot; it would be unfair to try to summarise any part of it, as that would spoil the surprises. It's partly political thriller, partly murder mystery, and partly a serious inquiry into how we will use the wonders of technology that our future promises.

The book has a wide range of characters, who are not portrayed with any great psychological depth, but are varied and engaging. Most successful is Rico Garron, a field operative for the College, whose failure to conform makes him attractive and



emphasises the stagnation of his society. Most mysterious is Correspondent RC/1029, sentenced to a long voyage through time and vital to the truth about what is happening.

The crisp, unpretentious writing paints a vivid picture of Jeapes's world. It's clear enough for inexperienced readers of science fiction to follow, without 'talking down' to them, or making use of massive info-dumps. The book is full of ideas, with a real sense of how human beings can change their future and will inevitably be changed by it.

I've often found that books for young adults fail to challenge their audience, and Jeapes triumphantly avoids this pitfall. He makes no compromises, and doesn't attempt to simplify or over-explain the paradoxes of time travel. Jeapes expects his young readers to think, to make deductions, and to be prepared to wait for the disparate plot elements to come together – as they do, in a satisfying conclusion.

This book should be successful for its target audience; it's fast-paced, exciting, and involving. For an adult reader, obviously, it's less challenging, but still very enjoyable.

Nancy Kress – *Probability Moon*

Tor, 2000, 334pp, \$23.95 ISBN 0-312-87406-5

Reviewed by Chris Hill

The entrance to a series of tunnels in space has been found 53 years earlier orbiting beyond Neptune and this has opened the stars for humanity. Unfortunately, for much of the time since they have been at war with another race who seem to have decided that there is no place for humanity in space.

A team of scientists has been sent on an expedition to World to learn about the indigenous people there. Unbeknownst to them, however, the expedition is really a cover for a military investigation of one of World's moons, which is obviously artificial and may be a weapon that will help in the continuing war.

Probability Moon is set on the same world as Kress's award-winning story 'The Flowers of Aulit Prison'. There is nothing particularly new about the set up; Big Dumb Objects are fairly fashionable and a war against an enemy that seems to be intent in wiping out humanity without apparent reason has been done before. Nevertheless, the background knits together well with the more character-driven elements.

It is in the creation of the inhabitants of World that Kress really triumphs. The people have a shared consciousness, and any deviation from what is accepted as 'real' by the majority

causes serious headaches (so the greatest punishment is to be declared 'unreal' so that any social interaction causes pain). The scientists' investigation into this phenomenon forms the core of the book, but equally important is the natives' decision regarding the reality of the humans. If they are found to be unreal they will be killed. In general the characterisation is strong (with the exception of a clichéd military scientist) and it is the misunderstandings about the two races' mind-sets that forms most of the conflict in the novel.

Kress can be a tough-minded writer and does not shy away from the negative implications of the shared consciousness (including the fates of children declared unreal). Although the background is fairly old-fashioned, she makes good use of contemporary scientific theories in the story (both Dawkins' 'Selfish Gene' and Penrose's 'Quantum consciousness' theories are used to a greater or lesser extent).

Probability Moon is a solid, competent novel and I am sure will feature in the major awards' shortlists next year. Sadly, Kress seems to be another writer in the increasingly long list that seems unable to get published in the UK.

Mercedes Lackey and Larry Dixon – *Owlknight* 

Gollancz, 2000, 326 pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-57507-092-7

Reviewed by Lesley Hatch

This novel, the third in the series concerning Darian Firkin and his progression from reluctant apprentice to trained Hawkbrother/Journeyman Mage, opens with one of the regular monthly Council sessions, at which news is given that the Vale he lives in is to get its own permanent, resident Herald-Mage. As this is a sign that the local Lord is sufficiently important to be granted this honour, plans are made for a celebration to welcome him and his trainee, Shandi, sister to Keisha, the resident Healer. Plans are also made to make Darian a Knight of Valdemar, and from there things escalate, as it is decided to make him Clanbrother to the Ghost Cat Clan, whose people were saved by Keisha from a lethal sickness. Arrangements are made to accommodate all these events.

But all is not sweetness and light in the area. Darian is plagued by dreams in which the Ghost Cat visits him and leaves a raven's feather, and Keisha, albeit able to divide her time between the Vale and the village of Errold's Grove, where she also acts as Healer, is less than happy about her relationship with Darian – mainly how long it is likely to last. Then there's her mother, determined to get her to settle down and become a dutiful wife, something Keisha doesn't



want at all. Even the news that Shandi is coming home only serves to make her feel more unsettled, more convinced that her life is going nowhere. However, things are about to change for all of them.

In the interval between the news of the Heralds' arrival and their reaching the Vale of k'Valdemar, Darian finishes his training in magecraft and becomes a master, which serves to set the scene for the events to come.

There then follows a lengthy (too lengthy) description of the welcome for the Heralds, and the honours heaped on Darian. The only significant event in all of this is when the Ghost Cat pays a visit during Darian's initiation into the Clan and leaves yet another raven feather. This, and a chance remark by one of his friends, decides Darian to go on a quest to find out what happened to his parents, who vanished when he was a child. The resultant expedition results in revelations for all concerned.

Aside from the many long debates littering this latest novel, I

can recommend it as an enjoyable read.

Les Martin – *X-Files: Quarantine* 

HarperCollinsEntertainment, 2000, 124pp, £3.99 ISBN 0-00-648352-6

Everett Owens – *X-Files: Regeneration* 

HarperCollinsEntertainment, 2000, 135pp, £3.99 ISBN 0-00-648353-4

Reviewed by Gary Wilkinson

Think of an onion: peel back layer after layer and you get to the centre. Think of a conspiracy thriller: peel back layer after layer of lies and misdirection and you eventually get to solution at the heart. Now think of *The X-Files*: like some fifth dimensional hyper-onion, all get is more and more onion – forever. Which is why I bailed out of the series around about *Paperclip*. The program's 'arc' episodes had become more baffling than intriguing and the non-arc episodes had developed into rather repetitive uninspiring variations on the same themes. So this is rather a strange return for me to the series.

Long ago *The X-Files* went from a cult to a phenomenon and the wheels of commerce have long been churning out tied-in product. These two rather slim books are straight adaptations of individual non-arc episodes of the series. *Quarantine* concerns a deadly plague breaking out in a prison; Scully is stuck inside whilst Mulder chases two infected escaped convicts. *Regeneration* features a paramedic whose

seems to be up and about despite a fatal road accident where he was decapitated.

Although described as 'Young Adult' I cannot imagine even quite young children having any trouble reading these with their short sentences and limited vocabulary. It took my less time to read each than to watch an episode. However they are written in partial American slang vernacular which does grate and there are a few gory bits, but nothing worse than you get in the series. Any youngsters who love the series, and who haven't graduated onto 'proper' books will probably lap them up. Then you see the price – obviously they are a complete rip-off. Yesterday I saw another in the series for ninety-nine pence in a remaindered bookshop, which is a bit more like it. But if you want to pay four quid apiece for overpriced tat I'm not going to stop you. Oh, and there are plenty more in the series to collect if really want to. How do they get away with it? That's the mystery.

John Marco – *The Grand Design* 

Gollancz, 2000, 573pp, £10.99 ISBN 0-575-07073-0

Reviewed by Alan Fraser

Quickly after the paperback publication of the first book in this series, *The Jackal of Nar*, comes the second in trade format. *The Grand Design* continues the 'classic' fantasy tale of a hemisphere at war from new American author John Marco.

Richius Vantran, Prince and later King of Aramoor (a small province of the western Empire of Nar), has left his homeland for love of Dyana, a woman from the eastern continent of Lucel-Lor, and helped the people of Lucel-Lor defeat the

armies of Nar. The Grand Design of the title is that of Count Renato Biagio, chief adviser to the now dead Emperor of Nar, and head of the Roshann, the Emperor's secret police. After the Emperor dies leaving no successor, the empire is torn by civil war between supporters of Biagio and those of his rival for power Bishop Herrith. Biagio is in exile in his home island of Crote, off Nar's western coast. Off Nar's eastern coast, south of Lucel-Lor, is an independent archipelago called Liss, whose fleet aided the easterners in the first book, and which plays a much greater role in this one. Meanwhile Richius Vantran is chafing in exile in Lucel-Lor with his new wife Dyana and baby daughter Shani, desperate to return to Nar and reclaim his lost kingdom.

Biagio meanwhile sends Roshann agent Simon Darquis to Lucel-Lor to kidnap Vantran's baby daughter. Vantran himself plans to enlist the Lissens against divided Nar, but Biagio's Grand Design is to use the unwitting or unwilling Vantran and Lissens to help him in his plan to defeat Herrith and become

the next Emperor of Nar. *The Jackal of Nar* focussed strongly on Richius Vantran, but here we follow the stories of several major characters as the Design unfolds.

In the first book, baddies such as Biagio were totally bad. Here Marco wants us to believe that Biagio, despite committing acts of great cruelty and callousness, is a lonely man who deserves some sympathy. Towards the end of the book Biagio makes one extremely magnanimous gesture, which given what has gone before, seems rather unlikely to me! Also Simon Darquis is shown as a good man who is forced to act against his better nature because of the hold Biagio has over him.

After reviewing *The Jackal of Nar*, I wrote, "It will be interesting to see if Marco can keep up the momentum, and maybe even improve on this." I have to report that this sequel has much to praise and always kept my interest, but yet loses focus by this time having too many plot lines going at once. Even so, I remain keen to see how the story ends.

Caiseal Mor – *The Song of the Earth*

Earthlight, 2000, 534pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-671-03729-3

Reviewed by N. M. Browne

The Song of the Earth is the middle book of 'The Wanderers Trilogy' by Caiseal Mor. As I haven't read Book One and Book Three will not be published until October, I can only judge it on its 'stand alone' merits. Unusually for a second book in a trilogy it can indeed stand alone.

By exploiting the split narrative technique so that each of the main protagonists refers back to key events in their own histories, the reader is spared great clunking chunks of background material. The trouble for me was that there were initially too many narrative perspectives, and it was not until they all converged on Teamhair, the seat of the High King of Eirinn, that the various strands meshed together in a satisfactory way.

The story deals with the efforts of the druids to retain the significance of the old ways under the proselytising influence of the Roman Christians. An earlier attempt to convert the people of Eirinn had ended in bloodshed and this story deals with a new attempt at a peaceful approach under Bishop Patricius. The conflict of ideologies is accompanied by the need of the High King to retain his political power and defend his people from the

Saxon threat. The tale is further embellished by the ghost of a falsely beatified monk demanding revenge, and a faery hag trying to steal the babies of the Queen of Munster. There is a lot going on! The Wanderers of the series title are two young druids, Mawn and Sianan, who are undergoing the ordeal of the Imbas Forsnai, a journey into the Otherworld, after which they will be given the gift of eternal life by the remaining faery people, to keep the druidic beliefs alive.

The plot is pacey and comprehensible, which is good. The story had a strong sense of place and a recognisably Celtic atmosphere. I felt that the characterisation was less successful: there was a lot of talk about belief and heresy but I didn't believe that any of the Christian characters believed anything, while the druids were suitably wise, music loving and cryptic. I wanted to know what happened next in the story, but I didn't care overmuch about any of the characters. For that reason in spite of the many references to music in the *Song of the Earth*, it never quite sang to me – almost, but not quite.

Pat Murphy – *Wild Angel by Mary Maxwell by Max Merriwell*

Tor, August 2000; 286 pages; \$23.95; ISBN 0-312-86626-7

Reviewed by Claire Brialey

In *Vector* 209 Steve Jeffery reviewed *There and Back Again by Max Merriwell by Pat Murphy*. *Wild Angel* is the next book in the sequence, ostensibly authored by Murphy's pseudonym Merriwell's pseudonym Maxwell; all three authors have afterwords to this novel, and both a Max and a Pat Murphy appear in it as characters.

This is tremendous fun in all respects. The story itself is a simple one, a melodrama in numerous acts where all the characters turn up in the right places at the right times for an extended denouement which sees justice done, mysteries explained, love found, families reunited and a happy ending everywhere you might want one. It is, inevitably, far-fetched – *Tarzan of the Apes* crossed with *The Jungle Book* in Gold Rush California – yet, since you know what sort of story it is, there's no reason not to adjust your parameters and enjoy it to the full. "This is not an historically and biologically accurate account," Mary Maxwell acknowledges in her afterword. "For those looking for such a novel, I suggest Pat Murphy's *Nadya – The Wolf Chronicles*. Pat insists on meticulous historical research. I find it only slows me down."

As for the plot: the young Sarah McKensie's parents are murdered in front of her, but she is nurtured by wolves and humanised through contact with Max Phillips, an artist and journalist with a Past, and Malila, an Indian healer. Thus, feeling

sympathy for humans but greater empathy with wolves, Sarah appears fleetingly to save errant travellers and then vanishes back into the forest, becoming known as the 'Wild Angel of the Sierras'. Meanwhile, her relatives are looking for her, and her parents' murderer is also keen to find her and remove the one remaining witness to his crime – itself a cover for many more. Enter Professor Gyro Serunca's Wagon of Wonders and Travelling Circus, with (of course) hilarious consequences.

Murphy has Max Merriwell consider in his afterword, 'On Women and Wolves', the challenges of writing under a female pseudonym. His pseudonymous touch is arguably heavier than hers, his dedication to Mark Twain (Mary Maxwell dedicates the novel to Edgar Rice Burroughs, and Pat Murphy to her husband) echoed in the chapter headings in what is ostensibly Maxwell's book and also in the brief fictional appearance of the journalist Samuel Clemens.

Murphy's own afterword explains that the prolific Merriwell (who writes sf, such as *There and Back Again*, in his own name and uses the Maxwell pseudonym for fantasy) additionally writes mysteries under the pen-name of Weldon Merrimax. It also admits that she has created as characters pseudonyms who have written books which she enjoys, but wouldn't write. In the forthcoming *Adventures in Time and Space with Max Merriwell*, Murphy intends to reclaim the joke and regain her authorial voice, dealing

with Max's experiences while writing this novel, *There and Back Again*, and a Weldon Merrimax book. It should be published next

year. Count the days.

K. J. Parker – *The Proof House*

Orbit, 2000, 499pp, £10.99 ISBN 1-85723-966-0 & 602pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-84149-018-0

Reviewed by Tanya Brown

At the close of *The Belly of the Bow* (1999), Bardas Loredan had just committed an unforgivable crime; a sin of the kind that, traditionally, begets Furies and divine vengeance (and phrases like "a *Use of Weapons* for the fantasy genre"). The conclusion of the trilogy, then, surely features Fate knocking on the door, and subsequently the head, of the offender. Right?

It's not that simple. *The Proof House* is not your regular heroic fantasy. This is a world whose ecology is mercifully free of elves and dragons. The gods, if not yet dead, must be hiding, since no one believes in them any more. The heroes – like Bardas Loredan, whose claim to fame in this concluding volume is that he's survived the collapse of a siege tunnel – are only too ready to tell you that it could've been anyone.

Magic? Well, there's the Principle, which teaches (rather like Time Travel 101) that there's one right and proper way for history to go. If anyone attempts to use the Principle to change the course of events, history becomes self-adjusting and generates a coherent, if not comfortable, alternative route to a logically-equivalent conclusion. (Does it matter, in the long run, which city falls, or which man dies?) Way back in *Colours in the Steel* (1998), someone set a curse on Bardas Loredan: the wrong curse. Everything that's happened to him, his family, his former secretary and his business associates can be traced back – albeit tortuously – to that mistake. If it *was* a mistake...

Actually, there's more than a tinge of the conspiracy to this trilogy. Alexius the Patriarch, well-meaning originator of the wrong curse, is convinced that it's all his fault, and spends the rest of the trilogy attempting to make amends. Bardas's sister Niessa, with a lifetime's experience of manipulating family, friends and

colleagues, has an entirely separate agenda. Their brother Gorgas has always had Bardas's well-being and happiness at heart, sometimes beyond all reason: an unsettling case of brotherly love that's definitely too much of a good thing.

Freud would have found, in the Loredans, extensive material for a study of the dysfunctional family. K. J. Parker's characterisation is subtle enough that the Loredans' behaviour is simultaneously shocking and convincing: not an easy feat when the characters in question are borderline sociopaths whose family motto might well be a reversal of the old saw about being cruel to be kind. They're the real (anti) heroes of the trilogy – as much instruments of Fate as they're its victims.

Colours in the Steel used the metaphor of a sword being tempered in fire: *The Belly of the Bow* described the strength that comes from being under pressure, like the wood in the inner curve of a bow. Bardas Loredan's 'promotion' takes him, as overseer, to the proof house, where armour is tested to destruction for weak points and flaws. In amongst the exhaustively detailed descriptions of every stage of manufacture, there's plenty of room for metaphor and allegory – and for chillingly prosaic battlefield scenes (mud, blood and folly) which reveal more than a passing acquaintance with military history.

This was never the sort of trilogy that would end with everything neatly wrapped up, the protagonists married off or killed: there are plenty of unresolved threads to tease the mind long after the book's been closed. *The Proof House* is a fitting and unpredictable conclusion to the trilogy, executed with enough artistry, humour and intelligence to set it apart from the summer crop of fantasy epics.

Terry Pratchett, Ian Stewart & Jack Cohen – *The Science Of Discworld*

Ebury Press, 2000, 368pp, £6.99, ISBN 0-09-187477-7

Andrew M. Butler, Edward James, and Farah Mendlesohn (eds) – *Terry Pratchett: Guilty Of Literature*

The Science Fiction Foundation, 2000, 183pp, £10.00, ISBN 0-903007-01-0

Reviewed by Sue Thomason

Neither of these two very different books would exist without the popularity of Terry Pratchett's 'Discworld' fiction, and both depend on readers being fairly familiar with it.

The Science Of Discworld, a paperback edition of the book first published in 1999, is accurately described by its cover blurb as "an irreverent but genuinely profound romp through the history and philosophy of science, cunningly disguised as a collection of funny stories about wizards and mobile luggage." It alternates chapter-length chunks of a Discworld story by Pratchett (the wizards of Unseen University are running a bizarre experiment with an interestingly compressed time-scale; it's called Roundworld. They send Rincewind to investigate...) with chapter-length chunks of really excellent popular-science writing, explaining (very carefully and clearly, but not over-simply) all the Big Ideas you need to watch a world evolve over a few billion years – geology, evolution, astrophysics, quantum mechanics, all that kind of stuff. I'm clearly one of the readers this book was aimed at; I was fascinated by both the science and the story. In fact it was one of my favourite books of 1999 (I really enjoy Painless Learning Through Fiction). I've recommended it

unreservedly to various friends, and I hope you enjoy it too!

Terry Pratchett: Guilty Of Literature, with an introduction by David Langford, is Foundation Studies in Science Fiction No. 2. It's a collection of 10 literary-critical essays on both Discworld and non-Discworld topics. There are excellent primary and secondary bibliographies and a comprehensive index. I particularly enjoyed John Clute's insightful opening essay (entitled 'Coming of Age'), Cherith Baldry's overview of Pratchett's children's books, and Andy Sawyer's exposition of the joys of faceted classification (in 'The Librarian and his Domain'). Despite the ongoing argument about whether Pratchett's work is in any sense 'literature' (depends on your definitions, Guv, dunnit?), a serious critical look at his books was long overdue, and this collection is therefore very welcome. Any profits from the book will be divided between two charities, the Science Fiction Foundation, and the Orangutan Foundation, which is another good reason for twisting the arm of your nearest academic library to buy it, even if you're not enough of a Pratchett fan to want it yourself.

Adam Roberts – *Salt*

Gollancz, 2000, 248pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-57506-897-3

Reviewed by John Newsinger

Salt is a tremendous novel that I unreservedly recommend. It is certainly one of the best that I have read this year and Adam

Roberts joins my personal list of essential authors, i.e. authors whose books one tries to read as they come out.

The story is concerned with the clash between two different social orders on the newly settled desert planet, Salt. There are the Alsists, a stateless community, without hierarchy or leaders, that derives from a particular kind of philosophic anarchism. Their society is superbly realised, warts and all. Determined to eradicate these savages are the Senaarians, members of an authoritarian, militaristic society, organised around wealth and religion. The one society champions freedom, fiercely rejecting rigidist thought, while the other champions order and discipline, militantly embracing hierarchy.

The two societies are among a number of human settlements on the somewhat inhospitable planet Salt, so named because that is what its extensive deserts consist of. Despite all the difficulties, human settlement is making headway until the descent into brutal, murderous, war.

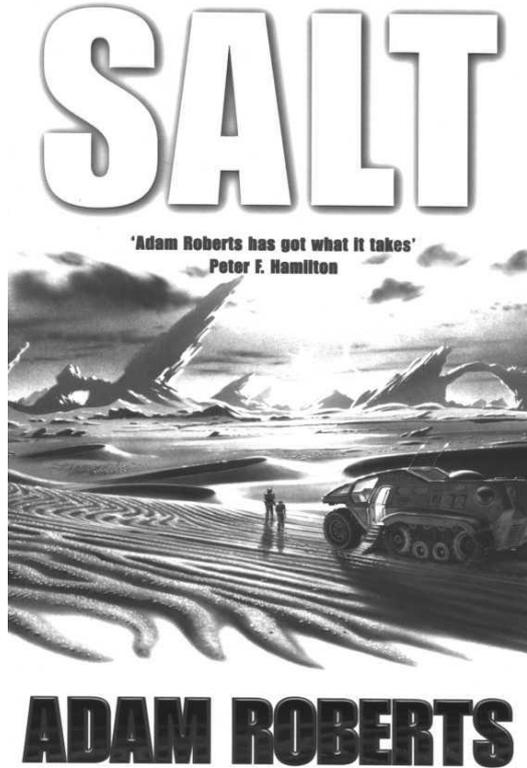
Roberts brings out to great effect the sheer inability of people from the two communities to comprehend each other. Their societies are so different as to make compromise impossible. What is of fundamental importance to the Senaarians (respect for authority, patriarchy, acknowledgement of social status) is of no interest whatsoever to the Alsists. This is marvellously explored by means of the alternate accounts of developments from the point of view of the Alsist, Petja and of the Senaarian leader, Barlei.

In the build-up to war, the Senaarians send a diplomatic envoy, Rhoda Titus, to negotiate with the Alsists. This is, of

course, impossible, because having no state, the Alsists have no diplomacy. She is met by Petja, whose rota duty it is to meet visitors, but he cannot even understand her concept of negotiation. There is no Alsist state for the Senaarians to enter into relations with. For the Alsists, all relations are personal relations. Rhoda's attempts to understand the Alsists are often comic. She cannot believe there is no compulsion to work: "How ridiculous! Then why does anybody work?" Petja can't really understand the problem: "Work is a good way of filling the time". When she accuses him of trying to win the argument, he cannot understand the idea of winning. It is an alien, hierarchical concept.

There is, of course, no serious possibility for these two incompatible social orders existing alongside each other indefinitely. In the end, the Alsists are too much of an affront to all Barlei and his kind hold dear. The result is war. In fact, this is a bit of a misnomer, because without a state, the Alsists have no concept of war. The Senaarians attack them and bands of Alsists strike back. Roberts provides a grim, unsentimental account of the Alsists guerrilla attacks and of the Senaarians take to suppress them.

Salt is a well-written, provocative novel that comes without any neat resolution, let alone a happy ending. It is a tremendous achievement and Adam Roberts is certainly a writer to look out for in the future.



Katherine Roberts – *Spellfall*



The Chicken House, 2000, 239pp, £10.99 ISBN 1-903434-02-5

Reviewed by Gary Dalkin

Following Katherine Roberts' satisfying debut, *Song Quest* (which I reviewed in Vector last year) *Spellfall* is her second novel. Like *Song Quest* it is a juvenile; despite the inclusion of a small amount of language which a couple of generations ago wouldn't have been acceptable in an X certificate film, the cover claims it is suitable for children aged 9+. Given the language, some savage violence and the fact that the protagonists are in their early to mid-teens, I'd notch things up a couple of years. It's certainly not a 'children's book', and reads perfectly well as an entertainment for adults. It certainly kept me glued to the pages, especially in the thrilling second half.

The biggest surprise is that *Spellfall* is not a sequel to *Song Quest*, but a stand alone novel which may lead to a sequel but which certainly does not require one. This book actually comes from a different publisher, The Chicken House, rather than Element Children's Books. However, a sequel to *Song Quest*, entitled *The Crystal Mask*, is due from The Chicken House next summer.

Spellfall is one of those fantasies in which another world exists in parallel with ours, the barriers between which can be crossed under certain conditions. The adventure starts with the superb hook, "Natalie saw the first spell in the supermarket car park." Natalie is living with her father, step-mother and step-brother, Tim. Ever since the death of her mother her father has retreated into the comfort of a bottle, so where better than to encounter magic than in a rainy supermarket car park? Lord Hawk wants Natalie to complete his Spellclave, and he needs her quickly, for

at midnight on Halloween the boundary between our world and Earthaven will be open until dawn, and Lord Hawk has plans for revenge against the Spell Lords of the Soul Tree Council. Natalie is rapidly drawn into a dangerous adventure between the two worlds, with much sneaking around, narrow scrapes and eventually, desperate battles as the true nature of Lord Hawk's plan is revealed. Katherine Roberts has created a complex web of entanglements, weaving together family history, the developing friendship between Natalie and Hawk's despised son, Merlin, and Natalie's bond with her familiar, the silver hound K'tanaqui, and the history of Earthaven. She has found time to insert a contemporary environmental message, while the Soul Trees themselves are an intriguing creation. Indeed, I would be keen to learn more about Earthaven in a further volume, for Roberts tells no more than is necessary, keeping the adventure, the twists, turns and thrills coming at a breathless pace. Of course, like any good novel aimed at teenagers, *Spellfall* is also about growing-up, learning to take responsibility and coming to terms with loss, and it is also a rattling good tale of triumph over evil filled with evocative description, well-realised characters and some particularly fine unicorns.

I should note that since Katherine Roberts won the Branford Boase Award for *Song Quest*, publication of *Spellfall* has been brought forward from Jan/March 2001 to October this year, while somewhat amusingly my proof copy carries the legend "From the original publisher of Harry Potter". Frankly, I'd sooner read Roberts than Rowling any day.

Kim Stanley Robinson – *A Short, Sharp Shock*

Voyager, 2000, 180pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-00-650178-7

Reviewed by Tanya Brown

A man is drowning in the surf: hands pull him ashore, next to a female swimmer with close-cropped hair. When he wakes again she's gone, prisoner of the Spine Kings. The man with no name is a solitary stranger in a surreal place, where a single ridge of rock, the Spine, circles a gigantic planet.

Having no other purpose or destination, he sets out to rescue the swimmer. On the way, he encounters strange and fascinating characters: tree-people with shrubs growing from their shoulders, sorcerers who dance every night, women with second heads. The tree people gift him with a name, Thel (meaning 'treeless'), but they can't tell him of his origins, or their own.

Gradually it becomes apparent that this isn't simply a heroic quest with rescue as its goal. Thel and the swimmer (who remains unnamed) meet, part, and meet again as they journey west along the Spine. Thel – who may be a traveller from another world – suspects that the Spine is unnatural. He asks each group of people how the world came to be, and listens gravely to the cosmologies they recount.

The sorcerers are perhaps the most credible. The gods (who "fly through space in bubbles of glass") argued over aesthetics, and whether beauty is an independent quality or if it depends on love and loss. The world of the Spine is their experiment; it has

been made as beautiful as possible, while "leeching every living thing of love, to see if the beauty would yet remain. And here we are."

It's a credible cosmology because Thel constantly regrets the passing of time: each time that he recognises beauty, he is overwhelmed and wishes the moment to last forever. But he's no native, and he is still capable of love: it is the concept of past (and the expectation of future) that he lacks.

It's not clear whether the swimmer is a native or not. Near the end of the book, Thel realises that she doesn't share his language: "when she said *arbitrary* she meant *beautiful*, and... when he said 'I love you', she thought he was saying 'I will leave you'". Eventually both are transformed, and their different origins become explicit. Whether the narrative is as circular as the Spine, and that transformation is simply the start of another cycle, is less clear.

A Short, Sharp Shock, Kim Stanley Robinson's self-declared fantasy novel, is available in a mass-market edition for the first time since its small-press publication in 1990. It's more of a novella than a novel, but here – as in his short stories – Robinson proves that he doesn't need exhaustive detail to create a world.

Melissa Scott – *The Jazz*

Tor, 2000, 316pp, \$23.95 ISBN 0-312-86802-2

Reviewed by Paul Billinger

The near future, and the Internet continues to evolve. All the rumours, innuendo, spin, half-truths and corporate press releases swamping the web have coalesced into a new art form: The Jazz. Part news, part entertainment, the sites specially set up to host the jazz are inundated and as a result the artists and technicians creating it are highly sought after. To break into the industry is the ambition of all young hackers.

One such hacker is Seth, who, after numerous rejections from the big jazz sites, comes up with a stunning new idea which his agent/broker Jazzman08 is finally able to sell. All that's needed is for one of the most influential hosts, Testify, to partner him with a gifted technician to design a virtual environment. One of Testify's best designers, Tin Lizzy, is persuaded to work with him, despite a strong feeling of unease about the job. Lizzy is right to be uneasy, as Seth has used his hacking skills – well, borrowed his parents' passwords – to access an experimental program being developed by a major Hollywood studio. Seth's hacking is discovered and he turns to the one person who can help, Lizzy, whose criminal past may just enable them to evade capture.

They go on the run across the US receiving help from Lizzy's criminal associates and, as the seriousness of the allegations

against them multiply, searching for Russ Conti – a long vanished, near mythical, figure.

Although the writing is always smooth, the plot, once the road movie part kicks in, is just too linear and straightforward. The events and tasks that they face come over as too easy and without any sense of menace; there is always another character waiting to help them out. This is compounded by serious problems with the motivation of both lead characters and the figure of the evil studio. The studio should be the evil corporate monolith crushing the free spirit of the ordinary people, but here is, for most of the book, a normal business trying to recover intellectual property rights. Seth is, at the core, a thief, and the story never gives us any satisfactory reasons why we should sympathise with his plight. Equally, the consequences of the theft are never sufficiently important for us to side with him. The reasons given for Lizzy agreeing to help him are buried and, when eventually explained, do not convince us that she should give up all she has worked for to help someone she barely knows.

These serious flaws undermine the better parts – such as the episode in the gated community of Stormhafen – to such an extent that this book does not meet its initial high promise.

Will Shetterly – *Chimera*

Tor, 2000, 285pp, \$23.95 ISBN 0-312-86630-5

Reviewed by Colin Bird

Chase Maxwell is a private dick with a heart of gold, walking down the mean streets of a cyber-noir LA in some indeterminate future. Whereas most PIs would shun a case from a chimera (the titular genetically engineered slave class of human/animals) Maxwell reluctantly accepts the task of finding out who killed jaguar-woman Zoe's human mentor, AI expert Janna Gold. Before you can say "Chandleresque" the case takes a turn into muddy waters involving an earring which overrides robot programming (say "McGuffin", children) and a burgeoning civil rights movement demanding citizenship for AIs. Maxwell leads Zoe inexorably towards a confrontation with the shadowy figure who is behind their perilous adventures.

Shetterly also writes for television and this is readily apparent in the wise-cracking dialogue that drives his narrative in-between bouts of frantic gunplay. The author's prose is tidy and he uses a steady stream of action and revelations to propel the story towards a neat resolution. The book is highly readable and can be read at a gallop. However, *Chimera* wanders into some woefully clichéd

ridden territory at times. Maxwell's background as an ex-military man, a wounded knight who leaves the service after being given the order to kill civilians, places him too squarely in the Philip Marlowe role as the private dick with an unbreakable code of honour. And *Chimera's* big romance develops with bland inevitability. Yet Chase Maxwell's rumpled charm and reluctant heroism just about won me over.

The full sociological implications of the development of a race of subhuman critters to act as humanity's servant class are not handled in depth although the author may have tackled these issues directly in some of his other books. A gumshoe novel is rarely the most elegant way of exploring a coherently imagined future; it is too constrained by form and expectation. However, the prejudices and deprivations faced by the chimera and their offspring is all too believable even if the scientific and political background for their existence doesn't bear close scrutiny.

Shetterly's novel also broaches the hoary old question of anthropomorphic identity with scenes of critters and robots

mixing with, and passing themselves as, humans. What is a human when the genome has become diluted? Mix in the underlying plot strand detailing the struggle for the right of

artificial intelligences to be considered as human and you get surprisingly cerebral undercurrents bubbling under the surface of this cyber-gumshoe novel.

**Christopher Stasheff – *A Wizard and a Warlock*
Christopher Stasheff – *A Wizard in the Way***

Tor, 2000, 224pp, \$22.95 ISBN 0-312-86649-6

Tor, 2000, 224pp, \$22.95 ISBN 0-312-86648-8

reviewed by Kathy Taylor

In 1969 Christopher Stasheff produced his first, and best-known, young adult's book *The Warlock in Spite of Himself* and most of his subsequent work has been set in this or spin-off series. *A Wizard and a Warlock* and *A Wizard in the Way* are books seven and eight of the 'Rogue Wizard' series. Like the rest of the series they feature the adventures of Magnus d'Armand, the son of Rod Gallowglass, the hero of the original Warlock series.

The background to both books is the same. At some point in the dim and distant past Earth had created a number of colonies on different worlds. These frontier worlds were subsequently cut off, and the records of many of them lost. Magnus d'Armand travels to these in a spacecraft, overthrowing corrupt governments, evil overlords and wicked men, and returning the societies to justice, truth and the right way.

Both books at times reminded me strongly of *The Man from UNCLE* series I used to watch and enjoy on TV. Organisations have wonderfully corny acronyms, such as PEST and SCENT, the latter being an agency Magnus had resigned from. Magnus is a master of disguises, with a bit of dirt and a stoop changing from an athletic young peddler to an old man to a lunatic. All so convincing that none of the soldiers looking for them can recognise him. The soldiers in *A Wizard and a Warlock* too seem to belong to that series and era, being sloppy and at times almost comic, although in fairness Stasheff does have the justification that these are amateurs.

The action moves along at a smashing pace, with most flaws passing too quickly to leap to the reader's attention. The characterisation is groaningly shallow. Magnus appears as an archetypal hero. He's handsome, clever, brave and strong, with

magic like powers of telepathy, telekinesis, and teleportation. He shows unfailing compassion to the poor downtrodden serfs he comes to rescue and always knows best. He never seems to have a lecherous thought, even about Mira, whom the books hint he has fond feelings for. As you can tell I didn't really appreciate him at all. Mira is a sidekick, an apprentice type Magnus appears to have rescued in an earlier book in the series. Mostly she appears to be there so Magnus can have someone to explain things to, and show his compassion by being sweetly reasonable and understanding when she argues with him. Mira does however show initiative and intelligence; and is reasonably likeable when she isn't thinking how wonderful Magnus is.

Book seven, *A Wizard and a Warlock* is the better of the two. The world Magnus and Mira, known on this planet as Gar and Alea, land on doesn't appear to have a corrupt government or indeed any government at all. The portrayal of this peaceful and happy largely self-regulating system is both interesting and consistent; and I found the portrayal of Magnus's puzzlement and not finding anything to rescue both convincing and amusing. There is of course a bad guy appearing on the scene, a power-hungry self-proclaimed General for Magnus to oppose. Book eight is more standard fare. Magnus and Mira land on the planet Oldeira and have to persuade the downtrodden serfs that it's OK to rebel against their evil wizard Lords, and then weld them into a successful fighting force. There are some nice twists but it's never in any doubt that everyone will be fine and good will win the day.

Both books have their good points and if you are a fan of the series will no doubt enjoy them. I found them reasonably enjoyable mind candy, but there are many better books about.

**Thomas Sullivan – *The Martyring*
Reviewed by Elizabeth A. Billinger**

Tor, June 2000, 255pp, \$13.95, ISBN 0-312-87498-7

Ignore the banner that tells you this book is a 1999 World Fantasy Award Finalist and judge this book by its cover. The dark sepia tones, church architecture and partially obscured images convey perfectly the atmosphere of this novel of gothic horror.

The setting is small town America where an ancient immigrant family continue their tradition of producing stained glass of unsurpassed quality and beauty. Kurt travels from Germany to join his mother's family and learn the art of creating stained glass. He is an innocent who know nothing of the craft and nothing of the Hauptmann dynasty when he arrives in Marlo County. He fears that he will be unable to fit in amongst the skilled craftsman in the studio and struggles to be allowed to become one of the family. The family rituals and history from which Kurt is excluded begin to seem dark and threatening, however, as he begins to be accepted.

Kurt's story, told with fascinating details about the manufacture of stained glass, alternates with gruesome

happenings in the town itself, investigated by a tired and laconic cop, struggling to come to terms with his divorce. The two strands of the book seem to intertwine two worlds: the mysteries of medieval Europe and the mundane trivialities of small town America where nothing exciting ever happens.

It is clear that the two threads – the story of the Hauptmanns and the growing number of bizarre and violent deaths in the town – are connected. What remains satisfyingly unclear is whether the family's special strangeness and the epidemic of deaths have a mundane, rational explanation or whether there are dark forces at work in Padobar.

The language and pace of the novel are perfect. The rich, almost languid language matches the jewelled intensity of stained glass, the dusty stillness of church; the skilful storytelling leaves the reader breathlessly turning pages as the air of evil and menace mounts. This satisfying book is a quick and engrossing read and seems to fulfil everything it sets out to be.

**Harry Turtledove – *Walk in Hell*
Reviewed by Mark Plummer**

New English Library, 2000, 694pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-340-71548-0

It's a common jibe—often delivered with a sense of almost genuine hurt—that the Americans are always late for World Wars. Here, in Harry Turtledove's alternative history of the First World War, they're bang on time, and join in on both sides to boot.

The American Civil War ended in an uneasy peace with a country still divided into United and Confederate States and Abraham Lincoln resentful of Britain and France who had forced his government to the negotiating table. Come 1914, and the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, old allegiances are remembered:

the Confederacy supports the allies while the United States aligns itself with Germany. The Great War has gained a new, American, front where events sometimes parallel the stalemate in Flanders and also developing their own unique character. The United States finds itself with enemies to south and north (Canada, of course, is part of the British Empire) as well as having to deal with a rising of Mormons in Utah, while the Confederacy experiences a rebellion of Marxist Negroes. This is the territory covered in the first volume of the sequence (*American Front*) and thus where

Walk in Hell commences.

In common with Turtledove's earlier *World War* sequence, this story is told from a variety of narrative viewpoints. There are nineteen of them—Union and Confederate, soldier and civilian, army and navy, officer and private, black and white—with the viewpoint changing every five or six pages. As a result, one strand is just getting interesting when suddenly the reader is zapped to the other side of the continent and a completely different aspect of the conflict, with the knowledge that it could be another hundred pages before the story cycles round again. It makes for a rather

disjointed effect, especially at first, as whilst these viewpoints do occasionally intersect, often they do not, leaving you with the sense that you're reading a series of vignettes rather than a novel. Turtledove is telling the story of a World War that might have been, but might it have been better to tell a story set within the framework of that war rather than try to novelise the entire affair?

This is the second volume of a tetralogy so, unsurprisingly, there's no firm conclusion. Remaining volumes offer the promise that the 'American Front' will continue to develop in its own way, like and unlike the bloodbaths of Europe.

Harry Turtledove – *Into The Darkness* Harry Turtledove – *Darkness Descending* Reviewed by Lesley Hatch

Earthlight, 1999, 607 pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-671-022822

Earthlight, 2000, 594 pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-684-85827-4

The story encapsulated in this duet of novels begins with the death of the Duke of Bari, which precipitates a war that expands from country to country, across seas and oceans, until the whole of the world is embroiled in conflict. The story is narrated by a hardcore of viewpoint characters, representing each of the countries involved in the war. They range from a constable to a Marchioness, from a common soldier to a foreign minister, all of whose lives are affected to a greater or lesser extent as the conflict escalates by degrees.

It took me a little while to become familiar with the various characters, but I found myself caring what happened to them, as well as being intrigued by the ingenious methods of warfare – using dragons as bombers, behemoths as tanks, and leviathans as submarines, plus the use of magic and espionage on a regular basis. By the end of this novel, I had decided that Harry Turtledove has taken actual civil wars as the factual basis for his fiction, embellished them with some unique fixtures to move it to another world, and it is this which makes the story believable.

Into the Darkness ended with war in progress, and *Darkness Descending* picks up on the same theme.

The further I got into this novel, the more I became convinced that the fiction was based on real-life warfare. However, it was at this point that Turtledove added an unexpected twist or two, in

the form of the mages on the two main opposing sides using blood magic on a large scale to boost their weaponry's power.

At the same time, a group of theoretical mages begin experimenting to find a way of ending the war, and a peasant in a distant village becomes famous because of the protest songs he becomes suddenly able to compose. And, all over the occupied territories, a resistance movement is springing up.

This novel focuses not just on the war at the front lines, but also on how it affects the ordinary people, including the Marchioness – who behaves very much like Scarlett O'Hara on finding that half of her home is under occupation – and a couple of young people who meet and fall in love despite their countries being at war.

I had not expected to be impressed by these novels, but I was. The only criticism I have is that the changes between the various characters would have been better contained in separate chapters, rather than having several of them in one chapter. Otherwise, I found no problem at all with them, and I can recommend them to those who like military science fiction and those who do not. Harry has created believable characters, with all their faults and racial prejudices intact, and this contributed immensely to my enjoyment of these two innovative and imaginative military-style novels. Obviously, there is more to come; I look forward to it.

Joan D. Vinge – *Tangled Up in Blue* Reviewed by Carol Ann Kerry-Green

Tor, 2000, 235pp, \$23.95 ISBN 0-312-87196-1

It took me two goes to get into this book, but once I got past chapter two, I found myself really enjoying the intrigue that Vinge has created in this book.

Nyx LaisTree, his partner Staun LaisNion and other colleagues of the Hegemonic Police force (known colloquially as 'Blues') get involved in some vigilante work on the planet of Tiamat, where the Snow Queen rules, and where she allows criminals to operate in return for contraband tech. However, one vigilante attack on the evening of Tree's Nameday goes disastrously wrong and he is the only survivor of a bloodbath he cannot remember. Staun, his partner and brother, dies while saving his life and the other patrolmen are shot down in cold blood. Why?

It's that why that takes us into intrigue and subterfuge and counter-subterfuge. We find out that all is not as it seems in the higher ranks of the Hegemonic Police force on Tiamat. Devony, a shape-shifter who, by the use of a sensenet, can become whoever her clients want her to become, and who reports their every word to the Snow Queen, becomes personally involved with Tree and is herself drawn into danger. Gundhalinu, a very proper Kharemoughi Sergeant, is drawn into the intrigue when he and his Inspector investigate the warehouse where Tree and his friends are intent on their vigilante work. Barely surviving himself,

Gundhalinu is plagued by nightmares and almost against his will finds himself working with Tree to solve the mystery.

The Snow Queen, intent on the survival of her Winter people as Summer and the Change come closer, is playing a dangerous game. An artefact of an older race is at the centre of all the threads of this story. Various factions are willing to pay anything or do anything if only they could get their hands on this artefact, and the Snow Queen is willing to aid those, like Mundilfoere, an Odinean woman who promise that it will cost the Snow Queen's enemies dear and help her cause.

Caught up in the tangle, Tree, Gundhalinu and Devony try to unravel the many threads of the various plots and counter plots. As they do so, they discover that rot has set in at the very heart of the Hegemonic presence on Tiamat.

I haven't read any of Vinge's other Snow Queen novels, but this one has certainly intrigued me enough to make me want to read the others. I just wish Vinge hadn't felt that she had to start the novel with two chapters that could have been taken out of any American police TV show of the last twenty years. It was nearly enough to put me off reading the rest of the novel, but I'm glad I persevered and discovered another author new to me.

Jo Walton – *The King's Peace*

Tor, 2000, 416pp, \$26.95, ISBN 0-312-87229-1

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

I was surprised to receive this uncorrected proof copy of a first novel by a British author – published by Tor in the US. There doesn't appear to be any plan to publish it in this country at present.

This is the story of Sulian ap Gwien, told by her in the latter years of her life; a life which saw her rise as the young daughter of a lord, to a great warleader in the King's army and closest of confidants to King Urdo himself.

Her tale begins at age 17, having survived a murderous attack and rape by raiding Jarnsmen (her elder brother whom she worships is slaughtered). She is selected by her village to set off in search of the new King and seek aid in protecting her kin from the raiders. Sulian finds the king, but also finds in him a man whose ideals match her own: a man who is not only fighting for a better world, but who might enable her to achieve vengeance for her dead brother.

Although the plot of *The King's Peace* is not hugely sprawling or complicated, Walton has peopled her world with characters one instantly likes and empathises with. The rise of Sulian ap Gwien to Praefecto is meteoric, but believable in a world where women fight as well as men, and her endearing naiveté – such as discovering she is pregnant following the rape – is wonderfully handled.

In a land of warring lords and political intrigue, beset by invading hoards of Jarnsmen (Vikings), the church is also flexing its muscles, and Urdo's refusal to embrace the 'One True God' adds yet another dimension to the whole.

This is a truly engrossing character-driven novel with strong female characters. Sulian is relating her tale some 55 years after the death of Urdo, and as at the end of this book he is still alive, the sequel to this book is one I will certainly look forward to. Highly recommended – an excellent first novel.

David Weber – *On Basilisk Station*

Earthlight, 2000, 422p £5.99 ISBN 0-7434-0822-5

David Weber – *The Honor of the Queen*

Earthlight, 2000, 422p £5.99 ISBN 0-7434-0823-3

Reviewed by Stephen Deas

"Commander Honor Harrington of the Royal Manticoran Navy has been exiled by a superior officer who she made to look foolish. Now, she is in charge of an overage light cruiser, patrolling a godforsaken quadrant, blamed by her crew for their exile. And the system's aborigines smoke homicide-inducing hallucinogens."

I seem to be going backwards in time – last issue it was nineteenth century naval battles, this time they're eighteenth century. In space, though. Two comparisons immediately spring to mind: Elizabeth Moon's 'Serrano Legacy' series (not as bloody, but with a style of writing and characterisation that feels very similar), and C.S. Forester's Hornblower books (to whom there is a dedication at the front of *Basilisk Station* as a hint to us clueless reviewers...). Personally, I'd take Forester for preference any day, but if the idea of Hornblower-in-space appeals, Weber does quite an adequate job of it.

Of the two, I found *On Basilisk Station* by far the better, although I dare say this in part came from the novelty of a new universe and a new set of implausible space-opera technologies,

which had worn off by the time I got to the second book. *The Honor of the Queen* swaps a bunch on primitive natives for religious fundamentalists who keep their women locked away; and naturally take none too well to a woman commanding a warship. (Weber – wisely – largely leaves the issues of cultures alone in *On Basilisk Station* and gets on with what he's good at, which is plots, conspiracies and big spaceships blowing each other up.) Which could have lent an interesting new tension, but Weber's a little too keen to make sure no one gets offended, and the result is twee and a little cringe-worthy in places. This is an ongoing series (at least seven books so far), and has the sizeable virtue of an ongoing plot while each instalment is a story with a proper ending in its own right. I do rather miss the space opera of old, when villains were really villains, not merely slightly misguided and in need of counselling, and space battles wreaked carnage across ten systems; but still, as Space Opera goes, this is perfectly good mind candy – the sort of books you can rip right through.

Roger Zelazny – *This Immortal*

Gollancz, 2000, 174pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-07115-X

Reviewed by Tanya Brown

This Immortal is the earliest of Zelazny's explorations of the solitary, long-lived hero who – in different guises – recurs throughout his fiction. This fast-paced, Hugo-winning novel (expanded from the 1965 novella '...And Call me Conrad') reads like a pastiche of Homer and Hemingway. The 'immortal' of the title, Conrad Nomikos, is a centuries-old, retired freedom fighter who's seen post-holocaust Earth abandoned by humanity. Embittered by the failure of the struggle, he finds small consolation in his role as Commissioner of Arts, Monuments and Archives. The humanoid, blue-skinned Vegans, who've taken in and sheltered the remnants of humanity, are fascinated by the tragic history of the Earth, and by the social problems the refugees bring with them. Earth has become a pleasure resort, and most of humanity is content to forget its ancestral home and create a new civilisation offworld.

Conrad becomes tour guide and protector to a Vegan ambassador and his human followers – one of whom, at the behest of the Returnist movement RadPol, has joined the tour expressly to kill the Vegan and save the Earth from alien rule. Despite his best efforts, Conrad's past as Konstantin Karaghiosis, folk-hero and founder of RadPol, comes back to haunt him. Too

many people know who he is – or was – and, if he's betrayed the cause, are prepared to kill him in order to get at the Vegan. Meanwhile, the radioactive Hot Places are throwing forth hazards of their own – satyrs, zombies, and the Black Beast of Thessaly, not to mention an anthropologist who's gone native and knows far too much about ritual cannibalism. Conrad must complete a set of labours worthy of a modern-day Herakles before he can receive a surprising legacy.

The mythological framework – Homer's Greece, recreated by the Promethean fires of radiation – is delicately drawn, and the slow, melancholy decline of human civilisation is conveyed without melodrama. This is a dated future, though. *This Immortal* was written at the height of the Cold War, when nuclear devastation was the Armageddon scenario of choice: it is nevertheless the narrator's attitude – rather than the socio-political background – which now seems outmoded. Despite the exotic backdrop and the motifs of death and decay, the tourists behave like guests at a Swinging Sixties cocktail party: flirting, gossiping and upstaging one another. Conrad's – and the author's – casually sexist treatment of the females in the group may seem patronising to a reader hypersensitised by the recent trend towards political

correctness. There's a macho sensibility to the whole narrative that recalls Hemingway: not necessarily a bad thing in an

adventure novel, but here the blending of fantasy with gritty realism is less assured than in Zelazny's later work.

Roger Zelazny – *The Chronicles of Amber*

Millennium, 2000, 772pp, £8.99 ISBN 1-85798-726-8

Reviewed by Tanya Brown

"It was starting to end, after what seemed like most of eternity to me..."

So, paradoxically, begins *Nine Princes in Amber*, the first volume of Zelazny's *Chronicles of Amber* – a series that eventually comprised ten volumes, published between 1970 and 1991. This Fantasy Masterworks compendium edition contains the first five novels: *Nine Princes in Amber* (1970), *The Guns of Avalon* (1972), *Sign of the Unicorn* (1975), *The Hand of Oberon* (1976) and *The Courts of Chaos* (1978). The second sequence of five volumes, whilst entertaining, is less epic in scope.

A man wakes, amnesiac, in a hospital bed, survivor of a car crash that he believes was no accident. He begins to piece together his identity: Corwin, son of King Oberon of Amber. Amber is the one true world that lies at the logical centre of an infinite array of possible Shadows. Oberon is missing, presumed dead: Corwin's least-favourite brother Eric has usurped the throne: and now Corwin, exiled for centuries, is rapidly regaining his memory – and his ambition. The stage is set for Machiavellian plotting by assorted combination of Oberon's surviving children, together with a cast of, literally, millions of 'Shadow dwellers', the unreal and thus expendable inhabitants of the Shadow worlds visited by the Amberites.

When *Nine Princes* was first published, Zelazny's reputation rested on clever snail reworkings of various mythologies: the Hindu gods in Hugo-winning *Lord of Light*, the Egyptian bestiary in *Creatures of Light and Darkness*, and a post-apocalyptic Classical pantheon in *This Immortal*. Men like gods – with all-too-mortal failings – people his novels, which are typified by strong characterisation, exotic scenery, and a pacy blend of hard-boiled prose and soaringly poetic imagery.

Distorted echoes of Earth's legends and literature people the

various Shadow worlds through which Corwin and his siblings pass. When any possible destination is just a journey away, and every scion of Amber can manipulate the stuff of Shadow as they move through it, the only limit is the Amberite's – or the writer's – imagination. Keats' *Belle Dame Sans Merci* lurks in her lakeside pavilion, waiting to distract Corwin from his hellride to the Courts of Chaos, cosmological antithesis of Amber; Odin's raven Hugi (or a Shadow of him) drops by for breakfast; and Lancelot du Lac battles demons on the road to Avalon...

Thirty years ago, the fantasy genre was still heavily influenced by Tolkien. Zelazny's iconoclastic creations proved that fantasy epics don't have to be powered by magical spells and good intentions. Corwin can journey to any possible world: but that's an innate ability, not an acquired skill, and all of Oberon's children can do the same. Brand and sister Fiona are sorcerers of note, but most of the family prosper – or otherwise – through a combination of brute force and personal charm. Their attitude to sibling rivalry is suitably bloody-minded, too.

The *Chronicles of Amber* present an epistemological, rather than a moral, conflict. Order and Chaos may be equated to Good and Evil elsewhere, but, as Corwin discovers, life isn't that simple. There's evil, in a sense, to be conquered: but that's in the form of a traitorous sibling cabal, rather than a Miltonian war between Amber and Chaos. If there's a moral element to this story arc, it's that Balance should prevail.

Zelazny being the writer he was, though, morality and epistemology share the limelight with choreographed fight scenes, the long struggle to maturity of near-immortals, and the memory of chestnut trees in Paris in 1908. The sheer *joie de vivre* is worth the trip, even if the setting's no longer fresh.



THESE ARE SOME OF THE OTHER BOOKS WE HAVE SEEN RECENTLY. A MENTION HERE DOES NOT NECESSARILY PRECLUDE A REVIEW IN A LATER ISSUE OF VECTOR.

Robert Bloch (ed.) – *Monsters in our Midst*

Tor Books, 2000, 303pp, \$13.95 ISBN 0-312-86943-6

An anthology of 17 dark tales, originally published in hardcover in 1993, edited and introduced by Robert Bloch. Contributors include John Coyne ('Snow Man'), Jonathan Carroll ('The Lick of Time'), Ramsey Campbell ('For You To Judge'), Richard Christian Matheson ('The Edge'), Charles L. Grant ('Name That Tune'), S.P. Somtow ('Fish Are Jumpin', and the Cotton is High') and Ray Bradbury ('Fee Fie Fo Fum').

Marion Zimmer Bradley – *Witch Hill*

TOR Books, 2000, 188pp, \$11.95 ISBN 0-312-87283-6

Paperback reissue of Bradley's 1990 "little known classic" (which seems something of a contradiction, but there you go) and part of her 'Light' series. Alone and without family, Sara Latimer moves to the small New England town of Witch Hill and a house left to her by her late aunt, also called Sara. But her arrival has a strange effect; she is shunned by the local inhabitants and Pastor Matthew Hay, of the Church of the Antique Rite, convinced there is an unnatural and unholy connection between the two women.

John Brunner – *The Jagged Orbit*

Gollancz, 2000, 397pp, £10.99 ISBN 0-575-07052-8

Pat Cadigan – *Mindplayers*

Gollancz, 2000, 276pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-07136-2

Harry Harrison – *A Transatlantic Tunnel, Hurrah!*

Gollancz, 2000, 192pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-07134-6

Robert A. Heinlein – *The Door into Summer*

Gollancz, 2000, 190pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-07054-4

Frederick Pohl and C.M Kornbluth – *Wolfbane*

Gollancz, 2000, 189pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-07135-4

Olaf Stapledon – *Sirius* Gollancz, 2000, 200pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-07057-9

Arkady & Boris Strugatsky – *Roadside Picnic*

Gollancz, 2000, 145pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-07053-6

Ian Watson – *The Embedding*

Gollancz, 2000, 254pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-07133-8

This latest set of Gollancz 'yellowback' collectors' editions moves both back and forward in terms of original copyright dates, from Stapledon's *Sirius* (1944) to Cadigan's *Mindplayers* (1987). Two debut novels are included in this latest set, Cadigan's *Mindplayers* and Watson's challenging (and occasionally horrific) *The Embedding* (1973). *Wolfbane* contains the note that the version here, taken from the 1986 revision is substantially changed from the Ballantine 1959 edition under the same title. The Strugatsky's *Roadside Picnic* was the basis for Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Stalker*.

Orson Scott Card – *Ender's Shadow*

Orbit, 2000, 559pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85723-998-9

A sort of sideways sequel to Card's *Ender's Game* (from which followed two direct sequels in *Speaker for the Dead* and *Xenocide*), which recounts the events of the first novel from the viewpoint of Ender Wiggin's companion and lieutenant, Bean. *Ender's Shadow* (reviewed by Andrew Seaman in V207) has also spawned a recent second 'companion novel' from an alternate perspective, *Shadow of the Hegemon*, reviewed in this issue by Claire Brialey.

Jonathan Carroll – *The Marriage of Sticks*

Indigo, 2000, 282pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-575-40249-0

Jonathan Carroll – *Kissing the Beehive*

Indigo, 2000, 251pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-575-40291-1

Jonathan Carroll – *The Land of Laughs*

Millennium Fantasy Masterworks 9, 2000, 241pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-86798-996-6

Paperback reissues of *The Marriage of Sticks* (reviewed by Paul Kincaid in Gollancz hardcover, V207 and noted in the Tor edition, V210) and *Kissing the Beehive* (reviewed in Gollancz hardcover by Steve Jeffery V201 and in Vista paperback edition, V207).

Complementing these is Millennium's Fantasy Masterworks reissue of Carroll's 1980 debut novel *The Land of Laughs*. Tom Abbey and his girlfriend Saxony travel to the small town of Galen, Missouri, to write a biography of the late children's author Marshall France (whose most famous book was titled *The Land of Laughs*). Once there, though, they discover that the town's association with its famous son has taken on a darker and disturbing quality, and nothing is quite what it seems.

Suzy McKee Charnas – *The Conqueror's Child*

TOR Books, 2000, 428pp, \$14.95 ISBN 0-312-86946-0

The fourth book in Charnas' uncompromisingly feminist 'Holdfast Chronicles', reviewed by Sue Thomason in V208, moves on from the simplistic sex stereotyping of the first books as the roles are reversed; with the fall of the patriarchal Holdfast, the men now slaves (and the women capable of acts of appalling brutality and cruelty, against them, and occasionally, each other). Against this is set the parthenogenic society of the Riding Women, nomadic outsiders who depend on their horses for food, transport and reproductive stimulation, and who maintain a wary distance from the retribution and vengeance of the Holdfast women.

Elizabeth Moon – *Change of Command*

Orbit, 2000, 423pp, £5.99 ISBN

The sixth in Moon's 'Serrano Legacy' series featuring ex-Space Service and now privateer captain Heris Serrano. The first volume in the series, *Hunting Party*, was reviewed by Chris Hill in V207, while the following volumes *Sporting Chance* and *Winning Colors* (Books 2 and 3) and *Once a Hero* (Book 4) were noted in V208 and 209 respectively. The fifth volume, titled *Rules of Engagement*, was not seen.

Philip K. Dick – *Three Early Novels*

Millennium, 2000, 442pp, £7.99 ISBN 1-85798-912-0

An omnibus edition, alongside Millennium's recent five volume reissue of 'The Collected Short Stories of Philip K. Dick' (see review by Andrew M. Butler in this issue) of Dick's *The Man Who Japed* (1956), *Dr. Futurity* (1960) and *Vulcan's Hammer* (1960), originally published in back to back dual volumes alongside works by (at that time) better-known authors.

Kim Newman – *Life's Lottery*

Pocket Books, 2000, 615pp, £7.99 ISBN 0-671-01597-4

Though it has to be said, the notion of a page count is (if you read the book in the spirit in which it was written) largely irrelevant. *Life's Lottery* is structured like one of those 'choose your own adventure' games books that became briefly fashionable with games writers Steven Jackson and Ian Livingstone, although as you might suspect, Newman's use of the concept is rather more complex than "throw a six to slay the orc", instead allowing you to try out the possible permutations of the life of Englishman Keith Marion, from childhood to maturity. Originally reviewed by Paul Billinger in V208.

Martin Scott – *Thraxas and the Elvish Isles* 

Orbit, 2000, 249pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-84149-002-4

Martin Scott is lately revealed as Martin Millar, author of the *Tank Girl* novelisation and a number of off-the-wall mainstream novels. This is the fourth of his 'Thraxas' novels, whose eponymous 'hero' is described as a "third-rate sorcerer, second-rate private investigator and first-rate layabout", enjoyed by Jon Wallace (who reviewed the first, *Thraxas*, in V206) and Patrick Smith, reviewing its two sequels in V207.

Jan Siegel – *Prospero's Children*

Voyager, 2000, 331pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-00-651280-1

A very impressive debut from Jan Siegel, to all intents and purposes a 'Young Adult' novel (although not marketed as such). However, this does feel oddly as if two rather different books have been joined down the middle. The first half, set in the contemporary world, is perhaps the strongest part of the book, with echoes of the dark fantasy of writers like Clive Barker (who describes this as "a charming, eccentric, and powerfully imaginative work of fantasy") Ann Halam and Diana Wynne Jones. The second half, in the fantasy setting of the last days of Atlantis, trades the dark edge of the first part of the book for action adventure and some grand set-pieces before returning neatly to underscore the novel's enigmatic prologue. Siegel's next book will definitely be one to watch for.

Steve Sneyd – *Gestaltmacher, Gestaltmacher, Make Me a Gestalt*

The Four Quarters Press, 2000, 82pp, £5.99 (\$12.00) ISBN 0-95351-13-2-4

Really, Ian McMillan's introduction of this volume of poems expresses it perfectly:

"I remember once walking in the pouring rain with Steve Sneyd from Marsden train station near Huddersfield to a hill a few hundred yards away; we were talking about science fiction and were being filmed for a little local television programme, but as the rain poured down and the cameraman wiped his lens with his sleeve, Steve never stopped talking about the place we were walking through, relating intertwining latticeworks of history and geography and fantasy and opinion and poetry and cosmology and whatever else took his fancy.

"And that's what this book is, a walk with Steve from his house to the edge of the universe and beyond."

(available from 7 The Towers, Stevenage, SG1 1HE, UK)

Bruce Sterling – *Distraction*

Millennium, 2000, 489pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-928-7

This year's Arthur C. Clarke Award winner, unaccountably not previously received or reviewed in *Vector* (and shamefully still not read by your reviews editor), now issued in mass market paperback.

At the time of writing, with half mile queues at the handful of still-operating petrol pumps, the back cover blurb is bound to raise an wry smile: "2044 and the US is coming apart at the seams. The people live nomadic lives fuelled by cheap transport and even cheaper communication. The new Cold War is with the Dutch and mostly fought over the Net. The notion of central government is almost meaningless".

A.E. van Vogt – *The Empire of Isher*

Orb, 2000, 352pp, £14.95 ISBN 0-312-87500-2

Omnibus reissue from Tor comprising *The Weapon Shops of Isher* (1951, fixup) and *The Weapon Makers* (1947, rev. 1952). Despite the cover claim "Now, the entire story of the Empire of Isher is in print in a single volume for the very first time", *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* notes a substantially similar omnibus edition under the title *The Weapon Shops of Isher, and The Weapon Makers* (1988, UK).

Robert Charles Wilson – *Bios*

Millennium, 2000, 218pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-85798-737-3

Something of a major disappointment after the 'interestingly flawed' Philip K. Dick Award-winning *Darwinia*, observed *Vector* reviewer Robert W. Hayler (reviewing the Tor hardcover of *Bios* in V209): "This is an infuriating novel. Paradoxically it feels too short while at the same time being full of padding. It feels like an ambitious short story ruined by being bloated to novel length without a corresponding development of what made it ambitious in the first place. The characters are stock and uninteresting... [with] a supporting cast of expendables. Unsurprisingly, they die in Hollywood determined order."

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Reviewers Key: AF – Alan Fraser, AMB – Andrew M. Butler, AS1 – Andy Sawyer, AS2 – Andrew Seaman, CAKG – Carol Ann Kerry-Green, CB1 – Cherith Baldry, CB2 – Colin Bird, CB3 – Claire Brialey, CH – Chris Hill, EAB – Elizabeth A. Billinger, FM – Farah Mendlesohn, GD – Gary Dalkin, GW – Gary Wilkinson, JN – John Newsinger, KT – Kathy Taylor, KVB – K. V. Bailey, LH – Lesley Hatch, MP – Mark Plummer, NMB – N. M. Browne, P – Particle, PB – Paul Billinger, PH – Penny Hill, PK – Paul Kincaid, RWH – Robert W. Hayler, SD – Stephen Deas, ST – Sue Thomason, TB – Tanya Brown, VL – Vikki Lee