Vector

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THE CRITICAL JOURNAL OF THE BSFA

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The View From the Chamberpot

Most of the articles in this issue of *Vector* are devoted to Arthur C. Clarke, who reached his eightieth birthday on 16 December 1997. Not only is he the most significant British sf writer since H G Wells, he is also (alongside Heinlein and Asimov) one of the three writers that almost every fan I know has cut her sfnal teeth on. Of that select triumvirate, who shaped the sf we have today, only Clarke survives, and we are proud to mark his eightieth birthday, just as *Vector* 170 marked his seventy-fifth birthday.

Others can speak more eloquently than me about his strengths, so I'd like to write about another of his gifts to us: the Arthur C. Clarke Award. As far as I can see, this is something unique – no other book prize is named for a living person. (The Ian St James prize is more of a creative writing competition). In another place – well, OK, *Matrix* – John Jarrold has suggested that the Award has lost its way, or rather that the judges have consistently given it to the wrong book. (And immediately I declare an interest, as a judge in 1996, and again this year – hence no confidences of the rightly closetted judging session will be broken, although I'm wary of abusing my position as editor and judge).

What on earth are awards for, and how come the judges always get it wrong? Erik Axel Karlfeldt, Sigrid Undset and Pär Lagerkvist have all won literature's biggest prize, the Nobel, but who's heard of them? But Yeats, Pirandello, Eliot, Hemingway and Hesse have all won it, redeeming it from the sin of never giving it to Greene and Burgess. Or how about the Booker, plunged this year into controversy with a dull shortlist? In the cases of Roddy Doyle, Pat Barker and Graham Swift, the juries found the correct writer, but the wrong book. At least the Clarke Award hasn't fallen into this trap – with the exception of Pat Cadigan who has won it twice and Paul McAuley, I don't think any writer who has made the shortlist more than once has gone on to win the award. (Nor, indeed, has any novel which was part of an ongoing series at its time of writing).

Awards serve several functions. They hopefully reward the best book of the year, by some kind of generally accepted criteria, even if it is only that of the jury. They may stimulate interest in the publications shortlisted or rewarded, they may act as publicity material, they may act as way-markers for future readers, they may encourage innovation or quality. They may even cause half a dozen otherwise sane and rational people to give up several thousand hours of their copious free time and several feet of shelf space.

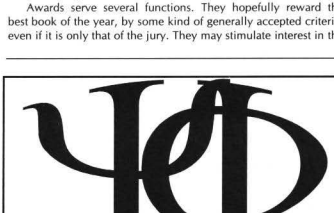
Stephen Moss, literary editor of *The Guardian*, suggests that: 'We are deeply conservative and the Booker – and other prizes – must work to cure us of our desire to cling to the known, the familiar, the culturally established.' How many times do we as sf readers settled for the sequel to something we know we've liked, rather than risk six or seven pounds on something different? How often do we buy something because we know it's like something else we've enjoyed? Given a choice between completing a collection of a favourite author or trying an unknown, I know which way I'd lean, and I'm not happy about it.

Just as Clarke has shaped the sf field by his originality, the Clarke Award has almost always gone to a book that could redraw the map of what we call sf. Atwood and Greenland refreshed seemingly exhausted genres of dystopia and soap opera. Ryman and Noon saw familiar locations through surreal new eyes. Cadigan dazzled us with a pyrotechnical use of viewpoints. On at least three occasions the award has gone to someone relatively outside of the sf coterie. Fine: to redraw the map you sometimes have to visit terra incognita.

I'm not claiming the judges get it right every time – our job is infinitely more difficult than the retro-Booker judges choosing between books published in 1847 by the Brontës, Scott and Trollope. The healthy variety of books shortlisted for the 1996 Clarke Award meant that the award felt closer to the Whitbread, where children's fiction rubs sleeves with nonfiction. But the Award's most important function is surely to get the sf community talking about books, about the merits of books, about how we judge the worth of a book. And thus a controversial choice should reaffirm the award rather than undermine it.

Happy birthday, Dr Clarke.

Andrew M. Butler (Nottingham – Hull, Winter 1997)



Nigel Parsons begs to differ with ***Andrew M. Butler*** *over one of several errors the latter spotted in Dan Simmons's* Endymion:

From: Nigel Parsons, Cardiff

Re: 'Continuity Corner' (*V194*). Whilst being a notable pedant myself, I would not accept that being 'terrible at poker' is inconsistent with being 'a formidable poker player'. My dictionary lists both as meaning 'awe inspiring', although admittedly 'terrible' has somewhat changed in meaning over time.

For an author constantly harping back to the works of Keats, should we not expect a purer use of English?

Andrew M. Butler responds: My first thought was, yes, you've a point there, you got me bang to rights, fair cop guv. That (one of several continuity glitches I highlighted) is a reasonable explanation.

But, unfortunately, I also had a second thought. Poker seems to be used in the book Endymion *to indicate whether characters show emotion on their faces; for example: 'I admit I was shocked. My face must have shown it. I'm glad I was not playing poker this particular morning' (143). Poker is one of several games that they play on board ship to pass the time: 'The week had passed pleasantly enough; the three of us had read a lot, talked a lot, played a lot – Aenea was excellent at chess, good at Go, and terrible at poker – and the days passed without incident' (182). I took the word 'terrible' in its modern sense (this is set in the future, after all) of meaning awful. Yes, it can also mean inspiring awe or terror. But then surely the sentence would run: 'Aenea was good at Go, excellent at chess, and terrible at poker', thus building the magnitude of her abilities? Then, yes, it would make sense that she was indeed 'formidable' (inspiring awe, terror, dread and so on), and that this is in line with what we have been told. But as I say, I had a second thought.*

Look again at the quotation about her prowess at poker: 'she was a formidable poker player'. Here it is as if it has been discovered for the first time, confirming something already wondered about. Indeed, following Aenea's bluffing against their enemies, Raul asserts that: 'this eleven-year-old would be one hell of a poker player' (198), which is confirmed ('she was') two pages later. But why is he still uncertain about her skills at poker at this point in the plot, when he's found her terrible (in either sense) some pages previously? The playing of chess, Go and poker was on the first leg of their journey, and this appears to be on their second. Even if she is awe-inspiring, it shouldn't be news to him. I suspect the sequel will cast some light on the whole issue – I strongly suspect we are being set up to see Raul as an unreliable narrator.

And now a letter from a dissatisfied customer:

From: David Lewis, Stowupland, Stowmarket, Suffolk

Vector's masthead for the last 30 odd years I have been reading it is: 'The Critical Journal of the BSFA'. The following analysis of the contents of V. 195 shows that this is not currently the case:

Reviews	60%
where are they now squibs	15%
obscure French films	10%
schoolboy sf themes	6%
editorial	3%
Letters	3%
contents / info	3%

I do not rate articles on obscure French Films as a necessary or legit interpretation of S.F. criticism nor do I rate Paul Kincaid's recycled schoolboy's guide to themes in S.F. as serious criticism or analysis.

Neither are the squibs by L. J. Hurst or A. Blundell much better.

I refer you to *Vectors* edited by the likes of Malcolm Edwards, Geoff Rippington or Kev Smith for the kind of articles which would justify continuance of the masthead claim.

As for info on books, *Matrix* was conceived years ago as the "Newsletter" precisely to supply that need.

Also *Paperback Parlour/Inferno* since dropped/ incorporated in *Vector* carried reviews.

I believe you must try harder on the balance of contents or drop your masthead claims. Reviews do not literary criticism make. Something nearer the articles in *Foundation* would redress the balance. Some longer discussion of current concerns within the SF community or analysis of a particular author in greater depth is called for.

Yes I hear the cry we cannot get the contributions. Yes I know the economic considerations *vis-à-vis Vector* and *Matrix*'s size but it does not mean I am happy with the result.

Gary S Dalkin replies: To be perfectly honest with you, David, I don't think either Andrew or myself have really taken a great deal of notice of the masthead. [Well, I kind of presume that criticical refers to something containing criticism, criticism is what critics do and reviews are written by critics – Andrew M. Butler] Rather we have tried to carry on Vector *in much the manner it was handed to us, and in keeping with the mixture of critical articles, interviews, reviews, and yes, letters, editorials and contents listing which every previous issue I have ever seen has contained to some degree. I can only assume, given that you have not written before, that you have been happy with the previous ten issues? John Newsinger's essay 'SF and the Troubles' and K. V. Bailey on* The Fall of Hyperion *in* Vector 194 *are surely exactly the sort of articles you are looking for?*

I am sorry that you did not enjoy V195, *but we consider that L. J. Hurst and Anthony Blundell (on Mark Adlard and Howard Baker respectively) have written valuable pieces which may help revive interest in two unjustly neglected authors. Obscure isn't a synonym for bad – indeed, much of the sf covered in* Vector *might be considered the epitome of* recherché *by the wider world. So I am surprised you object to coverage of 'obscure French Films'; or is it because they are French? Should we stick to covering only famous American films that you could read about in any of a dozen magazines easily available in any good newsagent?* Le Dernier Combat *(Luc Besson's first film in 1983) was not only sf, but one of the most striking first films of the 1980s. The films which followed, although not sf, were certainly fantastical, having that certain indefinable* something *which makes them appeal to fandom. His latest,* The Fifth Element, *is neither obscure nor French, but it is certainly sf, and it is certainly notable.*

Finally, Vector *is not* Foundation, *and yes it is difficult getting good contributions when it's not possible to pay for articles. Happily, the sf community includes many talented and generous people, including some of the best writer in the genre, who are willing to donate their time and effort free of charge to magazines such as* Vector, Matrix *and* Focus. *One example is the lengthy, discursive piece by Stephen Baxter in this very issue of* Vector. *We hope it is more to your liking.*

Letters to Vector *should be sent to* Gary Dalkin, 5 Lydford Road, Bournemouth, BN11 8SN *and marked 'For publication'. We reserve the right to edit or shorten letters.*

Arthur C. Clarke: **Childhood Ends**, edited by David Aaronovitz

(Portentious Press, 781 E. Snell Road, Rochester, Michigan 48306, USA, 1996.)

Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

No, this is not a typo, but a rather good pun. The subtitle of the book is *The Earliest Writings of Arthur C. Clarke* and I'm looking at a collection of the schoolboy writings of that famous writer, available in a very limited (85 signed copies) small press edition. Would *I* want my contributions to my school magazine revived? Certainly not the parody of 'Dangerous Dan McGrew', although the sf story in which I seemed to think that 'contretemps' means 'counterpoint' wasn't otherwise bad at the time for a *New Worlds*-influenced pastiche. Fortunately, this seems a very faint possibility. From virtually any other writer a collection of contributions to his school magazine would be the height of embarrassment, but Clarke has become the sort of International Elder Statesman for whose audience this sort of resurrection has a genuine interest. If he can sanction the frontispiece: a wonderful photograph of his two-year-old self with such a splendid head of curls we wonder if this is some parallel universe in which Harpo Marx grew up to be a science fiction writer, then we can be assured that the contents of this book are going to have a similar appeal. And the nature of that appeal? A fascination with what grew to become the man himself; a mixture of slight suspicion whether we do need these childhood scribblings and joy to discover that we *can*, in fact, look back over all those years and discover the seeds of potential in them. Let me put myself on the line and say that I enjoyed this book much more than the latest novel, but for similar reasons.

Childhood Ends is taken from *The Huish Magazine*, of the Richard Huish Grammar School, Taunton to which Clarke contributed under his own name and a number of pseudonyms between 1932 and 1938. The first contribution, a mock-interview, would have been written when Clarke was 14, and is largely an exercise in Somerset dialect – in his brief note Clarke himself confesses that he can't remember what it is all about, and if he can't explain it, who can? The dialogue is convincingly rendered even though the yokel-bashing tone is a bit public-school. Other pieces are what you'd expect in a school mag: in-jokes, the story in which the names of his schoolmates are hidden which appears in variations in every school mag ever written, precocious literary exercises (prose piece 'Poor Piano' perpetuates 'p' perplexingly plentifully – sorry about that!) and even House Reports. You may think that there's not much of interest in a bland account that two out of three matches in Senior Cricket have been won by Brendon House, and you'd be right, but let's face it, isn't it fascinating to read *Arthur C. Clarke* constantly bemoaning the fact that his House is bottom in the Keenness Competition and urging the slackers to do better next time? What was going *on* in Taunton in 1935/6 that even Clarke couldn't fix? (Clarke himself is more bemused about this than the reader, confessing that he had no interest in games and is surprised that he ever assisted in writing House Reports: his name, however, is there to prove it. I imagine yet another parallel universe in which Clarke is a hearty sportsman and boggle, quietly). We see a more recognisable Clarke in the Shakespearean parody 'The Mystic Potion', probably not actually written by him (or if it was, he disclaims all memory of it) which features as protagonist the scheming alchemist 'Clericus' (a pseudonym used by Clarke for some of his own contributions) whose speeches are full of jaw-breaking astronomical or chemical terms:

> When yonder star that's eastward from the pole –
> I mean of course, N. B. G. one-two-seven
> Of spectral type/or thereabouts –
> has moved through forty six point seven degrees,
> Our rites commence.

and who longs to see his rocket ship take off for Mars. This and further pieces from others show us a fascinating picture of a young man of scientific bent whose obsession is guyed affectionately but never maliciously.

There's more, though, that's of greater than biographical interest. True, school mag writings are often precocious, promising talents which fade and die. We look back on them with hindsight. How much other literary talent is there in *The Huish Magazine* from people who went into the Civil Service, the Army, or Agriculture and never wrote an imaginative word since? The interest in these brief pieces is simply because Clarke *did* go on to be one of the most successful writers in our field and one of the few who become household names, but yes, it is genuinely possible to point to suggestions that this particular schoolboy might, with luck and the kind of keenness that the rest of Brendon House seems to have lacked, have turned into something exceptional. There's a fondness for humour and pastiche which has always been part of Clarke's writing – look at *Tales From the 'White Hart'*, for example. 'Jule Gets His', written some time before 1934, is a gangster-parody of Shakespeare in which Cass and Brute rub out Jule to the cry of 'You dirty twisters'. 'The Fate of Fu-Manchu', written slightly later, brings together Sax Rohmer's great villain and an equally great detective.

Most fascinating, though, are the roots of the science fiction writer and scientific visionary. A series of spoof letters from ex-pupils in exotic places exaggerates the physical conditions so much that it is clear that Clarke is already thinking of extraterrestrial environments. One writes from the 'Arctic Circle' that 'I have to dissolve pounds of calcium chloride in my blood to lower its freezing-point sufficiently to prevent it from solidifying in my rigid veins.' 'Ex-Sixth Former' writes from the tropics that 'Our houses are built on the principle of the Dewar vacuum flask, to keep out the heat, and the outsides are silvered to reflect the sunlight. A deep-sea contributor talks about raising a wreck decades before *The Ghost From the Grand Banks* (1990) and concentrates on the strange life-forms and crushing pressures of the ocean depths, while a letter from a high-altitude shows a clear premonition of space travel: 'Our houses are airtight, and we can only venture out in a kind of diving suit, carrying a supply of oxygen [. . .] Owing to the lack of air, the sun's rays beat down with terrible intensity, but in the shade it is pitch dark and the cold is intense.' The narrator goes on to describe how, after accidentally piercing one of the walls, a colleague is sucked out of a hole an inch in diameter.

There are clear attempts at sf, although interestingly enough the most sophisticated is a Wellsian tour through a Huish School of the future, not written by Clarke, but in which a lightly-disguised Clarke appears as one of the characters. Science fiction and space travel feature in another mock-interview which partly takes place on Mars and is signed by Clarke's frequent fanzine pseudonym 'Ego'. When writing this, says Clarke, he was already a member of the British Interplanetary Society, founded in 1933, and the longest contributions to the book are articles written when he was serving as the BIS Treasurer after leaving school. 'Into Space' and 'The Greatest Adventure' are propaganda for space travel: closely-reasoned articles which – in the light of further developments – are wildly over-optimistic in their estimates of how cheaply a rocket could be sent into space but otherwise are Clarke in his pioneering, inspirational vein. The first paragraph of 'Into Space' in particular is an excellent piece of scientific journalism meditating on the implications of a photo taken from a balloon several miles above the surface of the earth. Here, the cool awe in the face of a physical marvel which is so prevalent a tone in Clarke's prose is fully established as he gazes at the photo and points out the dark patches which, apparently as flat as the rest of the plain, are 'ranges of not inconsiderable hills, dwarfed into insignificance by height and distance'. here the enthusiastic

teenage schoolboy with a taste for parody and pastiche has developed into a mature, visionary writer.

So, it's entirely appropriate that this book appears. It's a fannish production, if you like (albeit a highly expensive one), but Clarke has always embodied the best side of fandom: its enthusiastic intelligence or intelligent enthusiasm. Recent TV programmes have tried to build up a 'great man' image of Clarke almost entirely focusing upon the wrong aspects. Clarke is not, I think, a 'great prophet' – but, paradoxically, he is more than that. He is a man who, while living half-way round the world, remains close to his local roots, who associates with the Great and who dashes off a note to a fanzine, whose pleasure when the Dalai Lama notices his work is – well, similar to my pleasure when, as *Paperback Inferno* editor, I first got a letter from Sri Lanka. He is a man in whom the visions and optimism of childhood never went away, and who has been able to instil that humane optimism in so many others. The universe may be strange, even terrible, but finding out about it is an excitement like no other.

Another photograph in this book shows a studious-looking 17-year-old Clarke seated beneath rows of books, hair flattened by headphones, intent upon a tangled mass of electronic equipment. Although he is intent on his experiment, not acknowledging the camera's presence, we know that he will discover something fascinating – perhaps trivial games which illuminate how oddly the universe is put together, like the pentominoes in *Imperial Earth* or the Mandelbrot Sets which feature so strongly in *The Ghost From the Grand Banks* – and tell us about it. And we will listen, and marvel.

May Childhood never end.

© Andy Sawyer 1997

Andy Sawyer was the editor of Paperback Inferno *for many years, and now edits reviews for* Foundation, *as well as being the librarian and administrator of the Science Fiction Foundation Collection at the University of Liverpool. He is a frequent contributor to* Vector *— Eds.*

Why *Childhood's End* Remains a Classic

By Rowland Wymer

In 1990 Arthur C. Clarke felt it necessary to publish a new Prologue and Foreword to his highly-praised 1953 novel. The arrival of the Overlords now renders abortive a planned mission to Mars in the twenty-first century rather than the first space flight, imagined as imminent in the late 1970s. The small change betrays a rather literalistic anxiety about science fiction's status as a 'literature of the future' the predictive value of which needs protection from the inexorable process which turns its futures into a true or false past.

It is as if Olaf Stapledon's vision of the next two thousand million years, *Last and First Men* (1930), had somehow been invalidated by his hypothesis that, following the First World War, Germany became 'the most pacific' European nation and 'a stronghold of enlightenment'. Stapledon felt no need to revise the text. Neither should Clarke have done.

The novel as it originally stood scored enough predictive goals to satisfy those who want science fiction to fulfil a prophetic function. One might merely mention the glancing reference to a sexual revolution following the development of 'a completely reliable oral contraceptive' (60) or the equally brief reference to a world of 'passive sponges' who watch an average of at least three hours of television a day (126-7). Nevertheless, important science fiction is not judged by keeping tallies of this sort and the real power of *Childhood's End*, lies elsewhere.

In the Foreword to the 1990 edition, Clarke offers a fresh gloss on the puzzling little sentence which appears in small type on the copyright page of the novel: 'The opinions expressed in this book are not those of the author.' He says that he originally meant to distance himself from the dictum of the Overlords that 'The stars are not for Man' but would now like 'to change the target of that disclaimer to cover 99 per cent of the "paranormal" (it can't all be nonsense) and 100 per cent of UFO "encounters".' The broader interpretation of his disclaimer seems closer to the truth since many critics have commented on the 'Arthur C. Clarke paradox', whereby – above all in this novel – a writer publicly identified with science, reason and progress seems to flirt with the irrational and the mystical to the point of embarrassment. The consequence is a text which seems too dynamically self-contradictory to be a direct expression of the author's consciously held beliefs.

Childhood's End offers us a series of environments subsequent to a Utopia of peace and plenty, founded on the triumph of universal reason as enforced by the Overlords. This is succeeded by a modification of that Utopia in the New Athens community – who recognise that 'man does not live by bread alone' but still see a rational social organisation as the means to fulfil themselves creatively and artistically. A violent, quasi-religious transcendence of all such limited and rational goals then follows, in a mass escape from 'the tyranny of matter', leading to a merger of humanity's descendants with the Overmind. Meanwhile, the Overlords, who 'represent reason and science' (130), remain 'trapped in some evolutionary cul-de-sac' (161)

Much of the novel's pleasure and interest when first encountered comes from its abrupt changes of direction and rhetoric. It would have been impossible to predict anything like the apocalyptic poetry of the final section from the

manouevrings between Stormgren, Karellan and the Freedom League which occupy the opening pages. As each narrative climax proves not to be the real point of the story, as each triumph of reason is exposed as partial and unfulfilling, there is a wonderful feeling of reading a book which is getting more and more interesting with every page one turns.

The novel's real prophetic value probably lies in its anticipation of the strong currents of anti-rationalism which began to flow through Western culture in the 1960s. The picture of the children as savages, 'naked and filthy, with matted hair obscuring their eyes' (185), unresponsive to any normal stimuli as they lose their individuality in a group identity, prefigures some of the counter-cultural phenomena which emerged more than a decade after the publication of *Childhood's End*. (A distrust of reason and science, previously a minority position, has since become much more evident in he mainstream of Western culture, where it often presents itself a sophisticated postmodern rejection of the 'totalising' discourses of the Enlightenment. Nothing looms larger in late twentieth-century thought than the continuing struggle over the value of such Enlightenment ideals as reason, truth, science and progress.) Much of Clarke's novel offers an imaginative endorsement of Enlightenment ideals – before blowing them heavenwards in 'a great burning column, like a tree of fire' (197).

It is a considerable achievement to write a book which engages intellectually and emotionally with the two great contrary forces in modern Western culture and refuses to take a simple position. Although the novel's ending can be read as a repudiation of the Enlightenment, it is truer to say that Clarke seems fascinated by the possibility that science and mysticism might not be implacably opposed, but form two sides of the same coin.

Although Rashavek calls mysticism 'perhaps the prime aberration of the human mind' (90), Karellan later concedes that 'you mystics [...] had seen part of the truth' (166), a part inaccessible to a materialist worldview. Clarke seems to envisage a final reconciliation between Western science and Eastern religion of the kind proposed in books like Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics* (1975) and *The Turning Point* (1982). The rationalist Utopia imposed by the Overlords had not only led to 'the fall of religion' but also 'a decline in science' (62). The impulse behind religious thinking, the impulse to make sense of the universe, is perhaps not so fundamentally different from the restless curiosity which drives humanity to try to reach the stars. George Greggson's fear of 'whatever lurked in the unknown darkness, just beyond the little circle of light cast by the lamp of Science' (136) may appear rationalist but is profoundly unscientific.

Clarke manages to keep all these ideas in play without ever letting his novel become over-cerebral. Although, as in most science fiction, it is ideas which are foregrounded, the narrative is charged with affect. When humanity loses its children, watches them become alien and unreachable, it is only an extreme version of what every parent endures as childhood reaches its necessary end and the family unit breaks up. 'This was not tragedy, but fulfilment' says the text (188), but it *is* tragedy as well as fulfilment and we are made to feel it strongly.

The paradox of the 'fortunate fall' hangs over the end of the story, 'an end that repudiated optimism and pessimism alike ' (187). As in the fall from Eden, there are powerful conflicting emotions being stirred up which have their roots in the most basic developmental processes of human life. As well as dramatising 'the searchings of the mind', *Childhood's End* expresses the divided 'longing of the heart' (78). It will remain a classic of science fiction even if history finally overtakes its speculations and demonstrates that the stars are for Man after all.

Rowlie Wymer lectures at the University of Hull and is the author of Webster and Ford *(1995), as well as a revisionist article on John Wyndham: 'How "safe" is John Wyndham? A closer look at his work, with particular reference to* The Chrysalids", Foundation *55 (Summer 1992), pp. 25-36. Quotations from* Childhood's End *are taken from the 1990 Pan edition. The Olaf Stapledon quotations may be found in* Last and First Men *(Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1963) p. 23 – Eds.*

Arthur C. Clarke's Short Stories

by Chris Hill

When one considers the works of Arthur C. Clarke one tends to think of his predictions (The placing of satellites in geostationary orbits being the most often quoted) and his more famous novels (*Rendezvous with Rama*, *Childhood's End*, *The Fountains of Paradise* and, of course, *2001: A Space Odyssey*). It is easy to forget that during the late Forties and the Fifties and Sixties, he was a fairly prolific writer of short stories.

Arthur C. Clarke's first sale was 'Rescue Party' (*Astounding* May 1946) although his first published story was 'Loophole' (*Astounding* April 1946). Most of his short fiction up until 1971 can be found in six collections: *Expedition to Earth* (1953), *Reach for Tomorrow* (1956), *Tales from the White Hart* (1957), *The Other Side of the Sky* (1958), *Tales of Ten Worlds* (1962) and *The Wind from the Sun* (1972). Although there have been several reprint collections since then there have been no new collections since 1972.

A detailed critique of Arthur C. Clarke's short stories would require more space (and perhaps a more able critic than myself) than is available to me here. Therefore I have decided to discuss a small selection of short stories which I think show the different aspects of Arthur C. Clarke the short story writer. In doing so I have tried to avoid the more 'famous' items such as 'The Sentinel', 'A Meeting with Medusa', 'The Star' (which William Wheaton examines elsewhere in this

issue) and 'The Nine Billion Names of God', which I suspect have had quite a lot of critical attention over the years, in favour of perhaps less well-known stories.

'Encounter in the Dawn' (*Amazing Stories*, June-July 1953 – Collected in *Expedition to Earth*)

An expedition from a dying galactic empire arrives on Earth. The ship's three-person crew makes contact with the planet's primitive life forms. However after a short period the crew is forced to return home, leaving behind artefacts to aid the development of humanity:

> From the empty sky a peal of thunder echoed over the sleeping land: and Yaan knew at last that the gods were gone and would never come again.
>
> For a long time he stood by the gently moving waters, and into his soul there came a sense of loss he was never to forget and never to understand. The, carefully and reverently, he collected together the gifts that Bertrond had left.
>
> 'Encounter in the Dawn', in *Expedition to Earth*, London: New English Library, 1987, p. 145.

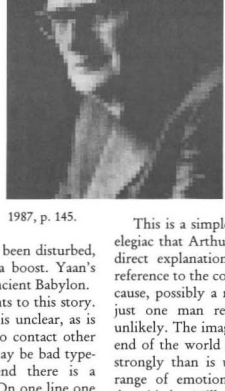
The slow timetable of evolution has been disturbed, the people of Earth have been given a boost. Yaan's people will eventually go on to found ancient Babylon.

There are some fairly clumsy elements to this story. The cause of the decay of the Empire is unclear, as is the reason for the desperate attempts to contact other civilisations. In addition (though this may be bad type-setting in my copy) towards the end there is a disconcerting narrative change of gear. On one line one of the crew members, Clindar, is bemoaning the amount of time that is being taken over the contact process, the next the human, Yaan, is being called so that the aliens can tell him that they are leaving. There is no break between the two paragraphs, which left me feverishly re-reading in case I had missed something.

However, what makes this story interesting is it is an early example of what has become one of Arthur C. Clarke's abiding themes: alien interference in human development (c.f. 'The Sentinel', *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Childhood's End*). In this story can be seen the seeds of the earliest scenes of *2001*. In fact the story fragments collected in *The Lost Worlds of 2001* (1972) retain a character called 'Clindar', a representative of the alien race who was involved in the uplift (© David Brin!) of the apes and survives (in one form or another) to meet Dave Bowman at the end of his journey.

As an aside, in *The Lost Worlds of 2001* Arthur C. Clarke himself seems to be a little confused about the history of 'Encounter in the Dawn'. On page 50 (Sidgwick & Jackson 1979 paperback) he states that an editor at Ballantine changed the name to 'Expedition to Earth' when it was published in the collection of that name. 'Expedition to Earth', however, is the alternative title of 'History Lesson' (*Startling Stories* May 1949).

'The Forgotten Enemy' (*New Worlds* No. 5, 1949 – Collected in *Reach for Tomorrow*)



In the still, clear night the sound of thunder awakes Professor Millward, last human inhabitant of a snowbound, frozen London. He presumes that some human action has caused the noise, but the expected rescue does not come. Instead polar bears, reindeer and wolves pass through London, fleeing the north. As what passes for summer ends, Millward discovers that the sound he hears is not caused by humanity reclaiming its lost land, but the return of the glaciers heralding the final triumph of the new ice-age.

This is a simple story, but among the saddest, most elegiac that Arthur C. Clarke has written. There is no direct explanation for the ice-age (though a passing reference to the coming of the Dust suggests an artificial cause, possibly a nuclear war) and perhaps the idea of just one man remaining in London seems a little unlikely. The image of the last lonely man awaiting the end of the world is, nonetheless, very powerful. More strongly than is usual in a Clarke story we feel the range of emotion (confusion, hope, disappointment, despair) that Millward suffers as the situation unfolds:

> Overnight, the enemy he had forgotten had conquered the last defences and was preparing for the final onslaught....Out of the North, their ancient home, returning in triumph to the lands they had once possessed, the glaciers had come again.
>
> 'The Forgotten Enemy', in *Reach for Tomorrow*, London: Corgi SF Collector's Edition, 1976, p.62.

'Let There Be Light' (*Playboy* February 1958 – Collected in *Tales of Ten Worlds*)

And now, as they say, for something completely different. In 1957 Arthur C. Clarke published *Tales from the White Hart*, a collection of linked stories featuring Harry Purvis, raconteur. Each story turned on a point of science (real or speculative), many of them

were humorous. 'Let There Be Light' is a late addition to this series.

Fanatical amateur astronomer Edgar Burton attempts to murder his wife by reflecting an arc light, generated at his observatory, into her eyes on a hairpin bend. Instead he manages to kill her lover, who was on his way to confess all.

Okay, it is a very slight, very silly story, more likely to raise a wry smile than a belly-laugh, but it shows a side of Arthur C. Clarke's writing that is not often found in his other stories and novels: a sense of fun.

Maelstrom II (*Playboy* April 1965 – Collected in *The Wind from the Sun*)

Cliff Leyland is catapulted from the moon to return to Earth for a holiday. However something goes wrong and he is left without the possibility of a safe orbit. To save his life, Leyland has to suit up and jump from his capsule, the extra momentum injecting him into a temporary orbit that will allow him to be rescued (although it is only fair to note that it is his capsule destroying part of a mountain range ahead of him that stops him hitting it anyway).

There are some faults in this story. There is a rather clichéd last conversation with his wife and children (his wife is, of course, very *understanding*) and Leyland is much more calm than most human beings would be (especially as it is emphasised that he is not an astronaut but a scientist seconded onto a project). So given this, why did I pick this particular story? Allow me a brief digression which I hope will help explain.

One thing that I find persistently annoying in these days of high-tech, glossy, visual sf is that there is no feeling of danger. I do not, of course, mean the absence of threat and conflict, but there seems to be little intimation that space travel itself is inherently dangerous. Of course there is always the danger of an air-leak (if it is dramatically convenient) but other dangers (particularly radiation) are ignored.

This is one of a number of Arthur C. Clarke stories that emphasise the fact that space travel does not offer you any second chances, that if things go wrong they stay wrong, that ultimately space travel is very dangerous. In recent times only Stephen Baxter, in *Voyage* and *Titan*, has made any real effort to convey that sense of danger (one of the reasons that I think these are, with *The Time Ships*, his best novels). So this story highlights Clarke the space expert, the scientist. Of course in this particular story Leyland is saved, but there are other stories (for example 'Transit of Earth', in the same collection as 'Maelstrom II') in which there is no solution, no get-out clause, no last-minute rescue.

So this has been a lucky-dip into some of Arthur C. Clarke's short story collections. Some of the stories are obviously versions of subjects which have been major themes throughout his writing career, while others are just for fun. He may not be an important short story writer in the sense of Ellison or Bradbury or Sturgeon but if you have not read the collections then it is worth seeking them out. You are unlikely to be disappointed.

Chris Hill is the administrator of the BSFA Awards — Eds

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In the Deeps of Time, Amongst the Innumerable Stars

Musings on Clarke and Religion

by Wm. A. Wheaton

Again and again in discussions of Arthur C. Clarke's work questions arise as to its relevance, if any, to religion, and Clarke's views thereon. It seems that his readers are deeply divided over the question of his religious beliefs or his atheism, usually reflecting their own thinking about these matters. Yet his broad appeal suggests some chord that touches us all. Clarke obviously has little sympathy for religious dogmatism, but beyond that I suspect that at least part of the apparent disagreement is semantic, revolving around the circumstance that there is no consensus in society about what we should properly call 'religious'. By way of illustration, I often call myself religious, even Christian; but many Christians would call me a Taoist, an agnostic, or even an atheist.

In *Childhood's End* Clarke takes an apparently simple materialist path and finds that it leads straight into something that is the functional equivalent of God: a cosmic mind that is present and active in the World, and so much bigger than we are that we simply cannot understand its motives, capabilities, limitations, or ethics.

How can we really have any firm opinions as to whether God is truly omnipotent, eternal, omniscient, and so on when we don't know if the World has four dimensions or ten, we don't know if the state vector collapses or the Universe splits when a quantum mechanical measurement is made, we don't understand the nature of time we and cannot really understand the nature of consciousness? [1] Do we know if we are ourselves an experiment in computational evolution, a virtual reality running in Someone's computer? Or if that Someone is not in the same situation with respect to Someone Else?

Physics was completely turned on its head twice between 1900 and 1930, and emerged almost unrecognizably transformed. Despite Weinberg's dreams of a final theory, this may happen again [2]. It might even happen many more times. The Gödel incompleteness theorem [3] strongly suggests that a finite axiomatic formulation of physics is impossible, even in principle. What if such revolutions in theory are destined to happen a trillion times more? If God is ten to the two hundred times bigger than we are, does it really matter, to us, if God is infinite or not? Or if God is an essentially natural phenomenon?

I don't know how Clarke describes himself, but he seems to reject any kind of dogmatic rigidity, the sort of narrow 'I've got The Truth all figured out' view that religious fanatics of all stripes put forth. It is this brittle certainty that I think has given 'religion' a bad name. Clarke knows that the World, even the part of it that we dimly perceive, is vast beyond our present capacity to comprehend, and by all signs strange enough to verge on the miraculous. This awareness of vastness and mystery as a present reality is close to religious awe, whatever some may call it.

One of the biggest questions is whether mind plays a major rôle in all this vastness and mystery. And if there is mind, is it friendly, or indifferent? Two themes in Clarke's writing stand out for me. The first is that if there is a mind active, it is strange, strange to the point of being alien. It may be friendly in some profound way, even concerned (as suggested again and again when, as in *Expedition to Earth* and *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the external Mind intervenes in human affairs); but its perspective and motives are necessarily so distant from ours that we can barely recognise its friendliness.

A vivid example concerns a famous Clarke short story, 'The Star'. The story tells of a starship with a crew whose scientific leader is a Jesuit, three-thousand light years from the Holy See. They are exploring the remnant of an ancient supernova when they discover a ruined world orbiting the stellar ember. To their horror they find there the archives of an old and wonderful civilization: histories, works of art, poetry, music, science, literature, telling of a thriving culture, joyful, wise, and noble – all lost in one searing hour of numbing tragedy. The scientist writes in his agony as he reflects on the results of their research, and the implications of the chronology he has just understood. For the star would have been brilliantly visible on the ancient Earth, an awesome thing, beckoning with mystery and beauty against the East in the dawn sky of Jerusalem at the beginning of our era – the Star of Bethlehem.

Much of the power of 'The Star' comes from the juxtaposition of the tiny human mind struggling to reconcile its deep conviction that the Universe is somehow friendly, with this shocking, alien indifference. Yet – apart from the difference of scale, which simply reflects our own vastly enlarged awareness of the size of stage on which we live – is not much the same situation described in religious literature, for example in the Book of Job, when God asks: 'Where were you when I formed the Heavens and the Earth?' [4]

The other outstanding feature is that, paradoxically, Clarke seems to be fundamentally an optimist, and his aliens are basically friendly for all their profound weirdness. I am personally convinced that he thinks that, unremittingly strange and hard though the truth of the world may be, we can come to terms with it, there is room for us to learn, grow, adapt, and eventually thrive. In *Against the Fall of Night* he introduces a being he calls 'The Mad Mind', one described as implacably hostile to us and to all material life. It is clear that, even within the context of that story, the Mad Mind is an anomaly, something not representative of the truth of the wider universe. The enterprise of mind is not doomed to a tragic or meaningless end, but is precious and will ultimately prevail. All this is of course the stuff of faith. We cannot know, we can only hope, and go on towards some end we only dimly perceive.

Finally, I would like to point out an analogy that I think many Clarke readers will understand, whether or not they are 'religious'. I have little doubt that there is other intelligence in the Universe, and I expect we will encounter it someday. Of course I have to admit that I cannot prove it. I just 'know it', or think I do. This is essentially like a religious conviction. On the other hand, no UFO story seems very convincing to me. I can't say I am certain that all believers in flying saucers are mistaken, but I am highly sceptical (as, indeed, is Clarke). But my disbelief in flying saucers is essentially irrelevant to my conviction that we are not alone.

In the same way, one can be meaningfully described as religious, even in the context of some particular religious tradition, without being compelled to believe that any specific details of the writings and mythology in that tradition are factual. Stories can be deeply true, and relevant to the human condition, without being factual. In the same way that flying saucer stories are irrelevant to my belief that we are not alone, so miracle stories are not necessarily crucial to religion, one way or the other. Given the extent of our ignorance as to what is the truth, I don't know if I would know a miracle if I saw one; I don't even know if I can say what the word means. When Clarke says any sufficiently advanced technology looks like magic, he is making essentially the same point.

In *Childhood's End* Clarke remarked that not all the religions in the world can be true. I would amend that slightly to say 'not all the religions in the world can be

factual', certainly not in their numerous claims to certainty; yet I believe there is a core common to the great religions, and that is quite likely to be founded on truth: 'The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao' [5]. Perhaps even, 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, [...] full of grace and truth' [6].

Words, words, lots of words. What do they all mean, really? Figuring that out, in full detail, is the nitty gritty of the task before us and our descendents, as we grow into whatever it is we are trying to become.

[1] Edward Everett, *The Many-Worlds Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics* (1973)
[2] Steven Weinberg, *Dreams of a Final Theory* (1992)
[3] Kurt Godel, 1931.
[4] Paraphrase of Job, 38: 4.
[5] Lao Tzu, *Tao te Ching*, Chapter 1.
[6] John, 1: 14.

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2001 > 2010?

By Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc

Science-fiction films have been produced since the earliest days of cinema. Méliès' *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) set the agenda for the fantastic and futuristic that has continued to the present day. What other medium could translate dreams in the way that film can? It can reject spatio-temporal continuity in a way bounded only by the imagination. As a genre however, it has been diluted by more mainstream factors to form hybrids with elements such as horror (*Alien*, 1979), comedy (*Dark Star*, 1974), action (*The Terminator*, 1984), bubble gum cards (*Mars Attacks*, 1996) and many more. Of the relatively few films which wholly embrace the sf ethos, *2001* and *2010* are two that champion the cause, and yet both are significantly different from each other in their outlook and execution.

2001: A Space Odyssey is an epic poem, in distinct parts, that tells the story of human evolution thus far and then extends into the future, to the year 2001 and beyond, each phase being linked by an enigmatic monolith. Visually and aurally stunning from the start, this is by no means a conventional film. The pace is extraordinarily slow (and could quite easily have been even slower) as we pass through millions of years of the development of planet Earth.

The film opens at the dawn of time. Apes (still more monkeys than human) and other creatures co-exist on the plains of Africa, but the Apes are learning to develop, despite the presence of predators. Breakthrough arrives in the use of a bone as a tool, a tool which can initially break inanimate objects, but then becomes a weapon which can control other animals. Thus begins the simultaneous glorification and damnation of the dominant species.

2001: A Space Odyssey (1968) – 141 minutes –
Cinerama/Ultra-Panavision– Metrocolor
Director: Stanley Kubrick
Screenplay: Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke
Director of Photography: Geoffrey Unsworth
Additional Photography: John Alcott
Special Effects: Douglas Trumbull, Wally Weevers, Con Pederson, Tom Howard
Music: Score by Alex North replaced by classical selections from Aram Khachaturyan, György Ligeti, Richard Strauss and Johann Strauss
Producer: Stanley Kubrick
Distributor: MGM
Cast: Gary Lockwood, Keir Dullea, William Sylvester, Leonard Rossiter, Robert Beatty, Daniel Richter, Douglas Rain (as the voice of HAL), Margaret Tyzack.

Final cut first shown: April 6 1968, New York

This is all we need to see. Millions of years of evolution can now pass by. The temporal jump is illustrated by the juxtaposition of two images; the 'bone tool' hurled triumphantly into the air transforms into a 'spaceship tool' by the use of one of the most famous jump cuts in film history. The film continues with images of spaceships dancing slowly and majestically through the cosmos to the tune of *The Blue Danube* by Johann Strauss. The exterior beauty of the spaceship is reflected in its interior design: smooth, silent and wonderfully sophisticated.

A mission to Jupiter is initiated as a result of discovering a signal emanating from an monolith found buried on the moon. The mission is guided by HAL, a caring, concerned, capable, compassionate and controlling computer, who interacts closely with the humans, Dave and Frank, the remainder of the team being kept in suspended animation. However, HAL malfunctions and the mission is put in jeopardy – all the crew are killed, except for Dave. This is super-evolution – humanity has created something more superior and powerful than itself, and this entity has gone out of control.

The film's final scenes are – after Eisenstein's Odessa Steps sequence in *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) – probably the most discussed in cinema history. What makes them fascinating is that they are obscure, surreal and open to as many interpretations as there are cinemagoers; difficult to summarise in words, they are an extreme visual and aural experience, the enormity of the universe compressed right down to the individual's fundamental existence – we are born, we eat, we sleep, we die. And we reproduce, thus allowing the perpetuation of evolution. But we are not alone. We are not even particularly significant; all part of a greater universe, that we do not yet understand. When Dave gazes upon himself in

the final moments, is it as someone viewing his ultimate demise or apotheosis?

Clearly reflecting the times, posters announced *2001* as 'the ultimate trip' (sic) and indeed the LSD soaked hippy fraternity came in droves to freak out to the psychedelic effects overload. Douglas Trumbull, the man behind the effects, clearly had the financial and artistic backing to realise the project: 'I'm going to need to build a machine as big as a house' said Trumbull (*Sight and Sound* May 1995) and he did. It is a testament to the quality of all the film's effects that thirty years later they still impress (more so than the already dated CGI in the re-released *Star Wars* Special Edition). This is down to Trumbull's reliance on quality of vision as opposed to acceptance of current thinking. He is an innovator (*Blade Runner* [1982] still looks great 15 years on and *Brainstorm* [1983] has the special effects to save it) and a creator whose oblique way of viewing technology makes his work so distinctive. In an age where CGI is available to 'Johnny Six-Pack with his PC', it is to his credit that his vision still stands out.

Sympathy throughout the film lies less with the human element and more with the human situation, a situation that is reflected in the audience's emotional response to HAL. HAL's voice is at once soothing and monotone, his attitude is reasoned and his descent into madness moving and inevitable. The fact that gender can be allocated to a bank of electronic components is testament to 'his' persona. Extracting sympathy from what is essentially a pulsating bulb (shades of Goddard's *Alphaville* [1965] here) is achieved by granting HAL a past. To make life easier for his human companions his programming has given him a 'love' of chess and the concern of a true friend, and as a result we accept his descent into madness because he has had a childhood and thus suffered mental scars that burden developing sentient beings. In his final death throes (surely one of the longest on-screen deaths in cinema) he is reciting a song, *Daisy*, taught in 'childhood', and this creates empathy with his character. We are told by HAL that a conflict of interest has resulted in this behaviour and we witness a plot by the humans to override his authority. When he kills and the body of Frank is retrieved we feel tense because of the silence, the uncertainty and our association with Dave as the holder of the cinematic gaze. We do not feel empathy with either Frank or Dave as people, but with their situation. Kubrick has always been cited as an emotionless director and a perfectionist, indeed he knew and recited all of HAL's lines during the initial filming. Is it any wonder that our sympathies are in tune with the director's preferred outward persona than that of the script?

Kubrick uses musical devices to mirror the development of mankind. From the opening strains of Richard Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra* we are made aware of a majestic primitivism that is reflected in the earlier part of the film. When this theme is reprised in the climactic, enigmatic final moments, the primitivism is in the nihilistic supposition that 'God is dead'. This is a two-pronged attack on philosophical sensitivity, at once humble because our position as intelligentsia has been sharply curtailed by superior intelligence, yet also empowering in its rejection of Judeo-Christian deism. In the final scenes is Dave a man or Übermensch? Is Dave still the ape to highly evolved lifeforms? ('What is the Ape to Man, a laughing stock, a thing of shame? And just the same shall Man be to the Superman' – Nietzsche.) It is between these bookends that the strains of Johann Strauss's *An der schönen, blauen Donau* sweeps along, the dainty complexity a rejection of the primitive and condescendingly civilised, as we are shown the beauty of man's technological advances. How like a God to break from the Earth and nature, how like a man to overemphasise his own importance in the cosmos. The lack of dialogue too, particularly at the start of the film (there are no words spoken until twenty-five minutes in) emphasises assured direction and precocious conviction – why limit philosophical ideas by the use of language, when visual and musical icons are a language unto themselves?

As *2001* was a poem, the sequel *2010* is a story, a direct follow-on to the events of the former. As Hollywood entertainment, it offers a definitive solution and rejects cerebral ambiguity in favour of a basic quest scenario: a mission to find the Mission to Jupiter. Character tension is created through the reintroduction of the Cold War, forcing potentially co-operative characters to become suspicious of each other and introducing claustrophobia and paranoia in the vastness of space. The characters begin to succeed in their quest via a number of setbacks and triumphs, but when they re-discover HAL they discover Dave and he has the ultimate revelation that will render any petty bickering back home worthless. The film aims to consider humanitarian issues, such as those of the nuclear family and the pride of nationalism, as well as dealing with the existence of superior intelligences and a fundamental change to our solar system, which redefines our lives and way of thinking. This sets up a dichotomy, some of which we can relate to and part of which we have no way of knowing our reaction to, either as individuals or as a race.

2010 as a stand-alone is basic, wholesome, good commercial cinema –but as a sequel to one of celluloid's masterpieces it is lacking because it feels obliged to explain the inexplicable, and then expand upon it. For example if one obsidian monolith is awe inspiring and enigmatic surely thousands of them will be thousands of times more awe inspiring and enigmatic? To the film's credit it is cinematic, the sound is outstanding and the direction is clearly a labour of love by Peter Hyams, who also shot, produced and scripted.

2010 does tend to fall into the major trap of showing earth in the (near) future. *2001* avoids this by setting the film either in space (to which very few people can relate) or at the 'Dawn of Mankind' (to which no one can relate), and its sets are impressive, simple, monochromatic and therefore hard to pin down; *2010*, on the other hand, throws caution to the wind by including shots of

2010 (1984) – 114 minutes –Panavision – Metrocolor
Director: Peter Hyams
Screenplay: Peter Hyams
Based on the novel by Arthur C. Clarke
Director of Photography: Peter Hyams
Art Director: Albert Brenner
Special Effects: Richard Edlund, George Jenson, Neil Krepela, Henry Millar, Mark Stetson
Music: David Shire
Producer: Peter Hyams
Distributor: MGM

Cast: Roy Scheider, John Lithgow, Helen Mirren, Bob Balaban, Keir Dullea, Dana Elcar, Madolyn Smith

life on earth in the future. It either looks exactly the same as 1985, or you get the ultimate sci-fi set crime – the Habitat 'future' household, complete in this instance with en-suite dolphin.

Visually, the film is wonderful. The special effects, while not as groundbreaking as those in *2001*, were clearly an advance on effects of the time, and the pinnacle of non computer-generated work. In particular, the space walks are stunning in their enormity and convey a claustrophobic tension that produces genuine concern for the characters. The film also takes a certain pride in the scientific accuracy (as we know it) of the events that take place and as a result is far more practical. For example, nowadays it is accepted that Europa has the potential to sustain life and notably after the success of the recent Mars Mission, we are constantly learning more about the possibilities of space travel to the further reaches of the solar system.

So, where do these works stand philosophically? Both address the issues of the existence of extra-terrestrial intelligence and superiority, indeed they demand it. In *2001*, there is no need for an explanation as to why life beyond the Earth exists – it merely forms part of the mystery of the Universe. In *2010*, it is the source of wonder – the creation of the second sun that changes our existence forever and the physical proof that we are not alone. Additionally, both films question the possibility of artificial intelligence and whether such intelligence is feasible, plausible, acceptable or exceptional. HAL is a conscious entity. How far can a mechanically created object exist as an individual with a conscience? At what point is the mind separated from the soul? HAL aims to do good, to fulfil his program and be a member of the crew: to err is human, is HAL therefore not human? To murder (in *2001*) and then to pay amends and perform the ultimate act of self-sacrifice (in *2010*) the machine created by the humans evolves a social consciousness from what was earlier a primitive ego-based consciousness. HAL evolves because of his errors, he becomes conscious because he ceases to be entirely logical and instead relies upon reasoned, if erroneous responses. Is this not sentient evolution?

Both films do however, state very clearly that there is enlightenment beyond our understanding. *2001* denies the continued existence of God, whereas *2010* glories in Its magnitude. This is not to deny an ecumenical perspective but to approach it from alternate angles; either we are now one of the sentient beings, we are not alone and have joined the universe, or we are not worthy, there are beings we should revere and we should be humble. If *2001* taught us that we are not God's but part of the greater cosmos, *2010* shows that we are just one more cog in the glorious machine that is creation.

Considering both films together, *2010* is clearly in the shadow of *2001*, particularly from a 'cinematic experience' point of view. This is not to say that *2010* is not a good film. It is difficult to see how it could have been made any better and that is testament to its director's vision and the thrust of the narrative. That said, the quality of both films, despite the differences in their execution, ensures that if you want pure, unmitigated science fiction cinema, you'd be hard pressed to find two better examples.

Colin and Mitch should be well-known to Vector *readers by now, having written for us on Caro and Jeunet (*Vector 194*) and Luc Besson (*Vector 195*). When not watching* Babylon 5 *or Hong Kong cinema, they can be found exploring such culinary delights as pickled chillies — Eds.*

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Cognitive Mapping 12: Clouds

by Paul Kincaid

Long ago, there were gods in everything, but the chief gods, the ones who were most feared, were those who lived on mountain tops above the clouds. The Greek pantheon lived on Mount Olympus, the Inca made their victims climb up to the peaks of sacred mountains to be sacrificed, the Aztecs, like the Mesopotamians and Egyptians before them, built pyramids, artificial mountains to honour the gods and the dead who joined them. But it wasn't the mountains as such that were important, it was their height, for they rose up to the sky, up above the clouds. Even today, European children are likely to picture God as a bearded figure living in the clouds.

The clouds were the roof of the world: they were visible but not touchable, they were mysterious, they were essentially nebulous. And the nebulous has always been fascinating: neither one thing nor the other, never quite graspable. Still today, when film-makers want to suggest the mysterious, or a translation from one state to another, they are as likely as not to show a figure emerging from fog or disappearing amid a cloud of steam. Even in such a resolutely non-fantastical film as *The Railway Children* (1972), the returning father is seen stepping through steam, marking his translation from prison and his transformation of the lives of the children. Once, of course, travel through clouds would have literally meant entering the realm of the gods, but today, when we can't quite shake off the notion that there is something numinous above the clouds. Cloud remains a symbol of mystery.

Gothic writers, like others of the Romantic Age, saw nature as providing the pattern and the symbol for everything. Storms, high places, wild moors and the ruins of the past were the inevitable settings for books or poetry, and continued so long after a new sense of realism overtook the romanticism of the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Using such a symbolic language, the dark and enclosing fog betokened dark and secret deeds. After industrial smog became such an inseparable part of the London landscape during the Victorian era, fog-clouded streets provided an ideal setting for everyone from Mr Hyde to Sherlock Holmes.

> 'It's not there, sir, it's not there.'
>
> 'What's not there?'
>
> 'The day, sir! There's no Sun!'
>
> Kingsley grabbed his watch. It was about 7.42am, long after dawn in August. He rushed out of the shelter into the open. It was pitch black, unrelieved even by starlight, which was unable to penetrate the thick cloud cover. An unreasoning primitive fear seemed to be abroad. The light of the world had gone.
>
> ***The Black Cloud* (1957) – Fred Hoyle**

In science fiction the transformative character of clouds was first employed by H.G. Wells in *In the Days of the Comet* (1906), when the gaseous tail of a comet passing across the surface of the Earth wrought a social transformation, albeit only briefly. For Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, however, such a transformation displayed a less comfortable character in *The Poison Belt* (1913), in which Earth can only wait helplessly while an interstellar cloud sweeps across the planet bringing inevitable death. Conan Doyle couldn't shake off a sense of hope – following the death of his son in the First World War he would become closely involved with spiritualism, with its promise of life after death – and the Poison Belt doesn't actually bring the tragedy it heralds. Nevertheless, this image of a numinous, nebulous threat in the skies has a powerful hold on our imagination; and not long after this the threat would become real: as poison gas billowed across an inhospitable no-man's-land we acquired a new image of dread.

> 'Listen: let's cut to reality here. Just the existence of this thing implies wholesale manipulation of gravity, of tidal forces, and of damned near every other kind of force I can think of. It's almost as if the thing exists in a dimensional vacuum, where nothing from the outside touches it.'
>
> 'Almost ?'
>
> 'Yes. Almost. Look: there are two clouds. Let's assume both were travelling at the same velocity when they entered the planetary system. They should have broken up, but they didn't. The one on the far side of the sun is moving more slowly than this one. That's as it should be, because it's contending with solar drag, while our baby here is getting pulled along as it moves toward the sun. So there is some effect. But don't ask me to explain it.'
>
> ***Engines of God* (1994) – Jack McDevitt**

Fred Hoyle presented an updating of Conan Doyle's story with *The Black Cloud* – and, in the final sentence of the passage quoted, illustrated one more reason why clouds can be such an effective literary device. Of course there is more to this cloud approaching through the solar system than interstellar dust. Just as Wells shaped the ever-variable cloud to suit his social

and political message, and Conan Doyle used it to express terror, so Hoyle expressed a message for which he would later become notorious: this cloud contained life. Far more developed than the amino acids he was to claim arrived on comets, this cloud creature is, in fact, god-like in its dispersed, untouchable and uncontainable body. God-like, indeed, in that like Zeus or Woden it sits upon a cloud controlling the earth below.

This vast, dispersed, interstellar being was the harbinger of other such huge and mysterious creatures, from those in James Tiptree Jr's *Up the Walls of the World* (1978) to the ones harpooned and skinned like whales in Terry Bisson's *Pirates of the Universe* (1996). But removing the skin of the Peteys, Bisson's vacuum-jellyfish, opens a way into the unknown, and that is the function of clouds. Whether it is Doyle's Professor Challenger or Hoyle's Kingsley, there remains something in the universe beyond the comprehension of these men of science.

You can see a cloud, but that's about all; in every other respect it remains a convenient representation of the unknowable. It might house gods or demons or other forms of life or simply forces that we don't understand – like the clouds that sweep periodically and destructively through the universe in Jack McDevitt's *Engines of God* – but essentially it is something we can only watch and wonder at and hope to survive. The science fiction universe is knowable – we go out into it, we explore, explain, make everything conform to physical laws we can either understand or extrapolate. But even in this well-ordered universe we need the extraordinary, the inexplicable, the mysterious. We need something that evokes our wonder and dread as gods once did – and what better symbol for this than the clouds that were once the home of the gods themselves?

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alt.space

by Stephen Baxter

In the last couple of years a number of works have appeared dealing with alternate histories of space exploration: *alt.space* – how it might have been, had some crucial technical discovery or political decision been made otherwise.

I plead guilty myself on several counts. My biggest effort was my novel *Voyage* (1996) about a NASA post-Apollo Mars programme culminating in a landing in 1986. But on the charge sheet I also have several short stories.

In 'Pilgrim 7' (1993) astronaut Wally Schirra is in orbit in his Mercury capsule in 1963 ... just as the Cuban missile crisis erupts in war. This was my first attempt at this mode of writing. 'Moon Six' (1997) is a long story in which an Apollo astronaut is dragged across a succession of alternate realities, in some of which there is no space programme at all, in others the Russians win, in still others the Brits get there first with *Prelude to Space* nuclear ships. In 'Sun-Drenched' (1998) Apollo astronauts are stranded on the Moon, by the kind of technical failure which came perilously close to wrecking many of the real-life missions. And in 'Sun-God' (1997) a far-future alien, unable to believe that we reached the Moon only to abandon it, reconstructs a series of alternate space exploration possibilities; a hapless astronaut simulacrum is dragged through the possibilities. In 'War Birds' (to appear in *Interzone*) I look at the way the Space Shuttle programme was supposed to turn out, orbital bombing runs and all.

The US space programme has, of course, been the most spectacular. But I've also meddled with other nations' efforts. 'Zemlya' (1997) shows Yuri Gagarin being sent on a quixotic mission to Venus. 'Prospero One' (1996) (written with Simon Bradshaw) tweaks British history of the 1970s slightly to allow the technicians to launch one British manned space mission, before being shut down (in reality, we managed one unmanned satellite launch). 'The Wire Continuum' (1998) (with Arthur C Clarke) takes Clarke's 1937 short story *Travel By Wire* as a starting point; Britain develops teleport capabilities in the 1960s, and the space programme is reduced to single-shot efforts to deliver teleport terminals.

I am not alone, however. Allen Steele in particular has produced a major body of work - culminating in his novel *The Tranquillity Alternative* (1996) - dealing with an alternate space history in which the Nazis developing a sub-orbital capability during WWII, so that Wernher von Braun's most extravagant post-war dreams are fulfilled ... but still, by the 1990s, the (different) US programme is in terminal decline. And William Barton's story 'In Saturn Time' looks at a post-Apollo programme which might have delivered Americans to Jupiter, for real, by 2001.

Why should writers take the extraordinary step of devoting major chunks of their creative effort to realities which never existed?

I suspect it is never healthy for a working writer to examine his/her motives and impulses (not to say obsessions) too closely – leave that for the memoirs. But in this case I think the answer is clear enough.

I was 11 years old when I watched the Apollo 11 Moon walk, in 1969. Steele would have been 9 or 10, Barton around 18.

We'd all grown up with an extraordinary expansion in spaceflight capabilities – only 8 years earlier, after all, the best the US could manage was to send Alan Shepard into a sub-orbital lob that lasted all of 15 *minutes*. And now, here were Neil and Buzz walking on the Moon. I for one firmly believed I was watching the future, and had no reason to believe it wasn't just going to carry on, growing and expanding.

I wasn't the only one who thought so, of course. As late as 1968, Arthur Clarke in *The Promise of Space* was able to list an optimistic catalogue of future uses of the Moon. In fact, "the future of lunar and ... solar system ... exploration .. depends on our ability to find supplies of all kinds on the Moon. The most valuable substance of all - as it is on Earth, when in short supply - would be water." Water would support life, and could be cracked into hydrogen and oxygen to supply rocket fuel, a filling station outside Earth's savage gravity field, which could be used to fund a general expansion into the Solar System.

And, said Clarke, water "certainly exists on the Moon; the question is where, and in what form ..." Perhaps there was ice in underground caves, and there were lunar formations which might indicate the presence of permafrost. And so on. "These are the optimistic assumptions, which may be wrong. If the

worse comes to worst, it will be necessary to extract water from the minerals in which it occurs; straightforward heating would be sufficient in most cases ..." Not only that, perhaps there were metallic ores which could "pay for any lunar exploration programme a hundred times over".

Tragically for the future, however, all this would prove dead wrong.

The analysis of even the first Moonrock samples returned by Apollo 11 betrayed not the slightest trace of lunar water, either now or in the past (leaving aside traces in polar cold traps). Not only that, the lack of water during the lunar crust's early melting periods ensured that big hydrothermal ore deposits - the type which produced much of Earth's mineral wealth - are completely absent from the Moon. There are no massive gold deposits, no huge diamond mines, no El Dorado on the Moon - only low grade aluminium ore.

To many, even inside the space programme, it appeared that Apollo - a first step into the cosmos - in the end it served only to prove that we *cannot* colonise space. And the Moon wasn't the only disappointment, lest we forget. For many space programme insiders, the moment when the future was lost came in 1964, when the first fly-by of Mars by Mariner 4 – a spacecraft sent over an area thought likely to show canals – showed *craters*.

Suddenly, there was nowhere worth going.

Even so, in 1969 NASA put forward ambitious proposals for its post-Apollo future. The Space Shuttle would have been just one element in this grand vision, with a space station, lunar bases and expeditions to Mars in the 1980s to follow. This was the clearest articulation, by *NASA* for God's sake, of the future we'd been led to believe was on its way.

But, though the technical logic was there, the political logic had vanished. In the event NASA's manned space programme came close to being shut down altogether; Nixon allowed one element of it, the Shuttle, to survive, a space bus with nowhere to go. (In *Voyage* I have Nixon make a different compromise, picking out another element, an Apollo-style Mars programme.)

All this, of course, was a crashing disappointment for me. The fact that the deadly wind-down in the US space programme – no manned flights *at all* between 1975 and 1981 – coincided with my own adolescence and growing up didn't help either. Suddenly, expansive dreams of spaceflight came to seem like memories of childhood games: neat at the time, but to be put aside now.

If 1970s Space Cold Turkey was bad for me, it was hell for some of the Americans, and they have found a variety of ways to work it out of their systems (see my essay 'Rusting Gantries and Lawn Ornaments'). And one of those ways is alt.space.

William Barton's short story 'In Saturn Time' (1995) is a spectacular exercise in historical revision. It starts with Apollo 21 on the Moon in 1974; Apollo has been saved from cancellation by a (non-McGovern) Democrat White House which reverses Nixon's Space Shuttle decision and reinstates Apollo "... because we spent forty billion dollars acquiring this technology. Let's get the benefit of it before we go ahead and buy another one." The story from then on is told in a series of compressed fast-forwards. The continued Apollo impetus induces the Russians to make it to the Moon by 1977. By 1988 the Americans are landing on Mars, by 1993 the Saturn V has evolved into reusable and cheap access to orbit, and by 2001 (of course) Arthur Clarke, Walter Cronkite and Wally Schirra are watching the US's first Jupiter mission reach orbit.

It isn't an uncommon attitude among American hard sf writers that every policy decision NASA ever made was irrational. In this story Barton is applying a retro-corrective: reclaiming space history from the idiots who got it wrong, and restoring it to the sf community. This is, he is saying, the way it *should* have been, damn it. He makes a heavy point, for instance, of showing us how the Saturn V technology could have (maybe) achieved the cheap-access-to-orbit goal that drove the Shuttle project. As such the story is of a piece with such works of near-future space propaganda as *Encounter with Tiber* (1996) by Aldrin and Barnes; by showing us how it might have been, Barton is trying to persuade us that it could be like this after all.

But while he plugs every nostalgia button (Walter Cronkite on the Moon in 1984), Barton barely explores the issues unturned by his spectacular future – for example the role of the military, and the impact of such a gigantic space effort on the US economy and its position in the world. Maybe Barton's lost future has something to teach us, but if so he will have to return to it and show us the downsides as well as the up.

The Tranquillity Alternative by Allen Steele (1996) is much more interesting: "Parnell looked away from the plaque and cast his eyes around the abandoned Moonbase ... The flag was a little crooked ... He managed to get the staff to stay straight. Not that it mattered; by this time tomorrow, he would be pulling down the flag, folding it and taking it home to a glass case at the Visitors' centre at the Cape, where tourists could stare at it with blank stupidity." *(The Tranquillity Alternative*, Chapter 16).

Tranquillity is the story of the declining days of an alternative American space programme. In 1944, Germany launches an 'Amerika Bomber' - a Eugene Sanger space glider - to strike at the continental US. But America responds with a secret spaceship of its own. Thereafter the US programme, fuelled by the Cold War, follows the generous lines set out by Wernher von Braun in his famous *Colliers* magazine articles of 1952. There are men in orbit in the early '50s, in huge winged descendants of the V-2; by 1963 there is an immense Wheel spaceship orbiting the Earth, serving as a calling port for direct-descent lunar ferries and providing a military surveillance platform. The Americans go to the Moon, but only to build Teal Falcon, a second-strike nuclear silo, in the Sea of Tranquillity; and in 1974 Neil Armstrong and Alexei Leonov lead Project Ares, the first - and only - manned mission to Mars. Thus, 1950s dreams are realised in full, at a cost of hundreds of billions of dollars.

But that's where the glory days end. With the end of the Cold War - and a controversial plan by President Dole to nuke Saddam in 1991 with the Teal Falcon missiles - the US space programme is scaled back. The von Braun spaceships are ageing, and attempts to replace them with Space Shuttles have failed - there was a *Challenger* disaster here too - although we are shown glimpses of a secret military spaceplane being developed at Area 51. The plot concerns the last American Moon mission: a voyage to Tranquillity by a motley crew of a fading astronaut, an embittered lesbian, German conspirators, a British spy and a bogus computer hacker, to decommission the missiles, after which Teal Falcon will be sold to the Germans for industrial operations and a nuclear waste dump. But more dastardly foreigners, the Koreans this time, are trying to steal one of the nukes for their own purposes.

Steele's research is impressive - there really was a 1950s US plan to put nukes on the Moon - as is his use of detail: burst seat padding and worn instrument consoles evoke the decay of the great von Braun spaceships, for instance. And, like Barton's story, the text is studded with evocative symbols of the era - like Walter Cronkite on the Wheel.

But although date and timelines are well worked out, Steele's alternate history away from the space programme is perhaps less convincing: there are computer hackers and cyberpunk and an Internet here, operating pretty much as in our world, and the usual Steele soundtrack of our-reality adult-oriented rock plays in the background, though sometimes the characters have to

invoke memories of their children's taste to justify it. The characters - particularly the non-Americans - are cliched and rather clumsily drawn. The plot is driven by coincidence, and the Korean scheme dissolves in a lurid gunfight on the Moon.

Like many Americans expressing a sense of the Loss of The Dream, Steele seems unable to distance himself from the sense of hurt national pride which suffuses the reaction of space buffs in the US to the turndown in their national space effort: "The United States - one-time world leader, now suffering from premature senescence, mumbling to itself as it played one endless Sega game after another while pretending that its undisputed position as the numero uno global exporter of exercise videos actually meant something - fell headlong towards the inevitable rude awakening" (Chapter 10). We must accept without discussion the assumption that the replacement of the US as space leader is a bad thing. Working within this mind-set, Steele's ability to analyse the historical processes which shaped the space effort is thereby diminished, and the rest of the world is seen through this filter; but on the other hand, sitting here in post-Imperial Britain - *our* space programme died in 1964, before it really got going - we might envy this emotional conviction, like agnostics excluded from a religious celebration. But the novel fails to evoke in us a sense of longing for this lost reality; it is hard to believe America lost very much by not spending so much money on such Strangelove follies.

Tranquillity Alternative, if flawed, is a fascinating book, especially when one remembers it comes from the head of the writer of straightforward post-Heinlein near-future-space extravaganzas like *Orbital Decay* and, more pertinently, *Lunar Descent.*

As for me, it was only much later – after 'Pilgrim 7', in fact – that I became interested again in the space programme, whose heroic days were by now receding into history. I came across references to the old lost plans for Mars (harder to find than you might think) and began to wonder how it might have been, after all, if ... So I began to gather notes for the project which became *Voyage.*

I started with the technical possibilities - enhanced Saturn Vs, nuclear rockets, 1980s Mars landers, the works - and how it would have been to have walked on Mars in a 1980s NASA EVA suit. It was wonderful, as if I was going there myself – or at least watching it on TV.

But by now I was in my 30s and I had come to see that technical logic is only a part of the story. I had spent much of my adult life working for large organisations, comparable in many ways to NASA. I had come to believe that the Apollo project was fundamentally crazy: the Americans went to the Moon for geopolitics, not for anything they hoped to find there. To reach outwards to Mars I was going to have to find ways to extend that craziness.

On the other hand, my broader experience of the world by now had taught me that the human race is pretty much crazy anyhow.

In *Voyage,* my astronauts reach Mars in 1986 ... but the book ends on the first words spoken on the surface, rather as the logic of Apollo was fulfilled when Armstrong made his one small step. *Voyage* is really about building the political will, the ships, and getting there; it was (according to one reviewer) an institutional drama. But then, so was Apollo; *Voyage* reflects my belief that the Apollo project actually represents the norm for how modern humans behave en masse, when they try to achieve great things. (Similarly *Titan* (1997) has the Americans, in the near future, going all the way to Saturn to put one over the Chinese.)

I don't accept, for example, William Barton's arguments of 'In Saturn Time'. We are *not* a rational species, and it's no good the space lobby – or anybody else – behaving as if we were. People who achieve large-scale things with their fellow humans understand this essential fact. That applies, for example, to John Kennedy, to James Webb (the political wheeler-dealer who successfully steered NASA through Apollo) and, more recently, to Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair. And that's how it works in *Voyage* and *Titan.*

And though in some ways *Voyage* for me was an exercise in wish-fulfilment, I found I could no longer believe whole-heartedly that throwing humans at Mars regardless would necessarily be a Good Thing.

Apollo has many lessons for us. Apollo dominated other space programmes in the 1960s - often to their detriment. The Lunar Orbiter and Surveyor lander programmes were effectively downgraded to serve as mappers for Apollo. If the Mars option had been followed it is not impossible to imagine that Viking might have been compromised in a similar fashion, and unrelated programmes - such as the unmanned exploration of the other planets - might have been put under even greater funding pressure than they were.

On the other hand, the abandonment of Mars and NASA's other great plans did *not* free up funds for other projects; the funds simply did not make themselves available at all. If a Mars programme had gone ahead, it would surely have brought many benefits in its wake, such as the need for the US to build up expertise in orbital assembly and long-duration missions.

And in the end, what a shame we lost the great spectacle we should have enjoyed had John Young walked on Mars at Mangala Vallis in 1986.

Costs and benefits: the adult view of the world.

To me alt.space is not really nostalgic, it is about our own growing up. And in these works, as our won world, the post-Apollo Moon, with its collection of decaying artefacts, footprints and fallen flags, is a potent symbol. We live in strange, unforeseen times indeed.

Reading

By Stephen Baxter

Voyage, London 1996.
Titan, London 1997.
'Pilgrim 7', *Interzone* 67, 1993.
'Columbiad', *SF Age,* May 1996.
'Moon Six' , *SF Age,* March 1997.
'Zemlya', *Asimov's,* January 1997
'Sun-Drenched', *Bending The Landscape,* White Wolf Books, ed. Nicola Griffiths, 1998.
'Prospero One' (with Simon Bradshaw), *Interzone* 112.
'Sun-God', *Interzone* 120, 1997.
'The Wire Continuum' (with Arthur C Clarke), in PLAYBOY, January 1998.
'War Birds', *Interzone* (to be published).
'Rusting Gantries and Lawn Ornaments', *Interzone* 105, 1996.

Others:

The Promise of Space, Arthur C Clarke, Penguin, 1968.
The Tranquillity Alternative, Allen Steele, 1996.
'In Saturn Time', William Barton, in *Amazing: the Anthology,* 1995.

First Impressions

Book Reviews edited by Paul Kincaid

Note: All novels marked: 🕮 are eligible for the 1997 BSFA Award for Best Novel. All collections and anthologies marked ❁ contain stories that are eligible for the 1997 BSFA Award for Best Short Fiction.

Kevin J. Anderson *The X-Files: Antibodies* 🕮
Voyager, 1997, 277pp, £16.99 ISBN 0 00 224638 4

Stan Nicholls *Dark Skies: The Awakening* 🕮
Bantam, 1997, 300pp, £4.99 ISBN 0 553 50619 6

Reviewed by Graham Andrews

Uh-huh. Novelizations of two PMT (Pre-Millennial Tension) TV series: compare and contrast.

First, I must declare a bias. The cock-up model of human history makes much more sense to me than all those deep-laid conspiracies; sometimes a grassy knoll in Dallas is just a grassy knoll in Dallas. Not that I don't like reading good *Manchurian Candidate*-type fiction. Ditto *The X-Files*, which – despite grinding axioms like 'the truth is out there' and 'trust no one' – never takes itself *too* seriously. The characters have a basic functional reality. Plots? Well, they usually make sense at the time.

These same claims can be made for Kevin J. Anderson's latest X-cursion (following *Ground Zero* and *Ruins*). The plot involves biological policemen called nanomachines: 'very tiny self-replicating machines small enough to work inside a human cell, versatile enough to know what they're doing ... submicroscopic robots that seek out and repair damage on a cellular level ...'.

But a nanotech plague-carrier is on the loose, who 'could cause a radical outrage of growths inside other people, healthy people, scrambling the genetic pattern'. *Antibodies* may lack the scientific rigour of Greg Bear's *Blood Music*, but it's a more pleasantly scaring narrative. Mulder and Scully aren't really needed on board; which I mean as a compliment to Kevin J. Anderson.

Now for *Dark Skies: The Awakening*. Stan Nicholls has novelized four teleplays by Bryce Zabel, Brent V. Friedman, and James D. Parriott – although his name features neither upon the front cover nor the spine, dashed bad form, in my opinion.

'History as we know it is a lie ...', the front-cover blurb, encapsulates the putative *Dark Skies* Unification Theory of UFOs. Eat your heart out, Einstein. Roswell, Project Blue Book, the Kennedy killings, Norway winning the Eurovision Song Contest, stuff like that, ditto crop circles, Nazi flying saucers, even – it says here – cattle mutilations. I prefer to call it the kitchen sink technique; and the resultant sludge is in danger of backing up the whole pipe dream.

Although co-creator/executive producer Bryce Zabel claims that one doesn't 'have to believe in UFOs to enjoy all of this', both TV series and noveloid clearly imply the exact opposite. '... Welcome to the *Dark Skies* resistance ... The fight for Humanity demands your courage'; bullshit or not? *You* decide.

The relationship between John Loengard* and Kimberly Sayers almost turns the word bland into a superlative; Mulder and Scully are Tristan and Isolde by comparison. All the same, I can't help but feel some liking for a book with

this chapter-ending: 'A rattle of gunshot loomed in the corridor outside, sealing the monkey's fate'.

Antibodies could survive – perhaps even thrive – in the marketplace without its arguably superfluous *X-Files* connection, but *Dark Skies: The Awakening* can only appeal to fans of the TV series – if such there be. I'd call it the difference between sf and sci-fi

* Shades of revolutionary hero Ernest Everhard, in Jack London's *The Iron Heel*.

Piers Anthony & Clifford A. Pickover — *Spider Legs*

TOR Books, 1998, 301pp, $22.95 ISBN 0 312 86465 5

Reviewed by Alan Fraser

I have reviewed Piers Anthony's books before, but I have never been a fan of his humour. However, this book is certainly not intended to be funny; the last book I read that was remotely like it was Peter Benchley's *Jaws*. *Spider Legs*, too, is about a monster that comes out of the deep to wreak havoc, is peopled with boldly-drawn black and white characters, and is full of intensely dramatic events in blockbuster style. It's also set on the Atlantic coast of North America, this time on the island of Newfoundland.

Piers Anthony is the first name on the cover, but the now Florida-based British 'New York Times best-selling' punster was not the original author of this book. It was first written by molecular biophysicist Dr. Clifford A. Pickover, now an IBM researcher, and author of many non-fiction books on the scientific use of computing, especially fractals. Dr. Pickover is fascinated by pycnogonids, creatures of the lobster family also known as sea spiders. Here he imagines the mutagenic solvents and pollutants that man throws into the sea causing them to grow to the size of elephants, and to come out of the sea ravenously hungry and fearless.

Piers Anthony has completely rewritten and expanded the book to get it to publication, and used his undoubted keep-the-pages-turning skills to make this a fast and easy read. It starts with a time-honoured formula:

- introduce the monster way down in the deep and follow it up
- introduce the nice couple going for a boating trip
- nice couple enjoy boating trip, have sex, go out on deck naked
- monster comes over side and enjoys munchfest
- Marie Celeste boat is found covered with bloodstains, etc.
- introduce group of main characters who will take the story on from there: police, coastguards, marine experts, etc.

There's lots of excitement, while the human and love interest is supplied by several major characters who get involved with each other. *Spider Legs* also has plenty of scientific background and interesting descriptions of the unfamiliar location. There's even a baddie, of sorts. The monster in the story likes to snip pieces off people or eat parts of them while they're alive, as well as killing them, so the action scenes in *Spider Legs* are pretty gory. A good time-passer of a book, and I'll never eat shellfish again!

If you want to see pictures of real pycnogonids, visit Dr. Pickover's Web site: http://sprott.physics.wisc.edu/pickover/home.htm

A.A. Attanasio — *Centuries*

Hodder & Stoughton, 1997, 437pp, £16.99 ISBN 0 340 66699 4

Reviewed by Jon Wallace

What are the next thousand years going to be like? As we head towards the year 2000, most of us are asking this question. This novel contains A. A. Attanasio's answer.

Starting with the natural disaster in the year 2000 which leaves only a sole survivor, the novel follows that survivor through to the year 3000. Ellen Vancet attempts and passes a rigorous set of tests to become a leading worker in CIRCLE – the Centre of International Research for the Continuance of Life on Earth. Here she takes a major part in a project which will influence events throughout the next millennium.

The sweep of this novel is at the same time broad and narrow. Broad, because of the sheer length of time, and the changes portrayed; and narrow because of the limited number of characters involved. Attanasio has pared down the cast to the minimum required to keep events pushing forward. No-one who is encountered has a minor role. Similarly, any act, technological or natural that we encounter in this book has an effect on the unfolding story. The breadth is mainly one of time. Each chapter is headed with a year, 2012 is followed by 2198, this by 2299. In this way, time sprints forward. The rate of change follows suit, although this is more subtle. Ellen Vancet becomes an observer for us as she watches the developing society from her primitive enclave, where she farms and fishes. Each time she emerges, she sees the change.

The thrust of the novel, then, is less technological than biological and sociological. How will we develop, not what will we use to propel the developments. The longevity treatments which allow us to follow Ellen Vancet over 1000 years are mentioned in passing rather than described, but we are made aware of the impact of these treatments on society. The gene-altering techniques which create the superhumans are an auctorial tool, rather than a central plot pivot.

Attanasio handles this breadth of vision with breathless ease. His portrayal is almost off-hand, his characters are as bewildered or at ease with the events swinging round them as they should be in the circumstances. The events themselves are as plausible as any that can be inferred for the next thousand years.

The main flaw is a marketing one. The cover proclaims this to be 'The towering novel of the next Millennium'. This is not really the case as almost all of the major events happen off-stage, only their effect appearing here. Because in the end, this novel, like all novels, has two threads. One is the question that the reader cannot fail to ask: what is going to happen to the people here next? And the other is the perennial question: what is going to happen next to everything? There are answers here, perhaps not the answers that you will want, but they are here in the end.

Ray Bradbury — *Driving Blind*

Avon Books, 1997, 261pp, $23.00 ISBN 0 380 97381 2

Reviewed by Edward James

Perhaps it is a sign of the depressed state of the short story market that of the twenty-two short stories collected together here, only four have ever appeared before (one in 1974, and the others in the 1990s). One could assume that most of the others are stories written in the 1990s, but who can tell?

Bradbury's voice is as distinctive as ever, and as unchanging. Some of the stories return to familiar territory and characters: 'The Highest Branch on the Tree' has Douglas Spaulding as the narrator: the same semi-autobiographical character that Bradbury used in *Dandelion Wine* (1957). With 'A Woman is a Fast-Moving Picnic', we re-enter the unconvincing, or perhaps subtly awry, Ireland of *Green Shadows, White Whale* (1992). A man-eating lion seems to prowl suburbia in 'Fee Fie Foe Fum', reminding one of 'The Veldt', that wonderful story from 1950. In short, there is nothing startlingly new here, yet neither is there any diminution of talent or imagination: any reader who loves Bradbury ought to seek this out, and anyone new to Bradbury ought to be inspired by this to look for the stories that Bradbury was writing forty or fifty years ago, when he was one of the greatest writers in the field.

This collection contains several striking fantasy tales, other tales that might be fantasy but are perhaps just the real world viewed through Bradbury's quirky spectacles, and just one story that might be defined as science fiction. Here the eponymous 'Mr Pale' is travelling from Earth to Mars: he is Death, transferring his attentions from a dead Earth to the new colony on Mars. If he himself dies on board the spaceship, will those on Mars live forever? And if they do, will they like it? Like so much of Bradbury's science fiction, this is short on science but poignant and delicate of touch. The title story, 'Driving Blind', tells of a hooded man who drives his massive 1929 Studebaker one day down Main Street in a sleepy Bradburyesque town. No-one knows how Mr Mysterious can drive his car blind; no-one knows what dark secrets Mr Mysterious is hiding under his hood, which he never removes even at meal-times. Or is it that he has no secrets? Does he, like Bradbury himself, just want to bring excitement and wild surmise into the lives of those he touches? In his epilogue, Bradbury notes that he himself cannot drive, but that once he dreamt that he was driving in a student's car, with its two steering-wheels, and with his blind-folded Muse sitting in the driver's seat. '"Trust me. I know the way," she said. "Close your eyes. Now, quietly, reach out." We arrived. And all of the tales in this new book were finished and done.' If you don't mind poignancy and some high emotion that some might see as mere sentiment, jump in.

Storm Constantine — *Three Heralds of the Storm*

Meisha Merlin, 1997, 60pp, £4.50 ISBN 0 9658345 1 4

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

Here are three stories from Storm Constantine, one previously unpublished, all very different from one another and yet all bearing their author's hallmark of fine writing combined with an idiosyncratic imagination. If these stories have a common theme, it is of the individual having to recognise the truth about themselves or their world.

The story that most readers would probably cite as most typical of Constantine's work us 'How Enlightenment Came to the Tower', a beautifully written fantasy, resonant of an archetypal fairy tale. Sapharial, a beautiful youth, lives 'within a tower of white stone, in a part of the forest where the light was greenest and the trees dwindled to a furry, sighing sward'. He cannot remember his life before he came to the tower, and has no knowledge of why he is imprisoned there. One day a visitor comes to the tower and forces Sapharial to confront the truth about his existence. Storm Constantine's rich, sensual writing makes this the kind of story that haunts the imagination long after it is read.

'Last Come Assimilation' takes the reader to a very different time and place. Ola Elamby's home world, the planet Brickman, is the site of a 'vast information gathering agency documenting the history and human achievement of the galaxy'. Incoce is a huge computer into and out of which data is processed both day and night. Ola, a nightshift supervisor, trying to contact her friend, Lancy, through Incoce, finds that Lancy is involved in some sort of classified activity, although Lancy later denies it. Determined to uncover the conspiracy behind her friend's prevarication and lies, Ola attempts an illegal neural link with Incoce...

Confronting the truth can be an unpalatable experience. 'There is a sense of loss, when ignorance dies' as Cynthia Peeling, denizen of affluent suburbia finds out when she tries to solve the mystery of the murder of her neighbour in 'Such a Nice Girl', unpublished until now. When Emma Tizard is found dead, the police are baffled. None of her neighbours knew her well, but she seemed sensible, elegant and polite, and entirely respectable. It is only when Cynthia discovers Emma's disturbing artwork and then receives a visit from Emma's former flatmate, thought to have been murdered also, that Cynthia realises that Emma had a secret life...

Recommended for all Storm Constantine fans.

(Available from Inception, 44 White Way, Kidlington, Oxon, OX5 2XA)

Tony Daniel — *Earthling*

TOR Books, 1997, 283pp, $22.95 ISBN 0 312 85571 0

Reviewed by Stephen Deas

Welcome to the six-part mini-series, complete with feature-length pilot; action monsters be warned, it's hardly racy. Gorgeous would be a better word. Set in the North West United States, it could almost be a tourist brochure for the scenery, such is the luscious feel Daniel gives it. Simmering in the background: psychotic eco-friendly technophobic unrest. Parked in the foreground: a mining robot, imbued with consciousness and fused with the spirit of a man. The robot grows up, discovers itself, discovers feelings, discovers people, learns to dream, all with a whimsical innocence. And then

the end. Bang. Change of scope. Stunned. Not much plot, but if what turns you on is touchy-feely writing, expertly human characters, to actually be drawn in to the wonder of the newborn faced with it's first experiences with the world, then beg, steal, borrow or buy the first ninety pages of this book. You will be moved.

If the rest was as good, this review would get nauseatingly sycophantic very quickly. Unfortunately it isn't. Ever picked up a stone at the beach, thought it was just the most perfect stone you ever saw, then turned it over to discover a massive flaw lurking on the underside? Didn't it make you want to cry?

Earthling is set at some unspecified time in the future; society has collapsed and fallen into a semi-tribal state, parts of it clinging to separate and different ideals and technological know-how of today. The plot is pretty basic: X goes from A to B in four parts. Perhaps it doesn't matter – this really isn't a plot book. The characters remain well-drawn and vividly human, everything flows, there's the same dreamy sheen to even the most violent episodes – an approach that mostly works, by the way – yet, somehow, the whole is less than the sum of its parts. What's missing is the big picture. A nice ride, but hardly gripping; no idea where or why we're going. I'm almost at the end before I have an answer, and then, dammit, I'm on the edge of my seat again and it's all over too soon. The background has this problem too; I felt as though as I was seeing it with the wrong pair of glasses on, a glimpse every now and then, and every time I wanted to see more. But there's no linkage, every new scene is time to start again from scratch. I exaggerate, but not a lot. And then there's the epilogue: personally I wish I hadn't read it. Some people will love it; I'm not sure there's an in-between. Imagine me finishing here with a paragraph on the relative merits of domestic appliances as icons for divine worship. Bah!

Still, it's a pleasant journey from start to almost-finish. Some people will get bored, others will get lost in the sheer quality of the writing and won't care. If he can repeat this and find a cracking story to go with it, I will personally nominate Mr Daniel for apotheosis.

Ellen Datlow & Terri Windling (Eds) — *Black Swan, White Raven* ❁

Avon Books, 1997, 369pp, $23.00 ISBN 0 380 97523 8

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

The editors of this collection of modern fairy tales discuss how, until the Victorian period, fairy tales were told or written for adult audiences, not children. The Victorians, to fit in with their ideas of what was sustainable for a child audience, simplified and prettified the original material, robbing it of much of its strength.

To some extent, the writers of this book – and the earlier books in the same series – reclaim the territory of the old fairy tales. They do what the earlier storytellers did, and make use of the communal body of material to convey their own vision. These reworkings of original stories draw on the full range of human experience. Whether they are set in the traditional land of faerie or in the modern world, whether they stay close to the familiar story or simply borrow elements from it, their power rises from what they tell us about ourselves.

Don't think that in using familiar and traditional material the writers are just rehashing old themes, or that a reader won't find anything new. Because we know the story, because we think we know what to expect, the sense of surprise is even greater. It can be achieved by something as simple as a change of scene or viewpoint, but what is simple does not have to be simplistic.

The collection includes stories by outstanding fantasy writers like John Crowley, Nancy Kress and Jane Yolen, all of whom have contributed excellent stories. Karen Joy Fowler's 'The Black Fairy's Curse' is a reworking of the Sleeping Beauty story which I found particularly compelling. However, the two stories I personally enjoyed most are both by writers who were unknown to me until now: Bruce Glassco, who contributes a moving version of the story of Thomas the Rhymer with a science fictional basis; and Susanna Clarke, whose retelling of the story Tom Tit Tot (aka Rumpelstiltskin) is stylish, convincing and very funny indeed. If nothing else, I'm grateful to the editors for introducing me to their work. And I can't bear not to mention 'Rapunzel' by Anne Bishop and 'The Dog Rose' by Sten Westgard, both stories impressively sensitive, and true.

I didn't enjoy every story in the collection; for example, I thought that Michael Blumlein's 'Snow in Dirt' tries too hard to fix the Sleeping Beauty in a modern setting, and I felt much the same straining of the source material in 'Sparks' by Gregory Frost, a retelling of 'The Tinder Box'. But these are not inconsiderable stories, and I can imagine that another reader might disagree with me completely.

As I wrote in my review of the previous collection in this series, those who have read the earlier books don't need this review. They have probably bought this book already. If you haven't, then this would be a good place to start.

Jeremy Dyson — *Bright Darkness*

Cassell, 1997, 282pp, £14.99 ISBN 0 304 34038 3

James Craig Holte — *Dracula in the Dark*

Greenwood, 1997, 163pp, £43.95 ISBN 0 313 29215 9

Reviewed by Daniel O'Mahoney

Dracula exemplifies vampirism and vampirism exemplifies the Other. James Craig Holte, who reveals *Dracula in the Dark* to those of us who can afford him, has previously written *The Ethnic I: A Sourcebook for Ethnic-American Autobiography*, so we might reasonably expect ethnicity to stand at the heart of his latest book. It doesn't. Bram Stoker's Irishness means nothing to him, but then neither does Sheridan le Fanu's (a far more shocking omission). *Dracula in the Dark* seems an academic book but it's oddly bereft of analysis.

Perhaps that's wise. Dracula's Otherness is a paradigmatic quality ('shape-shifting' according to Holte) of the kind which brings out the silliness in even the most level-headed academic. Crucially in a book whose most profound point is that *everyone* from Bram Stoker onwards has *appropriated* the

Count, Holte doesn't try to do this. He sees *Dracula* as a morality play, but, aside from a marked enthusiasm for Hammer's *savant*/monster confrontations this doesn't impinge on the text. What we're left with is a fairly straightforward trawl through screen *Draculas*. Holte's opinions are inoffensive and he offers no new interpretations. The text is fluent, remarkably brief, often repetitive and ultimately cut down by lack of ambition. There's no pretension to *Dracula in the Dark*, which is its main fault as some grandeur on Holte's part would have lent his subject more bite.

Bright Darkness seems, on first inspection, to be far more inconclusive, but actually has a narrower focus. Holte illustrates a theme but Jeremy Dyson is trying to engender a genre – one that begins with Universal's horror, weaves round Val Lewton and dies a glorious death with *The Haunting*. It's less academic that Holte's tome. Though the introduction threatens us with the potentially paradigmatic concept of *ehrfurcht* ('reverence for that which we cannot understand') it appears so infrequently in the body text that it's impossible to feel cheated by Dyson's failure to unpack its possible meanings.

Instead the text is defined by a selection of Dyson's personal shibboleths which amount to the Supernatural Horror Film. Silent films are out. So is anything not made in America or Britain (films whose potent *ehrfurcht* is married to an altogether more alien landscape – e.g. *Picnic at Hanging Rock* – get short shrift). Most telling is Dyson's exclusive interest in black-and-white film. Out of these elements he forges a (sub)genre 'in terminal decline'. This makes *Bright Darkness* sound reactionary but Dyson is careful to side-step the accusation. Like Holte he admits to a certain fannishness but he's not afraid to wear it on his sleeve. The effect is a much more intimate book than *Dracula in the Dark*. The background detail is dense and the analysis of individual films often extensive.

Thematically it's less secure, though Dyson almost comes up with an underlying theme to pin his theses together. Orson Welles is wheeled on occasionally as a kind of technical advisor. A whole book could be dedicated to Welles's tangential influence on fantastic film-making. Sadly this isn't it.

Greg Egan — ***Diaspora***

Orion, 1997, 295pp, £16.99 ISBN 1 85798 438 2

Reviewed by Gary Dalkin

Diaspora: a Greek word meaning dispersion, historically the community formed following the deportation of part of the population of Judah by the Babylonians, 597-586 BC.

Diaspora: the new novel from Greg Egan, his first since *Distress*, the finest sf novel of 1995.

Diaspora: the dispersion of Carter-Zimmerman polis across the near galaxy (and beyond), an attempt to find an explanation for the collapse of Lacerta G-1, a pair of neutron stars which, in forming a black hole, devastate the Earth's ozone layer with a massive burst of gamma radiation, 2996.

In Konishi polis, a virtual civilisation within a computer buried deep beneath Siberia, an unparented Citizen is grown from a mind seed. The Citizen attains consciousness, becomes self-aware and adopts the name Yatima. Embodied in abandoned gleisner robots, Yatima and her friend Inoshiro visit the Fleshers in Atlanta. Fleshers are our descendants, most of whom are Exuberants, who have implemented various genetic adaptations, or Statics, who have not. When Karpal, a gleisner astronomer working on the moon, discovers that Lacerta G-1 is about to collapse, Yatima and Inoshiro try to warn Orlando and Liana, their Flesher friends. The small Flesher communities do not trust the Citizens, and consider the warning to be a ploy to entrap the last remaining organic humans into digitising their minds and entering the loathed polis's. After the gamma storm Yatima helps rescue the last dying Fleshers. While other polis sink deeper into solipsism, Carter-Zimmereman determines to solve the cosmological riddle and so prevent any such disaster ever happening again. A thousand clones of the polis are made and dispersed to the nearest stars, each Citizen separated even from themselves. What they find is a threat to all life in the galaxy, and a very unexpected evacuation plan.

The adventures which follow include strange aliens, six dimensional stars, multiple universes and aeons of time.

In some ways *Diaspora* is a summation of Greg Egan's major themes to date. The virtual setting in which software-Citizens reconfigure themselves as needs and relationships change has much in common with the computer world of *Permutation City*, while speculative quantum physics, which plays a significant part in the development of the story, was also, in a different guise, at the heart of *Distress*. *Diaspora*, however, is even more of an idea-dominated book than its predecessors. The characterisation is less developed than in *Distress*, but this may well be appropriate, given that almost all of the characters are actually software. The plot, inevitably given its scale, is episodic. At times the novel comes close to resembling a collection of linked stories, or even a 'fix-up', and indeed Egan has incorporated the highly acclaimed 'Wang's Carpets' (first published in *New Legends*, the anthology edited by Greg Bear) into the narrative. All this does not diminish *Diaspora*, for although this time Egan fails to achieve the brilliant synthesis of plot, theme and character at personal and metaphysical levels which made *Distress* such a complete work, here is such a superabundance of imaginative ideas, fused with such a vast perspective that the novel assumes an elegaic *Stapledonian* grandeur.

At the very heart of this novel, as so often with Egan, lies the question of identity. When all can be re-coded, what is there that remains? Essentially *Diaspora* tells a simple story against a very complex universe. Egan writes with tremendous confidence presenting enormously difficult concepts in physics, mathematics, geometry and cosmology with such ease that we realise that his future truly is a beautiful and terrifying land.

Diaspora: a Greek word meaning the finest sf novel of 1997.

David Gemmell — ***Echoes of the Great Song***

Bantam, 1997, 350pp, £15.99 ISBN 0 593 03715

Reviewed by Janet Barron

The alternate world of David Gemmell's latest offering is a post-cataclysm setting of ice and bleak seas. The cities are buried, and with them are hidden most of the crystal power sources that allowed the magic-wielding Avatars to rule the lesser folk of their world.

Talaban, like many of Gemmell's characters, is a man with a dilemma. The crystal chests give the avatars god-like health and longevity, and fuel their weapons and all the trappings of their power. As an avatar, Talaban needs to search out the chests from the deeps and use them to sustain an ever more brittle hold over the Vagar majority and the tribes. As a man, he is unable to hold the view of the traditionalist Avatars that the other races are sub-human, and so is regarded with suspicion among his peers.

Anu is a prophet and mathematician who predicted the tidal wave that ended civilisation. He has plans for a labour of immense effort which will change this twilight world forever, and not in the way he has asserted.

Viruk, the warrior, is a madman, and his actions slice through this book like a knife through butter. No mixed motives for him; feral and self-absorbed, he knows what he wants and gets it. But though his motives may be self-interested, the results of his actions can be good. When he cures a young Vagar woman, Sofarita, he unwittingly unleashes a transformation which gives her legendary powers. Viruk leaps from the pages in ways that the more worthy characters do not. Sofarita, for instance, becomes noticeably generic as her transformation progresses.

Into low-key Machiavellian manoeuvring, comes a powerful threat from outside; other related worlds have found their own ways to avoid the cataclysm and one of them has broken the boundaries the separate the two. No shades of grey among these foes. The Almec leader, the Crystal Queen, has long ago lost any vestiges of humanity to the need to sustain herself on human blood.

The pace picks up with a vengeance, and what follows is an adventure in typical fantasy style to save the world. The book is crammed with additional characters such as the traditionalist Questor Ro, the tribesman Touchstone, and the King Anwar, all delineated with skill, but not infused with life. Though not a regular Gemmell reader, I suspect this is not one of his more memorable works. Those who are already Gemmell fans should seek it out for the delightfully amoral Viruk

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N.E. Genge — ***Millennium, The Unofficial Companion: Volume One***
Century, 1997, 144pp, £9.99 ISBN 0 7126 7833 6
Millennium, The Unofficial Companion: Volume Two
Century, 1997, 125pp, £9.99 ISBN 0 7126 7869 7

Reviewed by Graham Andrews

Books about 'classic' TV series have long been part of the non-fiction furniture. Examples abound: *Star Trek*, of course, in all its forms; *The Saint*; *Danger Man* who turned into *The Prisoner*; *The Man/Girl from U.N.C.L.E.*; ditto the decidedly un-classic *Space 1999*, although temporal distance now lends it some period charm (a Statute of Limitations on TV Tat?)

Now we have N.E. Genge's almost indecently hasteful 'unofficial companion' volumes to *Millennium*. I'd rather not think about the series itself, which probably even Leonard Cohen and Barry N. Malzberg found too depressing by half. These so-called 'covert casebooks' defy reviewing in any real sense of the word, the basic structure is an episode-by-episode guide, with twiddly bits. For example:

CASE FILE: Millennium: 'The Pilot'

CASE SYNOPSIS: Moving back to Seattle isn't the idyll Frank (Black) had hope for ... etc.
KEY CITATION: Lt ROBERT BLETHER ... This Millennium Group ... They really believe all that stuff? Nostradamus and Revelations? The destruction of the world?
VITAL STATISTICS: Original US Airdate (25/10/96); Production number; Regular/Recurring Cast; Guest Cast; (*and the ever-popular*) Death Toll: 1 female victim, decapitated/1 male victim, burned alive.
CASE HISTORY: NOSTRADAMUS: PROPHETIC POET? (Lots of stuff about the Millennium Effect, the Black Death, Good King Billy, and guess who).
Also: BLOOPER! The sound crew got a little too enthusiastic on this episode ... *Did you know?* Before it was decided that *Millennium* was catchier, the show's working title was *2000*; TESTIMONY TRIVIA 1 (+ answers); NOTE BOOK; INCIDENTALS.

So help me, the whole bally book is like that. *Books*, rather – but only by vice of large print, wide margins, and oversized photos. Why couldn't those good people at Century have compressed both volumes into 200-odd pages and sold it for a tenner? As if I didn't know.

Phyllis Gotlieb — ***Flesh and Gold***
TOR Books, 1998, 287pp, $22.95 ISBN 0 312 86523 6
Robert Reed — ***Beneath the Gated Sky***
TOR Books, 1997, 349pp, $23.95 ISBN 0 312 86269 5

Reviewed by Andy Mills

In *Flesh and Gold* Phyllis Gotlieb presents a future universe which is at the same time depressing and uplifting. Skerow, an inter-world circuit judge, finds her life turned upside down when a fellow judge is murdered; she also discovers a mermaid being exhibited in the front window of a brothel. She is determined to find out the truth behind the former event and help the latter creature. The reader is then sucked into a maelstrom of a tale in which the seedy side of intergalactic life is portrayed to the full: murder, slavery, prostitution, gambling, smuggling, corruption. Aliens, it seems, have much the same capacity for evil as human beings. Ranged against these criminal forces are a handful of good people, each of whom has little power but enough determination to plough on. And in the end the little people do win.

The reader has to concentrate throughout this book as Gotlieb introduces a vast array of characters, most of whom have only a minor role. But patience is rewarded as the story unfolds and it becomes clear how what appear to be separate strands are in fact interconnected.

The entry for Robert Reed in the latest edition of the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* notes:

> RR's course to date has been unusual in that he has avoided sequels in his first 5 novels... Today's sf readers tend to

expect a kind of brand identity from authors, and it may be for this reason that RR has not yet achieved any considerable fame.

One cannot help but think that Reed must have given some thought to John Clute's words, for *Beneath the Gated Sky* is of course a sequel (to *Beyond the Veil of Stars*). Indeed, by its somewhat inconclusive ending it appears as if it is the second volume of a trilogy, though nowhere in the publisher's blurb is this mentioned. However, one does not have to have read the previous volume to enjoy this book as Reed fills in all the necessary background information. It is evident, though, that some minor players in this novel had larger parts to play earlier and their presence here is never clearly delineated.

The story is that of Porsche, a member of a vast extended family called the Few, who have the ability and knowledge to cross between worlds through portals. The passage is instantaneous and remarkable: the traveller becomes one of the indigenous population, even owning the requisite instincts and skills, such as language ability, to enable them to survive. Porsche started life as one of the humanoid Jarrtee; now she is human, but has to return to her old world when one of the Few betrays the family secret. As in Gotlieb's novel, Reed shows us evil in men – alien and human alike – who use and dispose of others for their own purposes; likewise, good prevails. *Beyond the Gated Sky* is an interesting book (particularly for Reed's audacious ideas) but perhaps the sequence is best judged in its entirety.

John Grant & Ron Tiner — *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy & Science Fiction Art Techniques*

Titan, 1997, 176pp, £12.99 ISBN 1 85286 891 0

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

This latest addition to the series of science fiction and fantasy encyclopedias is of rather more modest dimensions than its textual predecessors. As a 'comprehensive A-to-Z directory of techniques' (we might quibble that it is, more accurately, A-to-L , plus S and T) it is nearer to Bruce Robertson's *Techniques of Fantasy Art* (1988) or Martyn Dean's *The Guide to Fantasy Art Techniques* (1985), although its more up-to-date recent status is evidenced by a section on 'Computer Enhancement'.

The choice of entries is also somewhat idiosyncratic, with the rather odd result that 'Perspective' is subsumed under 'False Perspective'; there is 'Sword and Sorcery' but no 'Space' under Conceptualizing and Rendering in the A-to-Z of techniques, while 'Space Opera', 'High Fantasy' and 'Alien Landscapes' appear under the separate section on Themes. With the caveat that these selections are more 'illustrative' than definitive, and the urge is to take these examples as a basis for experiment rather than as a gospel of 'How to become a fantasy artist', how does the book fare?

Pretty well in fact. The sections on Tools and Materials are useful, although largely to be found in any general guide to illustration, artwork and painting, with the effects of media and substrates. A short introduction places fantasy art out of its current 'dwarves and dragons' image (for which games-related outfits like TSR must bear a large responsibility) into a historical setting that goes back to the illustrations of Dore, Tenniel, Peake and Rackham, and indeed, with a strong case all the way back to Hieronymous Bosch. (I must look out for 'Mad' John Martin, whose epic fantastic landscapes at the beginning of the century are said to be precursors to those of Pennington, Burns and Taylor).

'Conceptualization is the name of the game'. It is, unfortunately, also the hardest to teach, and begs the same now cliched question presented to writers of fantastic fiction: 'where do you get your ideas?' (and the delightful addendum once asked of Alan Garner, 'or do you think them up yourself?'). Imagination is practically unteachable – no writers ask that question, and few can really answer. Artists and illustrators might be in the happier situation that they can take inspiration from a text, looking for a striking image, or even working to an art director's brief. Imagination might be woken, and perhaps directed and trained, together with technique and experimentation, and it is from here that the Encyclopedia takes on its main two sections on Conceptualization and Rendering and an illustrative gallery of Themes by some of the most respected fantasy artists working today. This gallery section, featuring works by artist like Jim Burns, Geoff Taylor, Les Edwards, Danny Flynn and David Hardy, is a small gem of its own, and contains a number of beautiful, striking and technically accomplished works.

But the bit I suspect most budding artists will keep returning to, for ideas and inspiration, is the A-to-Z of rendering and techniques, where the accompanying workbook sketches and progress roughs are less likely to make you want to give up in despair than being faced with a stunning finished artwork by Jim Burns. Armed with all this, the short final section on Getting Published has some useful advice (again, like that to budding writers: check out any publication before you submit to it, and the kind of work the editor or publisher uses). And while it's nice to find advice on submitting to fanzines and small press magazines as a first step, it has to be said that few sf fanzines (in the UK at least) feature very much overtly science fiction illustration nowadays, and most have limited resources to reproduce much more than black and white illustrations.

Nancy Kress — *Maximum Light*

TOR Books, 1998, 245pp, $22.95 ISBN 0 312 86535 X

Reviewed by John Newsinger

Nancy Kress, author of *Beggars in Spain*, is an author from whom one expects well-crafted, thoughtful, stimulating entertainment. *Maximum Light* fulfils this expectation.

The three central characters – Shana Walders, a tough young working class woman, Cameron Atuli, a gay ballet dancer, and Nick Clementi, an elderly scientist who is terminally ill – live in a grim future where humankind is dying out. Pollution has had a catastrophic effect on human fertility, and the birthrate has fallen to a level that threatens the survival of the species. The government, which is completely in the hands of big business, has covered this up,

suppressing the connection between pollution and declining fertility in order to protect the economy. The novel tells of the part that Shana, Cameron and Nick play in overturning this cover-up.

Maximum Light is a detective story in which the two young protagonists each seek to unravel a personal mystery, in the process enabling Nick Clementi hopefully to deflect humankind from species suicide. Shana has stumbled across some chimp babies with human faces and finds that reporting this costs her the chance of joining the army. She determines to prove the existence of the chimp children. Her story intersects with tat of Cameron, who had his memory wiped to delete some horrific experience and still can't help wondering what it was that required such drastic action. While out 'gay bashing', Shana comes across Cameron and discovers that the chimp children she saw had his face!

In a world without children there is a lucrative market for pets with at least some human characteristics: a chimp with human hands and face can be dressed as a human child and provide emotional comfort for women condemned to childlessness. Despite the fact that vivifacture is illegal, there is a thriving black market controlled by ruthless criminals and effectively condoned by the government. To manufacture the chimp children, young people are being kidnapped, used in medical experiments and, when finished with, murdered. Despite this, as far as the government is concerned the illegal research carried out by these criminal syndicates offers the best hope of solving the fertility crisis, short of recognising the real cause.

Cameron was one of many victims (he escaped with his life but not his testicles) and Shana nearly becomes another. She is held prisoner in a lab where there are rows of clear boxes containing 'whole female pelvises, from the waist to the tops of the thighs... the bellies bulge – some a little, some a lot. The floating pelvises are all pregnant.' She is to be dismembered and used as a womb.

Kress takes us into a world of ecological disaster, human despair and government conspiracy. Her three protagonists, all very different people, are extremely well-drawn, convincing individuals that engaged this reader's sympathy. She writes with genuine concern for what is being done to our world and the possible consequences. One criticism, however: from being apparently all-powerful, the government collapses far too easily in the face of Clementi and Co's activities. The BSE experience in Britain has surely shown how easily politicians can escape responsibility for just about anything. If only the world worked the way she shows it...

Paul J. McAuley — ***Child of the River*** *Gollancz, 1997, 286pp, £16.99 ISBN 0 575 06427 7*
Invisible Country *Vista, 1997, 320pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 575 60189 2*

Reviewed by K. V. Bailey

A collection of short stories, such as *The Invisible Country*, appearing at a strategic point in the evolution of an author's distinctive modes of fiction, can give readers, in addition to what pleasure the stories themselves afford, insight into how innovative ideas and images are growing and branching. There is a difference between a story that is expanded, by padding or inflation, into a novel, and a story which is in effect a kind of laboratory where the elements of a gestating novel are interactive. That latter process is apparent in the relationship of many of these stories to *Fairyland* (1995). McAuley himself, in one of his illuminating 'Afterwords' says of the story 'Slaves' (1995) that it 'stands as a bridge between *Fairyland* and an earlier novel'. There, and also in 'Prison Dreams' (1993) and in the 1993 stories, 'Dr Luther's Assistant' and 'Children of the Revolution' we are well into the territory of the blue-skinned dolls and fairies. The brilliant 'Children of the Revolution' makes the same strong intellectual/emotional impact as does *Fairyland* – perhaps even stronger for its concision.

Not all the stories are *Fairyland*-oriented; though the creation/modification of humanoid life is a common motif. One story, however, has a unique 'gestatory' role: this is 'Recording Angel' (1995). Its *mise en scene* is a city on the Great River. This flows through Confluence, an artificial, flattish world which librates vertically rather than rotating, while circling a halo star. As seen from it, the home galaxy rises and sets, and the planet looks towards what had been the Lesser Magellanic Cloud, now collapsed into a hideaway black hole by remote galactic creators and manipulators.

The above description could also be applied to the world of the 1997 novel *Child of the River*, subtitled *The First Book of the Confluence*. In both story and novel the artificial planet has a population of bio-engineered humanoid clades, displaying many varieties of animal origin in their make-up. The planet's affairs are partly ordered by insect-sized aerial machines. Into the 11,000 word confines of 'Recording Angel' are packed civil wars, super-being incursions, revoltions and an apocalypse, with an injection of seriously contemplated ideas from Frank Tipler's *The Physics of Immortality*. However intriguing the several protagonists' involvement, the plot tends to be lost amidst the chaos of such condensation. *Child of the River*, at novel, and obviously eventually at series length, is equipped for sorting things out. Its approach is the traditional and effective one of a main character viewpoint, enhanced here by that character's being a (Joseph) Campbellian hero. He, Yama, the eponymous Child, has a baby Moses-style entry into the world, is fostered by a 'royal' household, leaves it to search for the origin of his 'bloodline', engages militantly to save the world/universe, encounters 'ogres', and is given 'supernatural' aid. All this is counterpointed against the complex cosmology and metaphysics of an extravagantly imagined but compellingly presented Techno-gothic yet Hindu-like environment. Towards the end of the novel Yama, in the Black Temple of Ys, receives some knowledge of the nature and purpose of his and his world's aeonian Preservers and Builders: a spectral avatar urges him that his fight against the 'heretics', in aiming to perpetuate stasis, is fought on the wrong side (advice he rejects). Finally he and the fascinating beast-woman, Tamora, enter the Palace of the Memory of the People. What might he learn about his 'blood line' there, and how subsequently may his crusade be affected? The notorious 'second volume problem' poses its challenge, but plenty of impetus has been generated, and one remains curious about these strangely imagined far-future cosmographies and eschatologies.

Michael Moorcock & Philippe Druillet — *Elric: The Return to Melnibone*
Jayde Design, 1997, 60pp, £10.00 ISBN 0 9520074 3 6

J.R.R. Tolkien — *Realms of Tolkien*
HarperCollins, 1997, £14.99 ISBN 0 261 10345 8

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

Two rather different fantasy art books, in style, format and intent.

Elric has the oddest format, as a thin, almost poster size graphic story featuring the work of French graphic artist Phillipe Druillet, co-founder, with Jean Girard (Moebius), of *Metal Hurlant*. The story itself has an even odder history, appearing originally in the late sixties, in *Elric Le Necromancien*, and re-printed in Britain in a revised portfolio as *Elric: The Return to Melnibone* before running into copyright problems on its small print run. The story, as a lost fragment of the Elric saga, dropped out of existence until this edition by Moorcock small press specialists Jayde Design.

The text, it has to be said, is more of a fragment or prologue than a real story. Elric returns to Melnibone, and discovers his cousin, Yrkoon, has turned the palace into a decadent court during his appointment as Regent. Elric seeks out Cymoril, his betrothed. They make love in the bridal bedchamber, watched over by the Elric's patron Arioch, Duke of Hell, which union, and its consequences, are hinted at, but left hanging and unresolved.

As an illustrator, Druillet is a details man, rather than a natural figure drawer. His figures are stiff and awkwardly posed, with hands and faces a problem, even within the stylised representations of comic art. You feel he would much rather get on to the ornate fiddly bits, extravagant baroque scenery, costumes and swirling tattoos, and there are, indeed, some stunning full page designs here in the black and white illustrations. But unfortunately it doesn't quite carry the story, with the emphasis on background detail rather than foreground action working against the fragmentary nature of the text, and adding up to more of a Druillet portfolio than a graphic story.

Realms of Tolkien: Images of Middle Earth is pretty much what it says, a glossy coffee table book of colour illustrations and paintings by twenty artists, including Ted Nasmith, Alan Lee, John Howe, Michael Kaluta, Stephen Hickman and others. Most of the illustrations, unsurprisingly, are taken from *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings*, and represent a wider range of styles and approaches than might be suggested by a 'fantasy art' book.

Particularly intriguing are some of the European artists, such as Lode Claes, Capucine Mazille, and the almost medieval paintings of Dutch artist Cor Blok, several of which were purchased by Tolkien himself. Tolkien Calendar collectors, though, will recognise the more contemporary fantasy styles of Nasmith, Howe and Kaluta, especially Howe's glowing golden 'Smaug', while Alan Lee brings a fine art approach to the landscape of Rivendell and the Black Gates of Mordor and the dark, nightmarish 'Black Riders'. Each colour plate is accompanied by a passage from Tolkien's works, and the whole rounded off with a brief biography of each of the twenty artists. A nice addition for either Tolkien or fantasy art collectors.

Melanie Rawn — *The Mageborn Traitor*
Macmillan, 1997, 759pp, £17.99 ISBN 0 333 65032 8

Reviewed by Lesley Hatch

If you were to ask me what I considered a good example of epic fantasy, I would have to say that this, the second volume in Melanie Rawn's *Exiles* series, is exactly that.

The series is set in a non-technological civilisation which is rebuilding itself following the purge and Rising which were described in *The Ruins of Ambrai*. *The Mageborn Tower* picks up exactly where that first volume left off, with sisters Cailet Rille and Sarra Liwellan – Mage Captal and First Councillor respectively – discussing the dilemmas that face them both. For Sarra, newly pregnant, there's the rebuilding work that needs to be done before she can move to Ryka Court and the revision of the laws of the land to try and make the life of the male populace who, by tradition, have no rights under the law, less dependent on the female of the species. For Cailet, there's the disquiet she feels at being Mage Captal, responsible for the training of Mage Guardians to combat the might of the Malerrissi, the leader of whom is Glenin Feiran who happens to be sister to Sarra and Cailet.

These three are not the only main protagonists: there's Collan Rosvenir, Sarra's husband and a minstrel by trade, and Falundir, the one-time minstrel who taught Collan his craft.

On the surface, the conflict between Glenin and Cailet is depicted in black and white, but there are shades of grey interspersed throughout. Cailet, for instance, though chosen as the Captal by her dying predecessor, does not possess the full powers that go with the position and so there are certain magical things she is unable to do. She is also sharing her consciousness with four other entities, including the previous Captal and the former First Sword of the Mage Guardians who are mages in their own right. Then you have the suspense engendered when Glenin sends her son to Cailet's Mage Hall, incognito: his arrival coincides with the arrival of another young man (a Prentice Mage saved from an unsuitable marriage by Collan) and Cailet finds it impossible to decide which one is Glenin's offspring.

The novel has all the ingredients that make an exciting and suspenseful story. Melanie Rawn keeps up the tension from start to finish, and I can't fault the way in which the action is played out on a broad, colourful canvas full of people who, each in their own way, have something to contribute.

Kim Stanley Robinson — *Antarctica*
Voyager, 1997, 414pp, £16.99 ISBN 0 00 225359 3

Icebenge
Voyager, 1997, 262pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 00 648255 4

Reviewed by L. J. Hurst

Kim Stanley Robinson has returned from Mars to Earth, and his timescale has reduced: *Antarctica* is set in the near future, when the Antarctic territories will come up for grabs as the Treaty that keeps them relatively inviolate runs out. Voyager

have re-published *Icebenge*, his second novel, in a similar (attractive) jacket, probably thinking that sales of one will increase sales of the other. Oddly, though, for all the similarities of their titles, there is a world of difference between the two. The jacket blurb calls *Antarctica* a 'gripping, provocative eco-thriller', and if that is a true description I would say that it simultaneously damns the book. *Icebenge* is a much more provocative work that I had not appreciated before now.

Down on the various scientific stations of the Antarctic X is at work as a general labourer. X, who gets his nickname from the XL-size overalls he wears, is no scientist, but he reads anyway. Out on the glaciers leading vacationers on treks that re-create Scott's, Amundsen's and Shackleton's expeditions (even though those who experienced them first called them the worst journey in the world) is Val, a former lover of X. And Val, in turn, becomes a guide to Wade Norton, who is sent to the Pole to discover what is going on. For bases are being sabotaged, snow-mobiles are being stolen, and ecotage generally is eating at the edges of the taxpayers' millions.

Wade is being employed by an American senator, one of the last Democrats who cares about things. All of the characters are aware of everything that has gone before them: they are Americans but they constantly re-live (and visit) the sites that the Norwegian Amundsen, and all the British explorers knew. They can actually re-visit the huts in which Scott or Shackleton lived or died. In the intense cold nothing rots – not kitchen waste, not excrement, and though huts and buildings may move on or sink and be buried in the snow they may all be found again. In almost any other area one lives in the remains of the past, but there the preserving power of the cold means that a visitor might live in the whole artefact. In fact, as Wade Norton discovers, this is what at least some of the ecoteurs are doing.

Antarctica has two other themes: one, the investigation of the minds of the past explorers, driven by British stiff upper lip, or general stupidity. Robinson quotes from the classic accounts of those disastrous expeditions, but his sub-editor lets him down, and he makes errors, such as references to the *Boy's Own Weekly*, when he means the *Boy's Own Paper*, and he also manages to mis-quote the last words of Captain Oates. Francis Spufford's recent *I May Be Some Time* (Faber) discusses all this in a non-fictional context. The other theme is politics – there are actually two rebel groups living out on the ice, and the discussions of their rival theories recalls all the discussions in the *Mars* trilogy.

Icebenge has a background of politics, uprisings, fleeing rebels apparently. But only apparently, because reading on each new section denies the truth of the previous one. The icy eponymous replica of Stonehenge is either three hundred or thirty years old. And although the story throws in anti-ageing drugs, planetary travel and wars in space, it is actually a metafiction about the construction of texts. I enjoyed it more when I had realised that. At the heart of *Antarctica* I found much more of a cold emptiness.

Robert J. Sawyer — ***Frameshift***

TOR Books, 1997, 347pp, $23.95 ISBN 0 312 86325 X

Reviewed by Alison Sinclair

Pierre Tardivel is nineteen when he discovers that he is not his father's son but the son of a man now afflicted with Huntington's disease. He faces a choice between suicide, or genius – to fit the achievements of a lifetime into the fifteen or twenty years which may be left him. He chooses the latter. A research scientist, he eschews the obvious pursuit of The Cure, and turns instead to understanding the purpose of all those tracts of DNA which do not encode genes. His work takes him from Montreal to Berkeley, into the laboratory of Professor Burian Klimus, Nobel prize-winner, and into marriage to Molly, who has her own genetic quirk – a frameshift mutation which makes her a short-range telepath. They want a child, but Pierre refuses to risk passing on his defect, and Molly has been rendered infertile by an infection; they will need both a donor father and IVF. To their surprise, Burian Klimus volunteers. Molly's pregnancy is confirmed – and then Pierre is approached by Avi Meyer, Agent for the Department of Justice ... and Nazi hunter. Meyer believes that forty years ago Klimus was a concentration camp commandant known as Ivan the Terrible, a sadist and a mass murderer. Tardivel's problems compound as an attempt is made on his life, and he learns of the murders of other people suffering from Huntington's and other genetic and chronic diseases, all of whom belong to his own health insurance company. And then he gradually comes to realise there is something odd about his daughter, Amanda ...

Compile a list of all the issues surrounding DNA today, and they are all represented: the bioethics of screening for genetic disorders; health insurance and genetic disorders; using DNA for forensics and identification; the dark past and modern consideration of eugenics; genetics exploited to support racism; 'fossil DNA'; the mechanisms of evolution; genes and behaviour; unethical human experimentation ... There are two unifying moments, wherein Sawyer drops a noose over his farrago of themes and issues and delicately draws them together. One is where the Tardivel family sit for a family portrait, and Molly reflects that their portrait is a portrait of humanity, past, present and future. The second is in the great discovery that Pierre Tardivel makes before his disease claims him: the proof of the frameshift hypothesis, under which those vast tracts of apparently unexpressed DNA contain instructions for future mutations – in essence, the blueprints for the future evolution of humankind. Those were what made me say, 'Ah, *now* I see what he's about.' They were also what, to my mind, made the novel science fiction, rather than a topical thriller.

I admire the chutzpah it takes to propose a discovery in an immediate and unfolding field, as well as to suggest, however briefly, that evolution is *someone's* masterplan. I might have wished that Sawyer had been willing to efface some of his themes in favour of a fuller development of others – but that is a quibble. The issues surrounding DNA are numerous and complex, and he has tackled them boldly. The story – of a man driven to pursue both discovery and justice, despite threats from both inside and out – is satisfying. And the deeper meaning is there for the finding. What more can one ask from a novel?

Charles Sheffield — *Putting Up Roots*

TOR Books, 1997, 255pp, $21.95 ISBN 0 312 86241 5

Reviewed by John R. Oram

Fourteen year-old Josh Kerrigan arrives home to find his mother has abandoned him, leaving him money to go to relatives. His memories of his aunt and uncle are swiftly dealt a punishing blow. When he arrives, he finds his aunt, a kindly woman, has died, and his uncle has remarried, this time to a glamorous blond who could give lessons to all the wicked stepmothers in the whole of fairytale land. The only person who hasn't changed is his cousin, Dawn, who he finds out is autistic. But all is not well on the farm. A huge food conglomerate has bought up all the water rights, and made a big offer for the farm. The only sticking point is Dawn. Wicked Aunt/stepmother soon fixes that. She manipulates the uncle to send Josh and Dawn to another planet, licensed by the food conglomerate to start a new life. That is the last the reader hears about them.

Josh and Dawn find themselves aboard a space vessel with several other young people, all of whom have become a problem to their parents in one way or another. On arrival at the base, they find there is only one person there, and he tells them a highly implausible story to account for the lack of personnel. Another adult soon joins the group, much to the chagrin of Brewster, the man who first met them. Events unfold at a rapid pace, and Dawn plays a large part in discovering the truth about Solferino.

I found *Putting Up Roots* a highly stimulating book. This is the first time I have ever come across the problems of autism discussed in a science fiction novel. Come to think of it, it's the first time I've come across the problem in any genre. Sheffield uses the book as a platform to highlight other problems, too. The effects of divorce, gambling, and marital break-ups on young people; drug addiction, and last but by no means least, the environment.

This is obviously a novel for young adults; but it is tightly written, well paced, and does not shy away from difficult questions. In fact, being a novel for juveniles, it has a large advantage: there is no padding, no infodumping, just good writing. The plot is intriguing, the characters well thought out, and the final denouement adds a nice twist. Add to that superb book design, and a stunning dustwrapper illustrated by Vincent Di Fate, I mean could you ask for more? I couldn't.

Iain Sinclair & Dave McKean — *Slow Chocolate Autopsy*

Phoenix, 1997, 193pp, £16.99 ISBN 1 861590 87 3

Reviewed by Andrew M. Butler

There's a moment in William S. Burroughs's first published novel when he introduces a character named Norton: 'He looked like George Raft, but was taller. [... He] was a hard working thief'. First glimpsed within the fragile pages of an Ace Double, this character seems to form the centre of the latest production by Beat aficionado Iain Sinclair. Norton was there at the death of Christopher Marlowe and around the corner from the murder of Jack the Hat, trapped within the boundaries of London rather than New York Times Square, usually to be found within the Isle of Dogs or Leytonstone, but lureable to the West End... Obsessed with a millionaire author and political fixer, he is apparently documenting every last detail of the city with the aid of photographer Axel Turner, whilst avoiding retribution from East End gangsters or alchemic avatars.

To call this a novel would be misleading – to impose a unity which would distort the weave of the fabric. Even taking novel in the sense of something new would be giving a false impression – yes, a wholly original work, but one following in the footsteps of Martin Rowson's graphic novel of *The Waste Land* or Anthony Burgess's *Dead Man in Deptford* or *Enderby's Dark Lady* or Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor* ('God forbid that Ackroyd should pastiche this one' cries Norton early on), and one that wears much history, yet wears it lightly. William Blake. Joseph Conrad. T.S. Eliot. (Unreal City!). Stephen Fry. *Tonite Let's All Make Love in London*. The second nearest forefather I can think of is Brian Fawcett's *Cambodia*, where sections too long to be vignettes, too short to be short stories, are tied together by a literal subtext commenting on Cambodia and America.

The nearest is Burroughs – who bent time most satisfactorily in *Cities of the Red Night* – but with less sex and simpler prose. A prose too poetic to be hard boiled. (Think Chandler with similes ironed out. *High Windows* and Marlowe both appear – although Chandler took his from Malory rather than double agent Kit). And Dave McKean's illustrations – which spill over from chapter headings into entire chapters – are surely impossible without Burroughs's writings about cut-ups and fold-ins: 'In the safety of McKean's world text could become image, words would be isolated, photographs warped and set over fabulous maps'. Old prints. Photographs. Sketches. The *A to Z*. The paper itself. Texts become images, illustrator becomes character: '[McKean:] I never had these problems with Neil Gaiman. Neil's a pro'. Or author becomes illustrator as character.

Sometimes the page is too *noir*. Sometimes the text is too obscured: another ink tone would have lifted things into legibility unless we are meant to be kept in the dark at points. (We are – but which points?). And the same feeling I got reading Alan Moore's *Voice of the Fire*: yes, ok, Northampton, why not, but – *still* – why? There's a whiff of the arbitrary – other incidents could be told, just as well as these. Norton is trapped in London, yes, but we can see New York or San Francisco (witness quotes from Weldon Kees – a suicide from the Golden Gate Bridge – and Gregory Corso) or Lawrence, Kansas. All times all places are one. (Jerusalem Athens Alexandria Vienna London. Unreal).

But a book to reread, to watch it slot together and fall apart, to witness a bravura spectacle, to be left speechless and returning to yellowing Ace paperbacks and dime novels. Read. Watch. Wonder. Marvell.

L. Neil Smith — *Bretta Martyn*

TOR Books, 1997, 383pp, $24.95 ISBN 0 312 85893 0

Reviewed by Chris Hill

The story so far: Robretta Islay accompanies her father (Arran Islay, once the infamous space pirate 'Henry Martyn') on a mission to find the home of the galactic slave trade. En

route she is raped and beaten by the slavers' spy, thrown into a waste canister and ejected into space. She is rescued by escaped slaves and develops a plan to gain revenge upon the slavers. Now read on...

Actually, there is no need to read on much further as by now you are within 50 pages of the end of the book. Much of the first half is taken up by characters discussing things that *both parties already know* but the reader does not (unless, unlike myself, they have read *Henry Martyn* the book to which this is a sequel).

The novel is marketed as a tale of derring-do upon the high seas of space. Stories like this only work if they are either a) very well written or b) very fast moving. This is neither. As a result it never really succeeds in overcome the basic ridiculousness of its concept.

L. Neil Smith has twice won the Prometheus award for Libertarian fiction. If this is a fair example of his work I can only assume that the award is presented for obviousness of politics, rather than the quality of the writing. For example when Bretta is subjected to multiple rape this should be deeply shocking. But it is just given a couple of paragraphs and then on to the next bit with no psychological after-effects (although she does get to knife the perpetrator in the end, so that's all right, isn't it...?). In addition he is one of those writers who develops 'strong' female characters and yet manages to be incredibly sexist at the same time.

The book is essentially a thinly-veiled Libertarian tract. A section of the narrative is a description of the 'perfect' libertarian society left behind on Earth's moon when the malcontents have been forcibly ejected (of course we never get to experience this society in action, we are just told how wonderful it is). It seems that the greatest crime is to be acted upon instead of acting (If you let yourself be ruled by slavers and are killed during a raid, then that is just your hard luck for not rebelling).

Ultimately this is an overlong and offensively preachy book without even the virtue of being fun.

Martha Soukup — *The Arbitrary Placement of Walls*

Dreamhaven, 1997, 206pp, $25.00 ISBN 0 9630944 9 1

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

Despite a diminishing marketplace, science fiction is one of the few arenas still available where a writer can make a reputation (if not necessarily a living) by writing short stories. We should be grateful for it, for among others things it allows us to enjoy the work of Martha Soukup. She has written no novel to date, and seems reluctant to embark upon such a venture, but over the last decade she has written a couple of dozen elegant and subtly unsettling short stories that are about as good as they come. 17 of those stories are collected here, and reading them one after the other reveals just how good a writer she is.

The stories tend to share one basic theme: they are studies of loss and defeat, of sexual desire and sexual failure. Inhabiting the body of a mannequin allows one actor to make extraordinary protestations to another, only to discover that the disguise of the false body does not protect him from the resultant loss. A woman is torn between two lovers and wishes to have them both: she achieves her wish by splitting in two, only to find that each half of her yearns constantly for the other's lover. Another woman longs for her best friend's lover, but achieving her desire results in all three of them losing. In a world where every sexual union is a matter of formal social contracts, a woman seeks to gain her lover by forging documents, but once more achieving one's desire can only end in loss. You find the pattern recurring again and again throughout these stories, but it never becomes stale. What makes Martha Soukup such a good short story writer is that she has learned the trick that Philip K. Dick perfected, of working the same theme over and over again yet always doing so in a way that makes it feel fresh and original.

And Soukup does have a remarkably original take on things. 'The Story So Far' tells of a minor character in a story who seizes what life she can during those brief scenes when she is involved in the action. 'Good Girl, Bad Dog' takes us inside another fiction, this time the fiction of Lassie, and shows how that perfect screen hero can use that heroism to become a highly successful villain.

Even when she follows traditional or familiar tropes, she manages to turn them inside out so they no longer seem quite the same story. 'Alita in the Air' is about a little girl sent alone across country; at the airport of arrival she tells one lie and finds a completely different life opening up; it's a version of the Flying Dutchman, but not one you'd recognise straight away. When she writes of ghosts, in 'The Arbitrary Placement of Walls', they are figures of disillusion and demoralisation, not of threat or fear; and when ghosts recur in 'Absent Friends', they bring life, not death.

Most of these stories are comedies, but they are black comedies that will leave you not sure exactly why you are laughing. Most of these stories end with defeat or loss, but feel life-enhancing for all that. All these stories will involve, intrigue and delight you; and all will make you celebrate the fact that there is still a place in science fiction for the short story.

Starhawk — *Walking to Mercury*

Thorsons, 1997, 489pp, £6.99 ISBN 0 7225 3501 5

The Fifth Sacred Thing

Thorsons, 1997, 699pp, £6.99 ISBN 0 7225 3502 3

Reviewed by Kathy Taylor

The Fifth Sacred Thing is a superb feminist ecological fantasy that compares with the best of Margaret Atwood. It portrays the clash between two extremes of culture, the Steward's theocratic totalitarian militaristic regime and the City, a peaceful, culturally diverse democracy.

The story is told from the viewpoints of three of the City's citizens; Bird, Madrone, and Maya. Bird is a musician who, several years prior to the start of the book, went on a raid into the Stewards land to shut down a leaking nuclear reactor. He survived the raid, and it is through his awakening in a Steward's prison and subsequent escape attempts that we

initially learn about the Steward's regime. Madrone is a doctor who works by a combination of technology and 'energies'. Through her, and through Maya, an elder and one of the leading voices, we learn about the City.

The Fifth Sacred Thing works well on many levels. As an adventure story it moves with skilful fluidity, changing the pace to match the flow of events. Although the overall resolution of the intermediate plot lines is predictable – Bird escapes – Starhawk maintains sufficient tension at the appropriate places for this to be a real 'page turner'. The characters are well drawn with all the complex faults, virtues and motivations of real people, and the book works well as a discussion of why people behave as they do. However it is the depiction of the City, and the clash of the two ideologies, that lifts *The Fifth Sacred Thing* from a very good book to a classic. The complex ecological and social philosophies of the City are a vision of the future as it could be, a way for an ideal society to exist in balance with nature and itself, a would-be utopia that, on a good day, almost looks possible. The final clash of the two ideologies provides a superb climax to the book, with echoes of the siege of ancient cities and of past champions of peace such as Ghandi.

By comparison, *Walking to Mercury* is a disappointment. It is a partial autobiography of Maya, and its emphasis is on the motivations of its characters rather than on its limited plot. One of the advantages of such a book is to put you inside the head of the character and by empathising with them learn what it would be like to live in a different world or lifestyle. I found it difficult to do this with Maya, perhaps because her family background and adolescent preoccupation with drugs make her too different. Both Maya and the supporting characters are convincingly written and the book does furnish some background to *The Fifth Sacred Thing*.

Walking to Mercury is not really a science fiction or fantasy novel. There is a certain amount of Earth magic and mysticism in it, but no more than would be present in many mainstream novels. If you like books which are about the main character discovering herself you will probably like this one, but if you are looking for an adventure story or for something deeper try *The Fifth Sacred Thing* instead.

Michael Swanwick — ***Jack Faust***

Orion, 1997, 325pp, £16.99 ISBN 1 85798 517 6

Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

We all know the Faust legend, of the man who sold his soul to the devil in exchange for total knowledge, the subtext being that knowledge *per se* is inherently dangerous. Here's a variation: in late fifteenth century Germany, Johannes Faust experiences a mental visitation by an entity naming itself Mephistopheles, who promises him total knowledge with the *quid pro quo* that Faust must listen to everything he says. The entity is motivated by jealousy at humanity's relatively longer lifespan; its purpose is to provoke humanity's destruction. Faust, believing that his new knowledge will enable him to prevent this, accepts the bargain.

Faust finds, however, that the people of Wittenberg aren't interested in the new principles of physics he's discovered: all they want are things and money. Fleeing the town ahead of his creditors – but after ascending in a hot-air balloon and nailing the periodic table to a church door – he goes to Nuremburg and enters into partnership with the banker Reinhardt, whom he persuades to underwrite his inventions by outlining the military purposes to which they may be put. Thus the industrial revolution arrives, and soon Faust's factories are turning out repeating rifles, breech-loading howitzers, poison gases, and all the other accoutrements of modern warfare. Yet still he pursues his attempts at enlightening humanity; yet again, even as his antibiotics save Nuremburg from cholera, his ideas are rejected by the conservative social forces about him. Helped by the English spy William Wycliffe, he flees again to London, where he finds himself once more designing new and better ways of killing people: tanks, bombers, the dreadnoughts which defeat the Spanish Armada. As Mephistopheles tells Faust again and again: no one cares about ideas; they just want things.

There are several targets in all this. One is our propensity for slaughtering each other – although we claim the twentieth century as an exception (two world wars, several genocides, Stalin's purges, Mao's 'Great Leap Forward', forty years of Cold War-inspired 'low intensity conflicts'), we have in fact been maiming, murdering and incinerating each other all through our history: this century differs only in the greater number killed and the more meticulous recording of the killing. Another target is the contradiction between the love of philosophical enquiry by which we claim to be motivated and the desire for instant gratification which always overwhelms it: the desire for things, things, and more things, and never mind the more difficult question of comprehending the structure of the physical universe. A third target, which emerges towards the end of the novel, is the pollution and other ecological by-products of our activities, and the danger they pose to the global environment which we cannot escape and must save if we are to survive.

Swanwick's vision is a despairing one; and the novel would be grim indeed were it not for its blackly comic style. One laughs and winces in roughly equal measures – and edges towards the uneasy conclusion, as we stand on the brink of the third millennium of the Christian era, that the Faustian bargain which underlies our civilisation might not be such a good deal after all.

Harry Turtledove — ***How Few Remain***

Del Rey, 1997, 474pp, $25.00 ISBN 0 345 41661 9

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

One day, in September 1862, a Confederate messenger dropped three cigars in a Maryland field. Some time later, the cigars were discovered by a Union corporal and sergeant, who also found that the cigars were wrapped in a copy of General Lee's Special Order 191 which laid out the dispositions and objectives of his various armies on this invasion of the North. This information allowed even the dilatory General McClellan to act decisively, bringing on the battle of Antietam. The battle was a military draw, but Lee was forced to withdraw and Lincoln was able to claim a victory and issue his Emancipation Proclamation. This altered the entire nature of the Civil War, and denied the

European powers any chance of intervening on behalf of the Confederacy.

In Harry Turtledove's latest alternate history novel those cigars are not lost, the resulting battle is another Southern victory, Britain and France do intervene, and the Confederacy is firmly established. Years pass, not quite the years of economic growth actually experienced by the re-United States, and in 1881 Confederate President Longstreet negotiates the purchase of two provinces from Mexico which will give the Confederacy an outlet to the Pacific. In the US the first Republican President since Lincoln was ignominiously ousted from office sees this as an excuse for war or, more properly, for revenge. Thus the scenario.

Turtledove has already written one classic novel about the South winning the Civil War, *Guns of the South* (1992), and has long been rumoured to be working on a sequel set at the time of the First World War. This new novel is no sequel to *Guns of the South* (which required time travel by dispossessed Afrikaaners armed with Kalashnikovs to ensure Lee's victory), but it does seem to set the scene for that putative later book. The art of war has moved on in the twenty years, and the stalemated battle that results in Kentucky is a stark precursor of the trench warfare to come. And therein lies the main problem with this book.

In *Guns of the South* the twist of fortune was dealt with briskly in the first part of the novel, but the book was really about the consequences of Southern victory, and in particular the divergence in views on the role of blacks between the white supremacist South Africans and the Confederates. *How Few Remain* does not follow that model, but rather the model of his *WorldWar* tetralogy, in which the progress of events rather than the consequences of events lies at the heart of the book. The pattern of the book is one that Turtledove has very much made his own, a rapid succession of brief scenes in which a huge cast of characters (many of them genuine historical figures) play out an intricately plotted network of stories which intersect and separate to provide a panoramic view of events. Through this device we follow every moment of the war, from its first rumblings to its dying fall. It has to be said that Turtledove handles action scenes extraordinarily well, and there is a great deal of fun to be had with the way he has fitted real people into this revised history – Sam Clemens is a newspaperman in San Francisco, Abraham Lincoln (no assassin's bullet in this history, of course) is a roving lecturer espousing a political view akin to Marxism, George Armstrong Custer is still the headstrong cavalryman here involved in putting down an insurrection by the Mormons of Utah, while Theodore Roosevelt is a young man eagerly putting together his own troop and dreaming of military glory. Nevertheless there is little in the book beside the action, all the consequences are in what we, the readers, bring to the book by recognising what was to come in the First World War. Indeed, this is clearly and consciously part of Turtledove's intent, since one of the most significant characters in this book is von Schlieffen, here German military attaché observing the war, but in our timeline the man who devised the German plan that launched the First World War; his observations make it obvious that Turtledove is foreseeing a European war very different in character from the one we experienced. Unfortunately, that is the book at the heart of Turtledove's thinking, this novel, for all its thrills, its absorbing storytelling, its vivacity, reads like little more than a scene-setting exercise for what is to come, and that is a handicap it can never quite overcome.

Jack Vance *The Demon Princes: Volume Two*
Orb, 1997, 397pp, $25.95 ISBN 0 312 85316 5
Reviewed by Steve Palmer

This is a welcome, and rather fetching reprint of the final two volumes of Jack Vance's classic 'Demon Princes' sequence, begun in 1964 with *The Star King* and concluded in 1979 and 1981 with the two novels collated here, *The Face* and *The Book of Dreams*.

There is little doubt that Jack Vance's style is an acquired taste, or at least a taste that, like the pungent foods so hilariously described in *The Face*, is for some simply too strong. An *SFX* reviewer rather carelessly criticised this style when referring to his most recent work, *Nightlamp*, entirely missing the point of this master of futuristic prose. You don't read Jack Vance for snobbish literary niceties, you read him for the sheer exhilaration of his unique imagination.

The plot of the Demon Princes sequence is simple. On a terrible day, Kirth Gersen's parents and home planet are destroyed by five awful personages, the Demon Princes, who have joined up for a unique feat of criminal activity. Kirth's grandfather subsequently trains him, as he grows from boy to man, to get revenge – an ignoble but understandable attitude, and one Kirth takes up with alacrity. The five are secretive in the extreme, but by the time of *The Face* three Demon Princes are dead. Kirth has gained and lost love, visited bizarre worlds, and pushed himself to the limits of deduction in his monomaniacal desire for revenge.

Most Jack Vance aficionados believe *The Face* to be the best of the series, and this is also my feeling. As a plot it is virtually perfect; it could hardly run more smoothly. Kirth Gersen has to find the notorious Lens Larque, as usual with virtually nothing to go on. After much research in spice laden kitchens and back alleys, he arrives on the planet Dar Sai, where live the Darsh, a society of lumpen desert dwellers, opposed by the almost fay-like Methven. There follows one of the most delightful of all Vance's innumerable set-pieces, whereby Kirth discovers that control of a mining company is behind Lens Larque's plan, and as a result buys enough shares to start ordering people about. I cannot recommend *The Face* too highly.

So to the finale of the sequence. The only remaining Demon Prince is Howard Alan Treesong, the most secretive and mysterious of the lot. In *The Book of Dreams* – a reference to the childhood diary of the villain, in which his multiple personality is described – Kirth has just a single photograph to go on, but after painstaking deduction and the help of his new (and, the reader hopes, last) love-interest, he tracks down the final Demon Prince. During this process Kirth witnesses one of the most poignantly awful acts of retribution ever visited upon former schoolchums, a scene that all who were teased or bullied at school will empathise with...

In summary, buy this! It's not hard science fiction, it's not exactly character based. It's not really classifiable at all. It's Jack Vance.

Ian Watson — ***Oracle*** 📖

Gollancz, 1997. 287pp, £16.99 ISBN 0 575 06487 0

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

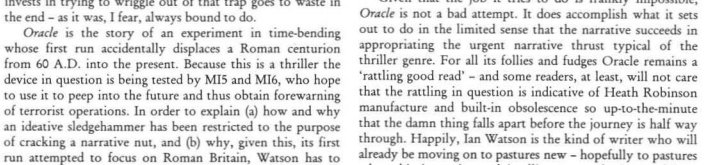
Like its predecessor, *Hard Questions*, Ian Watson's *Oracle* is a cross-genre exercise which attempts to graft sciencefictional ideas on to a thriller base. Watson has tried similar experiments before, producing 'science fantasies' as the trilogy begun with *The Book of the River* and the two-volume 'Book of Mana', and several sf/horror stories during the flirtation which produced *Meat* and *The Fire Worm*. Given that he has never been a writer to stand still, it seems probable that this phase will not last long, and I have to confess that I shall not be sad to see the last of it. This is not because Watson does this kind of thing any worse than anybody else – his work is always readable and always written with admirable zest – but because this particular process of hybridization always produces monsters.

The standard method of deploying sf materials within a thriller is, of course, to use innovative science and technology as a source of dire threats which the heroes must put away – thus producing an implicitly – and mostly idiotically – technophobic subgenre. Watson has too much intelligence to do that in any straightforward fashion, but the ingenuity he invests in trying to wriggle out of that trap goes to waste in the end – as it was, I fear, always bound to do.

Oracle is the story of an experiment in time-bending whose first run accidentally displaces a Roman centurion from 60 A.D. into the present. Because this is a thriller the device in question is being tested by MI5 and MI6, who hope to use it to peep into the future and thus obtain forewarning of terrorist operations. In order to explain (a) how and why an ideative sledgehammer has been restricted to the purpose of cracking a narrative nut, and (b) why, given this, its first run attempted to focus on Roman Britain, Watson has to stretch his ingenuity to the full. He knows full well – as you and I do – that the real implications of the possibility he is dangling are frankly apocalyptic (we have all read T. L. Sherred's 'E for Effort', have we not?) but thrillers can only deal with comprehensively-averted apocalyptic threats and usually prefer to work on a cosier scale than that. An IRA hit squad planning to assassinate the queen on a state visit to Belgium is more typical of your average off-the-peg thriller, so that is what Watson's *Oracle* actually reveals, when it does begin to work after the wretchedly inept fashion which is necessary to restrict its revelations to thriller-dimensions.

Watson's ingenuity is also stretched to the limit – and perhaps beyond – in tangling up his displaced Roman with the aforementioned IRA hit-squad (while simultaneously disposing of the mad scientist who invented the guilty machine). Thrillers are not renowned for their plausibility but the coincidence-strewn sequence of narrative moves which is employed to deliver all the various parties to their allotted comeuppances and to set the stage for the final shoot-out in the Brussels Atomium (another hybrid, crossing *Day of the Jackal* and *North by Northwest*) seems to me to be a lot harder to swallow than the casual sciencefictional *deus ex machina* which provides the story with a conclusion or sorts. I say 'of sorts' because it is at this point that Watson finally gives up the ghost and simply chucks his horrible hybrid into the nearest bin, washing his hands of the soggy crumpled mess.

Given that the job it tries to do is frankly impossible, *Oracle* is not a bad attempt. It does accomplish what it sets out to do in the limited sense that the narrative succeeds in appropriating the urgent narrative thrust typical of the thriller genre. For all its follies and fudges Oracle remains a 'rattling good read' – and some readers, at least, will not care that the rattling in question is indicative of Heath Robinson manufacture and built-in obsolescence so up-to-the-minute that the damn thing falls apart before the journey is half way through. Happily, Ian Watson is the kind of writer who will already be moving on to pastures new – hopefully to pastures where his ingenuity and intelligence can be invested in a project more worthy of their deployment.



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*.

Alain Carraze & Jean-Luc Putheud
The Avengers Companion
Titan, 1997, 194pp, £14.99 ISBN 1 85286 728 0

First published in France in 1990 and now available in English for the first time, this is a lavishly illustrated companion to *The Avengers*, from the original 1961 series which starred Ian Hendry to *The New Avengers* which was broadcast in 1977. The book includes interviews, a brief guide to all 161 episodes, longer accounts of ten key episodes and even a celebration of the fashion.

Arthur C. Clarke
3001: The Final Odyssey 📖
Voyager, 1997, 273pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 586 06624 1

The final adventure in the series that began with *2001: A Space Odyssey* in 1968. In **V196**, Chris Hill comments: 'the prose style is as clear as always, but somehow the whole thing feels a bit diluted. I came away with the

feeling that Clarke's heart was not really in the venture.'

A.C. Crispin
Star Wars: The Hutt Gambit 🕮
Bantam, 1997, 340pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 553 50547 5
Volume Two of 'The Han Solo Trilogy', this novel is set before the period of the *Star Wars* films and tells the story of young Han Solo, a fugitive from the Imperial Navy and setting out on his career as smuggler and adventurer.

David J. Howe
Doctor Who: A Book of Monsters
BBC Books, 1997, 118pp, £16.99 ISBN 0 563 40562 7
Here they all are, the monsters that have had generations of us hiding behind sofas. This collection contains a history of the series, an A-Z of monsters, and longer chapters on Cybermen, Ice Warriors, Sontarans, Haemovores and, of course, Daleks.

Diana Wynne Jones
A Sudden Wild Magic
Vista, 1997, 380pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 575 60197 3
There is something strange in the fact that one of our finest fantasists seems to get better recognition in America than she does here. Like several of her recent books, this novel was first published in America, in this case in 1992, and it wasn't until 1996 that it appeared in this country. Reviewing in **V191**, Andrew M. Butler said: 'It is gripping, moving and amusing by turns, like Jones's best work. Except I don't really feel that it is her best work; I get the sense that she is holding back'.

Stephen Jones & David Sutton (Eds)
Dark Terrors 2
Vista, 1997, 379pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 575 60235 X
Dark Terrors 3 ❁
Gollancz, 1997, 381pp, £16.99 ISBN 0 575 06516 8
The two latest original horror anthologies which feature both new and established writers, and a number better known for their work outside the horror genre. Volume 2, from 1996, for instance, contains 18 stories, including contributions from Paul J. McAuley, Michael Marshall Smith, Kim Newman and Harlan Ellison. Volume 3, from 1997, has new stories by Ray Bradbury, Poppy Z. Brite, Neil Gaiman, Storm Constantine, Pat Cadigan and Michael Marshall Smith among its 20 stories.

Paul Kearney
The Heretic Kings
Vista, 1997, 320pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 575 60186 8
Talking about the second volume in Kearney's sequence, *The Monarchies of God*, which is set in a thinly disguised late-Medieval Europe under threat from infidels and heretics, Mark Plummer said, in **V194**, 'While the parallels with our own history are obvious ... there are sufficient plot developments and revelations, as well as teasers pointing to revelations ahead in the final volume, to keep the reader interested'.

Alan Moore
Voice of the Fire
Indigo, 1997, 320pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 575 40055 2
Moore tells the story of Northampton from 4,000BC to the present through a series of linked fantastic stories which bring together the mythic and the real to draw a map of the town thundering through history. As reality is turned into myth, as new beliefs are overlaid on old, Moore builds into a novel which was hailed by Chris Amies, in **V192**, as 'a book of signs and wonders'.

Kristine Kathryn Rusch
Star Wars: The New Rebellion 🕮
Bantam, 1997, 532pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 553 50497 5
The future history of the *Star Wars* universe has been elaborately worked out, and this novel, first published in 1996, is set thirteen years after the end of *Return of the Jedi* when a master of the dark side targets Luke, Leia and Leia's Jedi children in his bid to become emperor.

Peter Schweighofer (Ed)
Star Wars: Tales from the Empire ❁
Bantam, 1997, 324pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 553 50686 2
A collection of stories taken from the *Star Wars Adventure Journal* and featuring new writers as well as several who have made their names writing various *Star Wars* spin-off novels. The collection includes a short novel written by Timothy Zahn and Michael A. Stackpole.

Margaret Weis & Don Perrin
Robot Blues
Vista, 1997, 382pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 575 60068 3
The sequel to *The Knights of the Black Earth*, all the enthusiasm it could arouse from reviewer Andrew Adams, in **V190**, was: 'this is neither the worst nor the best piece of military space opera I've ever read'.

N. Lee Wood
Faraday's Orphans
Vista, 1997, 351pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 575 60130 2
A post-catastrophe novel in which the face of the Earth has been forever changed by the geo-magnetic reversal of the poles. In his review in **V194**, John Newsinger said: 'Wood writes with great skill. Her devastated Earth is well-drawn and her characters are convincing... An enjoyable read by an author worth watching out for.'

Vector 197 – Index of Books Reviewed

Reviewers Key: AF – Alan Fraser, **AS** – Alison Sinclair, **AMB** – Andrew M. Butler, **AM** – Andy Mills, **BS** – Brian Stableford, **CB** – Cherith Baldry, **CH** – Chris Hill, **DOM** – Daniel O'Mahoney, **EJ** – Edward James, **GD** – Gary Dalkin, **GA** – Graham Andrews, **JB** – Janet Barron, **JN** – John Newsinger, **JRO** – John R. Oram, **JW** – Jon Wallace, **JN** – Joseph Nicholas, **KVB** – K. V. Bailey, **KT** – Kathy Taylor, **LJH** – L. J. Hurst, **LH** – Lesley Hatch, **LB** – Lynne Bispham, **P** – Particles, **PK** – Paul Kincaid, **SD** – Stephen Deas, **SJ** – Steve Jeffery, **SP** – Steve Palmer,