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Vector

201

The Critical
Journal of
the BSFA



David Wingrove • John Meaney
Tetsuo and Tetsuo II • *Gattaca* • John Wyndham
George Orwell • Best of British Poll • *Dr Who*

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THE CRITICAL JOURNAL OF THE BSFA

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COVER: Detail of a still from the Shinya Tsukamoto film,
Tetsuo II

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VECTOR

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Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial

The View from Hangar 23

Monday

The re-release of *The Exorcist* in recent months raises all sorts of questions. Despite the fact that it is far tamer than many films released since, you can't get hold of it on video, nor is it ever likely to get a terrestrial television showing. Something like *Tetsuo: The Iron Man*, for example, has been shown, as part of an extreme cinema season on Channel 4, and personally I found it more disturbing than a twenty-five year old horror flick.

When I first saw *Tetsuo*, subtitled (the BFI had cocked up, ruining several prints, but did provide scripts), I felt it was exactly the sort of film that demanded a trip to the dictionary to look up 'visceral', featuring as it did body piercing (half a decade before male bodies began to sport rings and studs), sadomasochism, and bodily fluids mixed with engine oil. At the same time, it seemed to fit into the tradition of the Japanese aesthetic of the fear of bodily transformation, the fall out of Hiroshima and so on.

Some of you may find Colin and Mitch's article on *Tetsuo* disturbing; those of nervous dispositions may wish to skip it in favour of the other material in this issue. At the same time I'm aware that we risk building it up out of all proportion to the material. On a number of occasions the editors of *Vector*, alongside those of *Matrix* and *Focus*, have discussed issues such as 'bad language'; I think the general feeling was to avoid gratuitous material, but also that coyness (such as asterisking rude words) is worse than risking offense. Perhaps you have an opinion on this you'd like to express?

In most cases of censorship, the result is a film and book which is more popular, or perhaps more widely seen, than would have been the case without the outrage. When the Odeon multiplex opened in Hull, *The Exorcist* became part of its late night Saturday or Friday showings. I saw it after about a year, and a rather poor print was being shown to a three-quarters full cinema. What other (then) twenty-year old film could do that? (Well, *Star Wars*, one guesses, and, God help us, *Grease*). If Kubrick ever eased the ban (in this country and in this country uniquely) on *A Clockwork Orange*, there'd be queues around the block. For a rather dead movie.

But censorship isn't really what I want to talk about, or only tangentially so. I want to talk about Them. Recently, I thought I'd had an encounter with a Grey. I awoke in the middle of the night, felt an immense weight on my chest, and sensed strange alien eyes boring into mine....

In fact, it turned out to be Mischa, one of Carol Ann Kerry-Green's cats, but it did remind me of all the times that a cat is mistaken for an alien or a monster in movies in order to make us jump. Before the characters all split up to make it easier for Them to pick them off.

And it also reminded me of the vast number of film directors

who have been kidnapped and then replaced by aliens. Take William Friedkin, director of *The Exorcist* and *The French Connection*. What has he done since? Or Spielberg, the sure-footed genius behind *Duel*, *Jaws* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, who surely can't be the same man responsible for the sentimental tosh which was *Amistad* and *Always*, nor the mess which was *The Lost World*. Woody Allen went sometime after *Manhattan*, but has been allowed to return on occasions. Martin Scorsese was allowed to complete *GoodFellas*, and an alien was clearly allowed to pass *The Age of Innocence* off as Scorsese's work. (Enough bits of footage were left after *GoodFellas* to put together *Casino*, rather like the posthumous *Pink Panther* films scoured cutting room floors for Peter Sellers). I could go on.

They got to sf writers early: Heinlein went in the early 1960s, as did Asimov, after completing the Robot novels, *I, Robot* and the Foundation trilogy. Clearly all Heinlein and Asimov's 1980s novels were written by different hands, but the differences were visible much earlier. Philip K Dick was briefly kidnapped in 1974, but it was a botched attempt and Dick was left to puzzle over pink lights for the rest of his life. It is no coincidence that film directors started to go missing around this time, beginning with Friedkin.

Except there are indications that the kidnapping is about to start again: there is evidence that one British author went just before he wrote the final section of an otherwise perfect novel. I have a list of names of potential abductees, but we can't print them yet. Who will be next?

Monday

Each *Vector* begins with a pile (if only mental) of manuscripts we've accumulated or commissioned. We look for similarities and diversities, for throw away references in one article which are taken up elsewhere. The result, we hope, is a coherent but varied issue. We tried to make issue 200 special: with messages from previous editors, as well as articles and interviews that reflected part of the history of the magazine and of sf. And Tony did such a good job of lobbying for extra pages and squeezing that everything fitted. It made for what we hope was a strong issue, but leaves *Vector*'s cupboards (or piles) looking bare.

So this issue of *Vector* reflects beginnings, new beginnings, and endings. It also contains the results of the BSFA Poll to find the best British science-fiction novel of the period 1948-1998. The result may well surprise people, but not half as much as it surprised me that no one nominated Robert Holdstock's *Bulman* novelisations or the classic Doctor Who books. So I'm off to read some more of them before I return to watching *Star Trek*, *Battlestar Galactica* and *Babylon 5*, which most people know I particularly enjoy.

By Andrew M. Butler Summer 1998



LETTERS TO VECTOR

There was just so much material to cram in to *Vector* 200 that we reluctantly held some letters over. Our apologies to our letter writers. First up is a response to Andrew M. Butler's editorial pondering on modern sf being insufficiently distinguishable from fantasy:

Jon Courtenay Grimwood, via email

It seems to me the reason sf is getting closer to fantasy – 'losing

the inner walls,' in the words of *Vector* 199's editorial – is that it's become difficult for anyone to write hard, confident science when science itself has long since stopped supplying the world with answers (if that's what it ever really did). Instead, new discoveries raise infinitely more questions than they answer.

We've currently got a universe that seems to be younger than some of the material in it. We've got physics happily blurring the line between objects existing and not existing. (Actually we've had that for a while. We just didn't know about it...)

On a human level, we've got CT scans showing the brain can be awake and asleep at the same time. We've got into a slow run up towards AI, which may well redefine what is or isn't conscious as well as raise the question can machines have rights?

Add in advances in genetics, nascent nanotechnology, recent successes in cloning using adult rather than fetal cells and changes in patent law and we're looking at the real possibility of most things we thought 'fantastic' being scientifically feasible.

(Unless anyone thinks the UN, US or EU are going to make various bans on cloning, genetics and nano stick. In which case I suggest we all take a look at the Pope's medieval edict forbidding gun-powder and outlawing warfare on Sundays.)

It wasn't just the boundary between fantasy and sf that was well guarded, obvious and more or less agreed by both sides. The

border crossing between what was and wasn't possible was equally concrete. Now all we've got is some quantum boundary that alters itself every time we stop look at it. No wonder the genres are getting muddled. ☐

*Andrew M. Butler responds: and hopefully sf (or, now, fantasy) is the place to work out some answers to the questions you pose. Dick and Sladek have already made a start. **

And now a satisfied customer responding to the article on John Wyndham by Ian Simpson which we ran in Vector 199:

Lindsay Jackson, York, via email

Thank you, thank you, thank you. Ian Simpson's excellent article may be too sweeping about Wyndham's attitude to women, but it made me re-read my entire collection and made me vow to re-acquire a copy of *Day of The Triffids* and I have 'accidentally' collected a copy of *The Outward Urge* in the process.

Regarding Wyndham's attitude to women, I must admit to a degree of ignorance (I haven't read *Day of The Triffids* this decade), however like most opinionated letter writers, I'm not going to let this stop me! Has Ian read the short story 'Dumb Martian' (Astounding, 1952 collected in *Consider Her Ways and other stories*)? In this story the 'dumb' Martian heroine is sold as a sex-slave and domestic servant. She is taught to read by a sympathetic human and teaches herself various technical skills to avenge his murder. In another short story 'Consider Her Ways' relationships between the sexes are dissected dispassionately by a historian from an all-female society. In two novels *The Kraken Wakes* and *The Midwich Cuckoos* strong female characters prevent male heroes from getting into serious trouble. In *The Kraken Wakes* Phyllis stops her husband from going out into the square as the 'sea-tanks' first appear, saving his life. In *Midwich*, the male heroes are prevented from attempting to intercede between a crowd of angry villagers and the 'Children', saving their menfolk from death or injury.

When male characters in Wyndham's novels discuss women disparagingly (as in *The Midwich Cuckoos*) I suspect that they are not necessarily expressing the author's views. Ian wrote that the women of *Midwich* accepted their fate (as alien-incubators) and that this was unrealistic, but one Civil Servant does abandon her young baby and escapes to London.

I strongly believe that Wyndham was too good a writer to make all his characters of one sex the same, male or female. The characters behave in ways dictated partly by their natures, and (realistically) more by circumstances. Sometimes the women are heroic (Mrs Zelaby from *Midwich*, addressing her fellow pregnant villagers) and sometimes vile (the cannibal mother from the short-story 'Survival', collected in *Consider Her Ways and other stories*).

On a different topic, Ian mentions various things that Wyndham may have foreseen. At the risk of sounding like the blurb on the back of the latest edition of *The Prophecies of Nostradamus* I would like to add the following. The extreme public grief (of women in particular) and floral tributes at the death of a much-loved public figure called 'Diana' (*The Trouble With Lichen*). ☐

*Andrew M. Butler responds: Clearly we must be careful of criticising those who wrote more than thirty years ago for not being as 'enlightened' as us when it comes to gender issues (or race for that matter), but at the same time we can't entirely accept or ignore such attitudes. L.J. Hurst continues the discussion of Wyndham in this very issue. **

And now further praise for Focus, Matrix and us:

Mike Brain, Higher Kinnerton, Flintshire

Now that I have my first PC, which has some DTP capability, I more fully appreciate the skill and patience that goes into producing *Vector*, *Matrix* and *Focus*, so thanks to you and the other teams.

The Stephen Lawhead interview by Madeleine Grantham was much appreciated, particularly since it is only a few months ago that I read and enjoyed *Byzantium*. I find that many readers of historical novels, also equally enjoy F&SF, particularly those who take the *Whispering Gallery* letterzine (aka M&K in the USA) for fans of Dorothy Dunnett. I enclose a review from *The Baptist Times* of *Stardust and Ashes: Science Fiction in Christian*

Perspective by Stephen May. Perhaps Stephen Lawhead or someone else might like to review it for *Vector*?

Given the huge popularity Robin Hobb (aka Megan Lindholm), as evidence in the Waterstone's charts of *Matrix* 131, it would be good to have someone interview her – that way I'll get to see her Bibliography.

Still pursuing the interview theme, how about something from Jed Mercurio, 'hot' from his fairly successful BBC tv series *Invasion: Earth*; certainly the final episode was the usual cliff-hanger. So will there be a sequel?

Does anyone else see a small trend of sf writers contributing to sf tv and film? *Babylon 5* has had Harlan Ellison and Neil Gaiman quite recently on Channel 4. I think 'The Day of the Dead' episode was improved by including the magicians Penn and Teller. ☐

Gary Dalkin responds: I rather think we should leave Invasion: Earth to the likes of SFX. It seems to me to be yet another example of how the BBC can be very good with their endless stream of costume dramas, detective dramas and 'contemporary' series, but that on the very rare occasions that they tackle anything remotely fantastical, the organisation immediately throws its collective brain out of the window, as if the normal rules of drama do not apply and are instead replaced by the dictate that 'any old clichéd nonsense will do'. Thus Invasion: Earth begins in laughable fashion with an RAF officer repeatedly disobeying direct orders and a science officer who bluffs her way onto the base, spots an alien spacecraft and leaves without comment only to go to the same pub as the officer, and then continues with generally woeful acting and re-heated leftovers from the late 1970s. The plot was stolen from the final Quatermass serial, spiced with some visual ickyness from Alien, then topped off with the Deathstar trench attack from Star Wars for the [anti-]climax. If there is a sequel, we can only hope the BBC get someone with an imagination [or experience beyond writing satirical medical dramas —AMB] to write it.

I'm glad though that you like the Stephen Lawhead interview. This particular piece took a long and winding road to come to print, so it's good to see someone appreciate Madeleine's work.

*Andrew M. Butler responds: For the record Vector interviewed Robin Hobb in mid-1997, but alas technical difficulties meant that it wasn't usable. (Somewhere along a long and winding road the tape machine's automatic level control set itself to zero). The interviewer was going to try again, but no joy yet. You win some, you lose some. Dorothy Dunnett gets a name check in Vector 200's interview with Mary Doria Russell – clearly another fan of sf and the historical novel. But isn't the historical novel just sf in reverse? **

Before this all goes to our heads, a justified complaint, from an aggrieved writer:

James Lovegrove, East Sussex

Steve Palmer's review of my novel *Days* (Vector #199, May / June 1998) would perhaps have been more telling had he not been under the mistaken impression that the novel is set in America and that I am an American.

Even the most cursory reading of the text would reveal that *Days* is set in the UK. The characters speak using British vernacular and mannerisms, but more to the point numerous reference are made to the United States as a distinct, separate geographical location, and indeed one of the character's prime motivations, stated several times, is his desire to travel to America and tour the country.

As for my being British, that is neither here nor there, although it does somewhat undermine Mr Palmer's assertion that the novel is devoid of irony because 'hey, we all know American can't do irony'. You only have to watch an episode of *The Simpsons*, for example, to know that this is a fatuous truism, and for Mr Palmer to trot it out in his review is, under the circumstances, itself highly ironic. ☐

We asked Stephen for his response:

From Stephen Palmer, via email

Of course, I am genuinely sorry to have missed the point of some of the foundation of the novel, but being slightly bludgeoned by the text must have done in my brain. As I think I said, it was not a bad novel, just one that – for me – didn't work. (It so happens that I am a great fan of the Simpsons, by the way.) As a reviewer, I am

entitled to respond to the novel in any way I choose. It is particularly unfortunate that James berates me for my supposed inability to spot British dialogue, since, although I am Welsh, and therefore a foreigner, I do have a fair grasp of the English tongue. I would say to James, as a fellow author, expect the widest range of criticism possible when you have your work published. I know I do. And never, ever "Do A Wingrove".

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

Red Shift

Corrections and Clarifications

Clearly we had a bad day with the biosquib for Stephen Baxter's article in V200: 'Stephen Baxter wrote on alt.space in Vector 197. If you were included in the Great Mailing Disaster, don't forget to send an A4 SAE 945p stamp) to Paul Billinger at the address on p. 2.' A confusion occurred between 'alt.sf' and the correct version 'alt.space'. More significantly, a '945p stamp' is clearly ridiculous: use of the shift key would have given the more sensible '(45p stamp)'. In fact, Paul will send them without an SAE.

The listing of Vector editors noted Chris Fowler's tenure as issues 69-83, but the article by him states 69-82. One of these memories is clearly wrong. Issue 83 seems to indicate it was edited by Chris Fowler. Chronologically speaking, Chris's article should properly precede Joseph Nicholas's.

At the Clarke Award Ceremony, David Barrett had asked us to make a minor revision to his article in V200, but this proved impossible to do in the timescale. Apologies to him.

A couple of clarifications to the Arthur C. Clarke bibliography: according to *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction, Imperial Earth* (London: Gollancz, 1975) was cut, and therefore the later edition (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1976) was restored rather than expanded. *The View from Serendip* (1977) was miskeyed as *The View from Serindip*. *2010: Odyssey Two* lacked a date for the Granada edition – 1982 is the year of hardback British publication. *The Fantastic Muse* Chap should have been *The Fantastic Muse* with an indication that it was a chapbook. *Childhood Ends* had another of those annoying lost shift keys, transforming a) to an 0: its publishing date was 1996 rather than 1990.

Please let us know of any factual errors or misrepresentations in Vector: email ambutler@enterprise.net or write to Andrew M Butler, 33 Brookview Drive, Keyworth, Nottingham, NG12 5JN or Gary Dalkin, 5 Lydford Road, Bournemouth, BN11 8SN

AS PART OF VECTOR 200 WE TOOK A LOOK BACK AT FORTY YEARS OF BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION, AND OFFERED AN OVERVIEW OF DAVID WINGROVE'S *CHUNG KUO*, A EIGHT VOLUMED NOVEL WHICH GENERATED MORE THAN ITS FAIR SHARE OF CONTROVERSY IN THESE PAGES. NOW DAVID WINGROVE – HIMSELF A FORMER VECTOR EDITOR – LOOKS BACK ON THE COMPLETED EPIC.

Afterthoughts: Reflections on having finished *Chung Kuo*

by David Wingrove

As I write this, it is the first day of June, 1998. Fourteen years ago, to the day, I was making a list of things to buy and things to take into the hospital, where my partner, Susan, was recuperating after having our first child, Jessica, by Caesarean. As I pottered about the house, I was also contemplating an idea I was working on, about an artist who had created the 'perfect art' – a virtual reality program more compulsively real than reality itself, and of a wife who wants to murder him... because he had become obsessed and 'lost' himself within the art-form. I was still part-time at the University – paying my own way while working two days a week for a music publisher – working on a doctorate on Hardy, Lawrence and Golding, trying to out-Leavis Leavis with a brand new Great Tradition. I was also writing music books to pay for the renovation work on our recently purchased house – a book on Heavy Metal being next on the horizon. Life was hectic, schizophrenic, fun.

Over the next four years, life remained hectic. Indeed, with the arrival of a second daughter, Amy, it got even more so. Susan went straight back to work after each child, doing three long days a week at *Sunday* magazine while I house-husbanded. And all the while I worked, when I could, on my VR idea. By early 1986 I'd given up the doctorate and the paid work and was working full-time (that is, when I was not playing at being 'Mum') at what by then was called *A Spring Day At the Edge of the World*. I had something like seven hundred and fifty thousand words of text and had decided to shift the emphasis of the whole thing quite dramatically by giving the story a Chinese future world as backdrop. Abandoning myself to research,

backdrop became foreground; the Chinese element – which had at first been mere exotic coloration – was seeping into every single aspect of the creation until, in a moment of absolute clarity, I realised that my tale was no longer a simple VR story, but was about China itself. A China that might possibly overwhelm the present-day world, and, in doing so, bury the old world – our world – beneath it. Of course, such a notion was ridiculed back then, even by the experts. Only a damn fool science-fiction writer would have had such an absurd idea. The work was about China, so I called it... 'China'... *Chung Kuo*... which is the word the Chinese or Han use for their land – The Middle Kingdom.

Two years of hard work followed in which I rewrote acres of text, researched hundreds of facts, read a mountain of books on China and continued to grow and shape my concept. And then, on the eighth day of August 1998, I handed in the first volume and an overview of the rest.

It was always meant to be a single and singular work; not a series or a sequence of sequels, but an integral whole. The story of a life – Li Yun's – and of how the great world changed during that life time.

Over the next nine years I wrote and rewrote the whole – eight lengthy volumes of a work which, when finished, was both better than and less than I'd envisaged. Better than, because the close attention I paid to it, and the obsessive care I took in getting things right – from the colour of characters' hair to details about Han behaviour – made it a far richer work than I could ever have hoped for. Yet also less, because, having finished it, I can see clearly now that the 1,800,000 words of *Chung Kuo* are, in fact, a

The work was about
China, so I called it...
'China'... *Chung Kuo*...
The Middle Kingdom.

kind of cartoon, in the artistic sense – a hastily-sketched study for a much finer, grander work. Reading K V Bailey's overview of the work in last issue's *Vector*, I was conscious that for all the things I'd achieved in *Chung Kuo* – and Mr Bailey identifies them accurately and with a gratifying sympathy – it was still lacking in all manner of ways. There are many places where it could have been better written; where haste or the demands of plot made me abandon the literary high ground. There are also numerous plot strands and characters who simply *did not work*. And – perhaps most important of all – there are whole aspects of the great world of *Chung Kuo* which I did not deal with properly and which, if I came to rework the beast, I would give attention to.

All of which begs the question, am I happy with the final shape and form of *Chung Kuo*?

It's strange. When you work so hard at something for so long, when you are forced constantly to defend it against unjust comment, or simply suffer the common ups-and-downs of publishing (new and unsympathetic editors, publishers who don't give a damn etc.) then it's actually very hard to sustain any kind of intense feeling about a work – even one on such a scale as this. For almost a year now I've 'written off' *Chung Kuo* in my head. If I looked back at all, it was to something I had finished with and which, to a large extent, 'failed'. Forget that the work is out in eighteen countries. Forget that people want to make CD-Rom games out of it, and films, and comics, and...

No. If I've any single afterthought it's this. I want to rewrite the bigger. I want to do it right next time. But...

Well, it's like this. As a writer you grow. You move on. Thus I've spent the best part of this last year writing and rewriting a new work, which I delivered to my agent this very morning. It's a first

person, contemporary novel set here and now, in England at the end of the 1990s. It's called *Imagine a Man*, and it's vaguely science fictional. It has a HUGE idea in it. But it's actually about one single man. About his life. And my next book will be similar. And then there's the TV series I'm working on, and the film and...

You see, it could be hard fitting in a rewrite of a 1,800,000-word work, even if I do it evenings and in the odd moment, fitting it between other projects. Because if I *did* do it, I'd want to do it right second time round, and I don't think I've another fourteen years to spare, I'm 43, almost 44, and that gives me, say, thirty more years as a working writer and that would be half of my remaining time.

And besides, I've got four daughters now and a new house to look after and a football team to support and mates to see and...

You get the idea? Something like *Chung Kuo* can only ever be done once. And whilst I feel a kind of humility when people write nice things about it, I guess what I'm saying is that, good as it is, I missed my aim. I intended it to be the very best. I wanted to do what Asimov had failed to do, or Heinlein and Herbert, in making the future seem real... as real as any environment in any so-called mainstream work. I wanted to make it both a pure piece of science fiction and – at the same time – something akin to Balzac or Zola: a portrait of real characters involved in real historical change – the kind that we might realistically expect in the future. And maybe that can be done, and maybe it can't, but that's what I intended, yes, and failed, to do. So now I move on. I have to let *Chung Kuo* speak for itself, find its own admirers and detractors and leave alone. My days of fighting for the beast are behind me.

Then again, who knows? If the film ever gets made...

© David Wingrove 1998.

David Wingrove was editor of *Vector* 84-94, and co-writer, with Brian Aldiss, of *Trillion Year Spree*. A bibliography of the *Chung Kuo* sequence appeared in *Vector* 200 — Eds.

Emergent Property: An Interview with John Meaney

JOHN MEANEY, AUTHOR OF *TO HOLD INFINITY* (1998), ATTENDED THE APRIL BSFA LONDON MEETING WHERE HE WAS GRILLED BY MAUREN KINCAID SPELLER.

MAUREN KINCAID SPELLER: WHAT LED YOU TO WRITING SCIENCE FICTION?

John Meaney: Like everyone else in the room, I was corrupted at a very early age and probably by the same people as well – your Heinleins and your André Nortons, the juveniles which hook into your brain and corrupt you. I do remember when my mother took me down to join the public library, at the age of five, whenever it was allowed, I got out a book about a little boy who stowed away on a rocket-ship to the moon. I can remember the picture of him hiding behind the wooden crate, beside the ramp, until all the robots got out of the way and then he ran aboard.

Beyond the juveniles, I remember when I read my first adult sf book, which was *Time is the Simplest Thing* by Clifford D. Simak, and I can still remember the part right at the beginning where the protagonist's brain is linked telepathically to this machine which is exploring a distant world, and the machine is just crawling across this wide-open, grey, desolate plain, and the winds are howling, and it crawls up to this sort of structure, and inside there's this great big pink blob, and then words appear in the protagonist's mind... It's the pink blob saying: 'I trade with you my mind.' Bloody hell, you know, that blew away my mind. And my fate was sealed.

MKS: What led you on from reading science fiction to trying to write it?

JM: That's just a peculiar psychological aberration. I was very

fortunate in the English teachers I had at school, because some of them would let me hand in science-fiction short stories when I was supposed to be doing essays. Occasionally not science fiction, but moving over toward action adventure. I do remember one story where we were asked to write about salad bowls, and somehow I made this salad into a tropical garden with an assassin hiding with his rifle waiting for his victim to come into shot. But they let me get away with it. They even gave it good marks. But

then, when it got closer to those horrible exam years, I handed in an essay, this was with a new English teacher, and the essay was part essay / part story, because it began with this long philosophical intro about 'What is the difference between life and not life?' 'When does an organic molecule suddenly become complex enough to become a life form?' It was good science fiction. I know it was good science fiction because I ripped it straight out of A E van Vogt. But the verdict on this was: 'This is not the sort of thing we require for English Examinations; C-.' So that was a bit of a blow – but there's always a tinge of rebellion in science fiction; that negative verdict probably

helped my underground rebellious streak. I think from that point onwards it was really natural that I would hide in a darkened room late at night and write science fiction.

MKS: How long was it before you got published? I think it was *Interzone* which took your first short stories.

JM: They did, yes. I'm even older than I look. When I was about

Whenever I choose an example of something that I think can be wrong in science fiction, I always go for *Star Trek*

twenty, I started dabbling with writing short stories and there was something I thought was good enough to be called a novel at the time, but nobody will ever see it. It is at home, in a mouldy little cardboard box. It will never see the light of day. You hope.

Eventually I did something that I remembered Roger Zelazny writing about: he wrote a long time ago about selling his first short story. What he did was he went back over all of his old rejections and he analysed what his mistake was, and I remember him saying that his mistake was that he over-explained things. So when I looked back at my stories, what I thought was that I didn't have the story under control. So I wrote a short story called 'Spring Rain', which is set in near-future Japan, and the story ends with a haiku. And the very first thing I wrote was the haiku, and that helped me step back from the story and consciously guide it. It took a long time to sell, but it was the first story that I sold; that very nice man David Pringle at *Interzone* bought it. Yoshiko and Tetsuo in *To Hold Infinity* are descendants of two of the characters from 'Spring Rain'.

MKS: Is it going to ask you about the choice of Oriental characters in *To Hold Infinity*.

JM: I think that partly comes from my fascination with martial arts. I've trained in martial arts a very long time. My instructor, Enoda Sensei, comes from a long line of samurai, and he's a very frightening man to be close to, basically. I've always had a fascination for Japanese culture, but my knowledge of the Japanese language is a bit ropy. I know how to pronounce things when they're written in English texts, but as for colloquial conversation, I can rattle off jumping-spinning-reverse-roundhouse-kick, but try getting a taxi across Tokyo with that...

MKS: It'd be an interesting experience. Having said there's an Oriental influence upon the novel, undoubtedly there's the use of artificial intelligence. I wonder what prompted you to take that particular road, given that it's been well-trodden by the likes of William Gibson.

JM: That was a scary thing to think about: the fact that Gibson had done it and done it so well. He made science fiction cool again, that's what he did. But there was the knowledge at the back of my mind that I was constructing a novel that was in the reasonably distant future, not the near-future-mean-streets approach of cyberpunk sf. None of my main characters were going to be drug dealers, or other shady characters on the edges of the law.

I tried to make the society as complex as possible, within the bounds of a single novel, but still I was able to bring in all the cyberpunk tropes and so on and play around with them. When I started writing the book, one of things I was looking at was how people with enhanced brains might communicate, more or less just telepathically, given that telepathy as we normally understand it in science fiction probably isn't physically possible.

The reason it's not physically possible is to do with complexity theory and emergent properties, because our consciousness is an emergent property of the competition of the different underlying groups of neurones. What that basically means is that if we both think of a word and try to hold that word in our minds, the pattern of our neurones firing in our two brains is going to be completely different. My idea was that telepathy in that sense was not possible; what you can do is have processes which although they're constructed out of electronic hardware themselves, are based on learning algorithms and these processes learn to be extensions of the human brain. Then when I looked at communications: you've got this grey area of some software that could be pre-loaded into the processes, which would enable communication between them. Then you have the concept of the simultaneous broadcast of the different physical senses, between two individuals, also in that way. It was only when I finished writing the first draft, that I realised that that goes right back to the book I mentioned, *Time is the Simplest Thing* by Clifford D. Simak, because he has the telepaths in that book communicate by one character constructing a cartoon or caricature of someone and broadcasting that as a mental image. I really hadn't thought of that at the time, but suddenly I realised that that idea must have come bubbling up and just subconsciously drifted into the story.

Something that I did much more of as I was revising the story was putting in deeper and deeper levels of the software code. It

did strike me that nobody, in any of the cyberpunk books, ever shows you any software code. I know that there have been some exceptions to that – little bits of BASIC in one of Fred Pohl's books, for example, springs to mind – but I wanted to go maybe a bit further than that, but I knew that it was rather scary stepping that far because I knew that if the damn thing ever got published, IT people were going to read it. Having decided to bite the bullet and go for it, I had a lot of fun doing that and in the software house that I work for, as day job, I've got talked into issuing a challenge so that if there's anyone who can find a coding error in the book, gets their money back. Given that I was going to write program code, I then started trying to throw in jokes for techies types, so you'll find, for example, that there are *trinary* variables buried in the code, where it's implied that the way that these variables work is that they may be 'true', 'false' or 'maybe'.

MKS: I was more preoccupied with the cohenstewart discontinuity. Would you care to explain that to me?

JM: My outlook on the entire universe has been changed by a popular science book called *The Collapse of Chaos* by Jack Cohen and Ian Stewart. What they're looking at is chaos theory and complexity theory – which is talking about emergent properties – and they take that concept a bit further and talk about different types of emergent properties arising from the interaction between different complex systems.

Some of the biological ones are very neat: for example, they talk about an ant whose reproductive cycle is spent inside of the intestines of a cow. Now that is not behaviour you could predict from detailed knowledge of the biochemistry of the ant or the cow, or of grass, and it's certainly not something you can know from knowing the quantum wave functions of the entire organisms, it's something you can only predict, when you're at a certain level of scientific explanation, so every thing is context dependent.

The reason I dropped in the phrase 'cohenstewart discontinuity' was thinking of the way that complex systems can undergo a kind of phase transition from one mode of behaviour to another. I'd just like to think that at some point in the future, someone would have a mathematical system, a calculus of complexity, which is way beyond present science, but with which you can predict how complex systems are going to change, how new sets of complex rules are going to spring into being as emergent properties, and if that does happen, I'd like to think that Jack and Ian are remembered.

MKS: I wanted to ask you about the society you've created, because there's discontent in the society, but it's not structured in the way that you'd normally expect to find in a science-fiction novel. It's much more in the interstices of what's going on.

JM: Whenever I choose an example of something that I think can be wrong in science fiction, I always go for *Star Trek*, right for the jugular. One of the things that pains me about *Star Trek* was the way that the different aliens that you get in it is a) they're humans with rubber masks on, b) that they're no more different from each other

than Americans from different states. Sometimes the Klingons act a bit oriental, but that's about as far as it goes. But the United States itself is quite a diverse and varied culture.

The world of Fulgor is a world which has been colonised for two centuries, so that I'd like to think that it's got at least as much cultural diversity as the United States. Then it was really an extension of that, when you think about the different kind of groups you might have. It pleased me to think that there are a lot of renegades who don't want to live in very structured cities in very structured societies, and would like to go out into the wastes of the planet. But given that that's going to happen, why should that be a single homogenous group of people? And I can see different subcultures building up within that; when you got different subcultures, then you've got conflict.

MKS: It was interesting too that in the Luculentia strata of society, there were very different views – they have this immense power and abilities, but there's those who are sympathetic to the Shadow People and those who are tending towards corruption and those working for, as they see it, the general good of things. Even at that level where they've got everything they might possibly need or want.

There's a little bit
of the psychopath
lurking in us all...

JM: Yes, but none of us ever feels that we've got everything we could possibly need, none of us ever feel that all of our ambitions have been fulfilled, although having a novel published comes pretty damned close. I don't think the Luculentis elite are going to be happy, despite the wonderful powers they have, if anything because of their enhanced ability, they've got more ambition. In some ways, there's more strife between the individuals then there is among our present society.

MKS: So Tetsuo's on a hiding to nothing the moment he gets there.

JM: He is. At the levels of society he's working in, even when he's dealing with the upper layers of Fulgidi society – so we're talking about individuals that were conscious of the fact that they're not Luculentis – who have got all sorts of software running on their systems all the time, teaching them language, teaching them science, so all the time when business negotiations are taking place, they got all this back-up technology. So Tetsuo, the poor guy, is really on a hiding to nothing.

MKS: And not even upraising is going to –

JM: Yes, you're right, that's the other aspect, he's never going to fit in despite the upraise, which going to help him cope financially, if you like. He's going to be able to cope with the commercial world. I hope it's kind of apparent in the book that when he moves out among the Shadow People he then finds a kind of spiritual home and then realises that the society is more complex and that there are many more aspects to it then he initially realised and that there are people that he might be able to get on with provided they eventually accept him. The Shadow People, although they are very nice people to be among, are the people with the biggest grudge against the Luculentis. Poor Tetsuo has a tough time, doesn't he?

MKS: We haven't talked about Rafael so far. He seems to me to be like Lucifer the Fallen Angel, and there's a case for the influence of *Paradise Lost*.

JM: It's very frightening how easily you can slip into the mind of a serial psychopathic killer. But it's a lot of fun. Rafael's just a cool dude, isn't he? I hope, I hope you think he is, because I do, it was the charm and the elegance that made him to me a sympathetic character, which then let me force whatever portion of my mind has become Rafael force it further into the character, because when it really comes down to it, he is really a nasty piece of work.

MKS: When I think of some of his less desirable characteristics I'm somewhat worried about this. I think it was interesting that you managed to make him so attractive, and yet so deeply and clearly unpleasant at the same time. Once I got over the initial response, I don't I ever found him tremendously attractive, so I wonder if it's going to be a reaction which splits on gender lines.

JM: It could, because my editor, Simon Taylor, was rather saddened by the fact that Rafael comes to a not particularly nice end. And some people think that, 'No, Rafael's a nice bloke really.' You're right, it's males who've read it, who say that. There's a little bit of the psychopath lurking in us all...

MKS: I felt he received his comeuppance, and entirely well-deserved. On the other hand, he was clearly a complex character, the sorts of things he was trying to do with artificial intelligence, his rampant misuse of the plexore, effectively turning Fulgor into a massive mind. Is it his intention to attempt to take over the entire planet?

JM: I think we're coming back to emergent properties. The artificial processes that have enhanced people's minds are called plexores; it is very dangerous stuff and there is a legal maximum on the number of plexores which a Luculentus or Luculenta (that's the female version) are allowed to have implanted in their bodies. They are not allowed to have more than two processors. Most people don't have that many for a practical reason, the time delay. In order for Rafael to set this huge array of illegal plexores, one of the things he has to do is soup up the system so that light speed delays don't screw up the actual fabric of his own thoughts.

Once that network grows beyond a certain size, the actual characteristics of human thoughts might change. To some extent a part of his mind is letting the ambition get completely out of control because neither Rafael nor anyone else can predict what

his own personality is going to be like a) when he subsumed mind and memory fragments of so many different people and b) when the array itself is just so huge and new waves of electronic activity are sweeping across this network and new structures are going to form. His thinking will become quite different, quite alien.

MKS: But in the hands – or mind – of another Luculentus would you imagine it to be entirely different? Are Rafael's actions entirely inherent? What about say the actions of Lori or Lavinia, if they were in his position would the entire thing be entirely different or does the megalomania tendency rise to the forefront of the mind?

JM: No, I think that's peculiar to Rafael, Rafael does have a psychopathic personality.

MKS: He's effectively an opportunity to have a psychopathic personality writ large.

JM: Yes, I think if someone's plexore array did grow that large, they would inevitably end up with some peculiar personality traits, but it is only because he is some kind of vicious psychopath that he's gone down that route in the first place.

One of the things that every Luculentus or Luculenta does at some point in their life is designate a successor, to receive their edited memories, when that person knows they're going to die, which is how you've got interface technology which lets somebody to perform a deep scan on memories and thoughts. At one point in the book you do see this process in operation, but I dropped in a little hint – when Rafael thinks about his lineage of minds – there's a hint that when one of these memory transfers took place, that something dreadfully went wrong, so to some extent there's a physical cause for Rafael's psychological aberration.

MKS: Where do the Pilots come into this? I was struck by the fact that they seem to be almost, if you had a theological hierarchy here, they seem to function very much like angels, as angels, somehow removed.

JM: They are rather unearthly creatures, aren't they?

MKS: I thought originally it would be the Luculentis, but then I realised that once the Pilots came on the scene, but no, they were maybe the top 2% but they weren't quite so different as.

JM: The Pilots are to some extent above the entire society, because they're so remote from it; the concept of Pilots was already inside my brain, matured quite a lot, because I've used them in a couple of short stories in *Interzone* and they are cool dudes as well, I have to say, the way I got into thinking about pilots was just to do with if we're going to have faster than light travel, and if they involves some kind of jump through hyperspace, what does hyperspace look like? Because that's something which nobody ever deals with, it's just something which is there and then the ships pass through it and then they're out of there, back into real space, and we're all at home now, we know what's happening. So, I thought that if I'm going to have some kind of hyperspace, then I'm going to think about what kind of physical laws I'm going to have in that continuum, and so I've made a start on that just by thinking that, well, maybe, for reasons that are probably pure caprice, that the physical dimensions are fractal, and

once you start thinking about fractal physical dimensions, as opposed to the dimensions of an object that exists within space, when the spatial dimensions themselves are fractal, then the geometry just makes my head hurt.

And that just kicked it off, and I thought that really I don't think that human beings can survive in that kind of continuum, so then I ended up with this notion of Pilots who are partly genetically engineered, partly to do with the fact that one of them was born in *mu*-space and that changed her phenotype rather than genotype, but in a way that other people could investigate and then build up from. One of the physical characteristics is that they all have completely black eyes, and I think I got that from Ray Bradbury's 'Dark They Were and Golden-Eyed', but suddenly my mind turned it the other way round. I think that's where they came from.

MKS: You've published one novel. What are your plans?

...there weren't
any triads in
Dickens as I
recall.

JM: To survive long enough to write the second one. Those nice people at Bantam have bought the second book already, but I haven't written it yet. I do know what it's about, I have written some words.

MKS: Are you planning to go back into the same universe, or are you going somewhere different?

JM: It's the same universe, a different world, a different time frame. Do you want to know about it?

MKS: If you want to tell us.

JM: OK. It's a world called Nulapeiron, physically a large world, again it's something which has been settled for centuries, but this planet is very much cut off from the rest of human civilisation and everyone lives underground. There are billions of people living underground and there are many physical strata, so it's another stratified society, but even more so, than Fulgor, although in some ways the distinctions are blurred, but in the physical sense it's very much more real. People need legal permission to move physically between levels.

MKS: Belgium.

JM: The chocolate on Nulapeiron isn't as good as in Belgium. So again there's an élite part of society, who I've just given aristocratic titles to, the distinction between them and ordinary folk in a physical sense isn't as sharp as in *To Hold Infinity* in that they're not set apart physically from the rest of humanity, they have wonderful education, they do have some extra technology, but it doesn't make them as different from ordinary human beings as plexorcs do the Luculenti.

The basis of their political powers is not their own abilities, but that there's a subgroup, off in the wings, called Oracles, and the thing about Oracles is that they can foresee the future, surprisingly enough, and you're going to say, having talked about chaos and complexity theory, how can I get away talking about people that can see the future.

And the answer is, before you ask the question, is a bit of magical sleight of hand: the way that they see the future is that basically their consciousness kind of travels up and down their own time line, their own world line. Before anyone throws out any precedents, I know that's like *Slaughterhouse 5* thank you very much, my reasoning behind this, to shore this up, and try and turn it into science fiction and not fantasy, is that there's a whole new set of interpretations of quantum physics, which get away from either the Copenhagen interpretation, which eventually leads to paradox, or the multiple universe scenario.

They are alternative explanations for, we're talking about different philosophical ways of looking at equations that we know which work and there's a whole bunch of new ones which are all based on the ideas of time-loops, or basically saying that the notion of time that we have, isn't correct, it's a bit simplified, and all the events of quantum physics make sense if you can talk about the future events, the future observation effecting the historic conditions which led up to it. So you're talking about an influence travelling backwards in time, so one formulation is the notion of waves travelling forwards and backwards in time. But there's your Oracles.

I will not bore readers with my interpretation of quantum physics, I promise. The hero of the story is a working-class boy, he works with his father in a market place, quite a number of levels down from aristocratic society, I'll tell you some of the start.

An Oracle comes to the market where he works, this is where various totally exciting or violent things anyway have happened, just to get you into the mood of things, and basically our hero, Tom, finds that his mother has run away with this Oracle, which is a bit upsetting for the poor lad, and his father makes a hi-tech version of our telephone call to the Oracle and says, 'Can I have my wife back?'. And the Oracle says, 'No, she's very happy with me, but also do you realise that you've only got forty days to live.' Of course, being an Oracle, whatever he says is true, therefore the father only has forty days to live, which as you might expect makes Tom rather upset with society.

Tom's an outcast and in some ways the novel is the story of a poor boy made good, but it's not quite that simple, at least I hope it doesn't come across as being that simple. My editor, Simon, says that it's quite a Dickensian tale, because it's talking about this boy growing up, and portraying him in this very stratified society in which he's rather down-trodden, but the book moves towards a bit more violence. And there weren't any triads in Dickens as I recall.

MKS: John Meaney, thank you very much for letting us grill you.

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Maureen Kincaid Speller, who conducted the interview on which this transcript is based, is the Administrator of the BSFA and 1998 winner of TAFF. She is currently touring the United States.

IN HER INTERVIEW WITH JOHN MEANEY, MAUREEN KINCAID SPELLER ASKED ABOUT "THE COHENSTEWART DISCONTINUITY", WHICH IS A CONCEPT DERIVED FROM THE IDEAS OF IAN STEWART (LAST YEAR'S SPEAKER AT THE ROYAL INSTITUTION CHRISTMAS LECTURES) AND JACK COHEN (WHO SHOULD ALSO BE A FAMILIAR NAME, FROM THE ASSISTANCE HE HAS RENDERED SUCH AUTHORS AS BRIAN ALDISS AND HARRY HARRISON WITH THEIR FICTIONAL BIOLOGY). NOW MR MEANEY EXPANDS UPON HIS EXPLANATION, OFFERING A TANTALISING GLIMPSE OF THE WAY TOWARDS THE ANSWER TO THE MEANING OF LIFE, OR FAILING THAT, HOW THE FEIGENBAUM CONSTANT ARISES...

The Cohenstewart Discontinuity: Science in the Third Millennium by John Meaney

'A host of new and thought-provoking ideas ... will almost surely form the backbone of twenty-first-century science.'

Nature: review of Jack Cohen and Ian Stewart *The Collapse of Chaos* (Penguin).

When the world's foremost scientific journal carries a review like that, you know this is a book to be taken seriously.

If systems proceed to increasing disorder and randomness, where did we come from? If quantum physics 'drills down' to underlying simplicity, whence the plethora of subatomic particles and insoluble equations?

In mathematical chaos, complex dynamics can be generated from the recursive application of a simple rule. A visual analogue in the infinite complexity of the Mandelbrot set, produced by simple iterations on a pair of co-ordinate values...

Hey, we're cool. We read sf. We know all about chaos, right? So how does everything fit together? Can we explain economics as the sum of individual psychologies and circumstances? Is psychology determined by biology, and is biology merely lots of chemistry? Is chemistry 'really' quantum physics?

Nice try. If you think of building the universe 'bottom-up', then you start with the Theory of Everything (reading it off Steven Weinberg's T-shirt, no doubt), build up to the wave mechanics of lots of particles, leading to molecules and their interactions, and so on. You get bigger numbers, more complex and messier systems...

Hold on a minute, that's not how it works.

Newton's laws predict the position of the Earth in a million years' time, but quantum, physics cannot even show how a salt crystal forms. Economics and the global weather system may be both complex and chaotic, but the Earth's orbit is simple...

Now there's a thing.

Where did the simplicity come from?

The answer is emerging from complexity theory. It illuminates and changes every single scientific discipline – indeed, as Cohen and Stewart show, it merges the traditional sensibilities of the artist or poet with those of the analytical, reductionist scientist –

and point the way to the new millennium.

Reductionist biochemistry – very powerfully – explains how DNA replicates, by examining its internal properties. But why does it replicate? That depends on external features of the world.

The important features of the universe are context-dependent.

Don't believe me? Examine an oxygen molecule. It's just flying around, occasionally bouncing off another molecule. What's its pressure, its temperature? Nothing... For a molecule, such concepts don't exist.

It may hit another molecule: that molecule may be another free-flying individual, or it may be part of a box's wall. Big deal. That's a mechanical collision.

But, from outside of a box in which we've trapped a big number (we're talking Avogadro kind of numbers here, we're talking numbers like 6.02252×10^{23} here) of molecules, the gas has temperature and pressure. If you heat up a boiler past the safety limit you'll find out – in the worst way – that pressure exists.

That's one kind of emergence: a statistical property of large collections. But there are other sorts. You might say that the colour red arises from lots of photons with frequencies within a certain range (around 650nm) ... but to a flower, the colour of its petals is what a bee sees.

The simplicity has somehow come from 'outside', from context.

I don't know about you, but I've always thought of Newtonian mechanics as a superseded approximation to general relativity. But, in the Einsteinian model, it's impossible even to write down the equations which describe a binary star system; you've got to go back to old Isaac's methods.

Theories are as context-dependent as the concepts they describe: gas laws, gravitation, double helices, homeotic (process-control) genes, even Pythagoras' theorem.

Also, our ingrained notions of complexity need careful examination. There's no 'conservation of complexity', as Cohen and Stewart point out, though we naturally think of complex behaviour as having complex roots, and simple behaviour arising from simple causes.

How about frog DNA, then? It's longer and more complicated than ours. That's a bit of the blow, isn't it?

(We're arguably more complex than frogs, but we've achieved an evolutionary simplicity. Tadpoles have all sorts of different enzymes to achieve development when the water's hot or cold, using different biochemical pathways; we develop in a nice centrally-heated womb).

And our minds are way too complex to be due 'just' to DNA coding.

Why don't we intuitively understand complexity?

One reason: we get programs and data mixed up.

A kilobyte of information may contain a few stanzas of poetry – a data – or the instructions to generate the Mandelbrot set – a program. The length is no indication of the complexity. (In the program, lots of information has been compressed into a short algorithm). In the same way, you can't determine the complexity of a DNA sequence just from its length, because DNA sequences can act as program or data, depending on circumstances.

Another reason: we forget about context.

Context affects both program and data. A recipe for making a cheese omelette will be a relatively short string of characters if I'm writing the recipe for housewives (especially if they're Japanese, and I'm writing in kanji). If I'm writing for male undergraduates living away from home for the first time, I need to include lots of extra information like what an egg is and how you crack it open. (Sorry, guys. You know I'm exaggerating really).

DNA acts on – and is acted on by – its surroundings: proteins, four different sorts of RNA... loads of good stuff. DNA by itself – lying in the bottom of a test tube – isn't going to replicate anything.

It's complex in a cell, because that's where the operating system and hardware are.

Computer simulations show some interesting features. In Conway's Game of Life, for example, cellular automata play out their artificial lives according to very simple rules – in a universe, if you like, where the Theory of Everything is known: it's in the

(simple) program code – and generate complexity. They can even create a computer within the computer, capable of running any program.

Other computer models can approximate chemistry, by using rules to build up strings of characters. Say you invent rules for adding different characters which correspond to simple chemistry (such as $A + B \rightarrow C$); in addition, you specify that 'reaction rates' depend on whether other characters are around, to act as catalysts. Finally, you seed the virtual world with strings of characters such that some of the catalysts are themselves the products of other reactions. This sets up the possibility of autocatalytic feedback loops.

Run the model. What often emerges, for many different starting configurations, is replication – self-replicating 'molecules' – then predation and parasitism.

We have a self-organising system, with exceedingly complicated behaviour, but with simplicities emerging... and they're the same simplicities we see in biological evolution. But there's no DNA underneath: the reductionist underpinnings are different, but the emergent properties are the same.

Something as complicated as evolution can only be described using the concept of phase spaces: virtual spaces whose axes are parameters to be measured, and need not be physical lengths. For a gas, the axes might be pressure and temperature. A line drawn through this phase space shows the possible pairs of values a particular sample of gas might have: that's an attractor.

To depict the actual gas sample's pressure and temperature (which varies with time), you need to show a moving point: it's a cursor travelling along the attractor. At any instant in time, the cursor's co-ordinates are the current pressure and temperature.

Evolution takes place in a many-dimensional phase space. A new-born individual may be born – and grow – onto some co-ordinate on this landscape of possible values.

Now, remember that the early Earth had a virtually oxygen-free atmosphere. In the first known instance of global pollution, bacteria produced oxygen as a highly reactive by-product of their biochemistry... and completely altered the context in which life could evolve.

In a evolutionary phase space, the landscape itself (at least in any phase space with few enough dimensions for us to map) is shifting, as organisms affect the environment.

So what does this tell us about emergent properties and simplicities?

Let me say, first, that Cohen and Stewart have done more than write an account of other people's work, for all that *Collapse of Chaos* – and its sequel, *Figments of Reality* – are marketed as popular science books. There is no 'calculus of complexity' yet: but they've made a start.

Some simplicities emerge directly as a result of the underlying rules. If you keep chopping corners off polygons, you come closer and closer to getting a shape whose perimeter is π times its width. (You know that: but did you realise that the Feigenbaum constant in period-doubling arises similarly? The onset of chaos is a universal, in the same sense in which a circle is a universal arising from polygons with corners lopped off.)

Cohen and Stewart call these emergent properties *simplex*, and they're the easy ones to understand...

The more important and unpredictable emergent properties are *complicit*: they're the result of the interaction of two previously separate phase spaces.

In *Figments*, Cohen and Stewart describe a parasite which lives mostly inside ants... but reproduces inside cows. Its life-cycle is not simply predictable from looking at the phase spaces of cows, ants... or of grass. But what happens is, the parasite affects the ant's brain, so that it keeps hanging on to a blade of grass even when a cow has come along to eat it.

There are many more examples, and, in evolutionary terms, complicit interactions often mean sudden shifts in the landscape: explosions of new characteristics.

This also destroys any picture you might have been building up of a hierarchy of levels, each with its own rules and theories. There are 'strange loops' unexpectedly connecting disparate phase spaces. For example, one theory is that Jupiter and Saturn are

Where did the simplicity come from?

massive enough to sweep the inner planets relatively free of comets, keeping us safe, so that Terran evolution depends on the gas giants as well as on DNA.

Mind and consciousness are strange loops, also. In fact, emergent properties tend to arise when there is some sort of recursion going on: whether it's the production of successive generations of children, or neural feedback loops causing intelligence.

Typically, a recursive loop needs some sort of special conditions to get started, then it can carry on its iterations 'indefinitely'. DNA (or a self-replicating precursor) may have had its replication kick-started by chemical reactions on clay surfaces, which then became unnecessary. Cohen and Stewart term the initial processing 'scaffolding': it's discarded when it's no longer needed.

(If you're into programming, I've provided an example of my own as a footnote.)

What else do Cohen and Stewart describe?

Well, in the second book they use recursion and complicit interactions (between the individual and culture, for example) to show how intelligence, consciousness and, well, civilisation have arisen. In general, their approach provides a new viewpoint which extends science's explanatory powers and opens up new areas.

This is a serious contribution to science. Cohen and Stewart have provided the scaffolding; their ideas will replicate and grow.

I haven't mentioned what great writers they are. Always lucid, and pure joy for us sf types to read. Their thought experiments are as likely to refer to Delany, Heinlein or Niven as to the great philosophers. Cohen and Stewart have invented their own aliens, the Zarathustrans, whose perspective on the universe is as funny as it's illuminating. (I laughed at all the other jokes, too).

Buy now. Read. And see the universe in a different way, forever.

Footnote - Example of recursion

The following is a program written in Prolog, with four facts about particular daughters (e.g.: Betty is a daughter of Anne) followed by two rules, which define 'descendent'.

The first rule is a special case (if X is a daughter of Z, then X is also a descendent of Z).

The second rule is more general, and it's recursive, because it says that X is a descendent of Z if X is a daughter of Y and Y is a descendent of Z. To find out whether the last bit is true, you have to apply the same rule over again. (This time to Y and Z. Don't worry, they're variables).

```
daughter(betty, anne)
daughter(cath, betty)
daughter(doris, cath)
daughter(eileen, doris)
```

```
descendant(X, Z) :-
    daughter(X, Z)
```

```
descendant(X, Z) :-
    daughter(X, Y)
    descendant(Y, Z)
```

How does this work? Well, there are no procedural instructions because that's part of the context: the Prolog interpreter. The interpreter is there to answer questions.

If we ask...

```
?- daughter(cath, betty)
```

...we get the answer 'Yes', because it searches down the statements and stops at the second fact, which matches the question.

If we ask...

```
?- descendant(eileen, anne)
```

...we again get the answer 'Yes'. In this case it actually works backwards, using rule 2 over and over: Eileen's a descendent of Doris if Doris is a descendent of Cath, if Cath's a descendent of Betty, if Betty's a descendent of Anne... but then rule 1 answers that last part in the affirmative, so the whole string of propositions is true.

Easy, wasn't it?

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THE FOLLOWING COMMENT WAS INCLUDED IN AN EARLIER DRAFT OF THIS ARTICLE: 'DESPISE BEING HIGHLY RECOMMENDED VIEWING IT SHOULD BE STRESSED THAT THESE ARE UNCOMPROMISING FILMS IN ALL RESPECTS AND ARE IN NO WAY SUITABLE FOR MINORS OR THOSE WITH DELICATE CONSTITUTIONS.' ONE OF THE FILMS BEGINS WITH A BLACK AND WHITE EXPLOSION OF IMAGES, INCLUDING SELF-MUTILATION, AND CONTAINS WITH SEX SCENES WHERE THE PARTICIPANTS SPROUT PNEUMATIC DRILLS OR VACUUM CLEANER ATTACHMENTS. AT LEAST ONE OF THE EDITORIAL TEAM FOUND THE MATERIAL UNWATCHABLE IN ITS DEPICTION OF SADO-MASOCHISM, FETISHISM AND GENERAL PERVERSITY - IT'S WORTH REPEATING THAT OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THE MAGAZINES ARE OF THE INDIVIDUAL WRITERS RATHER THAN OF THE EDITORS OR COMMITTEE MEMBERS. HOWEVER, THE EDITORS STRONGLY SUPPORT THE FRANK AND HONEST DISCUSSION OF SCIENCE FICTION EVEN IF WE FIND THE SUBJECT MATTER NOT TO OUR OWN TASTES, AN APPRECIATION OF AN 18-CERTIFICATED DIRECTOR WOULD BE MISLEADING IF IT WERE COY, AND SO SOME OF THE IMAGERY DISCUSSED MIGHT BE FOUND OBJECTIONABLE BY SOME OF OUR READERS. YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED...

MAN-SIZED MONSTERS

by Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc

T1 and T2 are clearly the most breathtaking science-fiction films of the last fifteen years. Before examining that statement it should be pointed out that this is not a reference to James Cameron's twin teutonic time twisting Terminator films with all their cartoon carnage, multi-million dollar budgets and critic-friendly Nietzschean aphorisms, but instead to the hyperkinetic and visceral cyberpunk / mecha / superhero epics *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* and *Tetsuo II: Body Hammer*, the works of Japanese auteur Shinya Tsukamoto. Between making the two films, Tsukamoto became a darling of the film festival circuit and made a horror film called *Hiruko* (1991). His next film after *Tetsuo* and *Tetsuo 2*, *Tokyo Fist* (1995), was a break from the sl/horror genre, but was similar to all his films in that was fast paced, confrontational and produced in his inimitable style.

Tsukamoto was born in Tokyo in 1960 and started making 8mm films at the age of fourteen. He studied painting at Nihon University and, while still a student, became interested in the dramatic arts. His first job involved producing TV jingles for an advertising company. However in 1985, he decided to form his own company, the Kaijyu Theatre, or Theatre of Sea Monsters and after producing three plays decided to return to film-making. His

first short films, *Futsuusaizuno Kaizin* (1986) and *Dentyuokozounobouken* (1987) were shown on Japanese television and these were the forerunners to his first feature film *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* (1989).

Tetsuo: The Iron Man is not a film to be approached lightly. It is confrontational on every level. Any attempt at reducing the film to a synopsis is doomed to failure; it would either seem like a random series of images or give the impression of temporal continuity / narrative coherence, both properties that are not in the film's design. This piece resembles the work of William Burroughs (both in his writing and his films with Anthony Balch) or the films of Nicholas Roeg. Basically (this is the trite coherent approach) a metal fetishist goes crazy after seeing that the metal bar he has inserted in his leg has caused the limb to begin to decompose. This leads him to run in front of a car and its owners dispose of his (still living) body, before making love in front of him. Things go wrong for all and sundry as a symbiotic process takes hold and the corrupt hit-and-run salary man begins assimilating metal and losing control of his mind. The stage is set for an extended and climactic battle of metal and flesh culminating in the merging of capitalism and fetishism into all-conquering homometallic

evolution. The film's structure is non linear and non narrative and contains many scenes that may or may not be dream sequences or fantasies, which leads to a very high level of ambiguity throughout, so this plot summary is by no means definitive. But therein lies the beauty and the challenge of the film.

The elements within the film are derived from two main sources, manga/anime and avant garde cinema, although its execution is completely original. The title *Tetsuo* (itself a play on words: Tsukamoto used two kanji so that the name literally means 'iron'/'male') is a nod to one of the dominant characters in Katsuhiro Otomo's manga/anime opus, *Akira* (1982-), a two-thousand page comicbook masterpiece that similarly features man/metal fusions, although Otomo's vision is of a post-apocalyptic Tokyo and his heroes are drug-addled teenagers with blossoming psychic powers. Otomo managed to finance and direct a film version of this highly influential manga, and it is still the most well known anime here in the UK. Also serving as a visual pun, Tsukamoto's fetishist is reincarnated as a mutilated version of the popular *Dragonball* character, Japan's best known cartoon icon, complete with spiked hair and the ability to fly.

Tetsuo relishes in sexualising industrial and mechanical processes, it caresses any metal present in a given scene, it is drawn to it and fuelled by it. Lingering shots of wire and tubes take precedence over plot exposition, spurting molten metal, glittering backlit swarf and lubricants abound. In this way Tsukamoto is following a subversive cinematic tradition of celebrating deviant impulses – Buñuel's foot fetishism, Cronenberg's obsession with disease and bodily mutation, Borowczyk and Svankmajer's deification of the inanimate. Indeed the debt to Svankmajer is pronounced as wires arrange and disentangle in an animated blur, confrontational/loving heads disassemble, amalgamate and reform into a unified, mutated whole – a technological *Dimensions of Dialogue* (Svankmajer, 1982). The film shares a similar formalism to Svankmajer's work, complete with accelerated repetition and cruel humorous revelation. Large portions of the film involve complex pixillation, either to indicate travel or the consequence of superhuman punches, here so strong that they can knock the opponent across half of Tokyo. The effect is closer to Zbigniew Rybczynski's *Oh No I Can't Stop* (1981) than the more viewer-friendly *Wizard of Speed & Time* (Jittlow, 1988). Driving industrial music, industrial to the extent that machines and metal bars are used as instruments, perfectly complements the films breakneck speed, visual *lietmotifs* and metallic obsessions.

All Tsukamoto's films delight in the sexualisation of the male body. As sculptured, muscular, athletic *übermensch* all glistening with sweat, oil and other liquid substances, they exert a masculine aesthetic gaze uncommon in the science-fiction genre. Just as the female body is 'cut up' in mainstream cinema to objectify and pacify her for the male gaze – reducing female characters to fetishistic icons – so Tsukamoto imbues the male with similar sexual attributes. However, his male characters are at once male and female in the traditional cinematic sense: they are both powerful and powerless, both consumed by their own sexuality and afraid of it. It is no contrivance that the battling iron men reconcile their differences, admit their love for each other and unite. Jerry Cornelius/Miss Brunner-style to dominate this 'New World' of industrialism. The fascist and militaristic overtones are at once ridiculed and glorified – Tsukamoto's pagan celebration of the human body jumps from Reifentahl-like objectification to Cronenberg style bodily mutation as evolutionary supremacy. Tsukamoto himself plays the Metal Fetishist in the film, perhaps his on screen alter ego.

The scopophilic pleasure in identifying and enjoying the masochism of the protagonists is another trait inherent in these films. The attention to detail in all the scenes of bodily mutilation and self-mutilation is astonishing and filmed with an affection both for the wound and the wounding process. When the metal fetishist inserts an iron bar in his leg the wound is both vaginal and anal, a source of pleasure and pain, he is literally having sex with himself. His displeasure resulting from this act is not that of the pain endured, but of the realisation that the metal was corroded; the fusion of flesh and metal extends beyond his body alone and the leg becomes infested with maggots. Wounds also represent the externalisation of the character's psychosis and sexual drives, they are at once visible and representational. In a culture where public affection is avoided, this device serves to visualise repressed desires.

A predominant theme in *Tetsuo* is the triangular relationship between the protagonists; female character development relies upon the masculinisation of that character. It is this process that empowers the female within the film but also drives the central male to act upon his homosexual impulses. If this ultimately causes the downfall of the female character in *Tetsuo* then that is unfortunate, the same masculinisation in Tsukamoto's *Tokyo Fist* allows her freedom and power over her male counterparts, accepted as perhaps beyond the male. The demise of the female character in *Tetsuo* is due to her nymphomaniacal tendencies and perverse sexual preferences. Much of the strength of the characterisation is derived from the conflict between the heterosexual and homosexual impulses of the central character. This is made explicit in a (dream?) sequence where the businessman is sodomised by his girlfriend who is sporting a living, serpentine, metal penis of considerable length. When his own penis is transformed into a pneumatic drill his amazement is less the shock of change and more the externalisation of his sexual impulses, both for his girlfriend and the fetishist, impulses that reveal the potential his new body has as a weapon.

Budgetary restraints always put a burden on a director, especially for a first film. *Tetsuo* cost about £55,000 to make, a ridiculously small amount of money for any film, let alone an effects-heavy science fiction one. The biggest expense was the purchase of a 16mm camera to shoot it. *Tetsuo* is essentially a one man show, truly the work of an auteur; the boundless talents of Shinya Tsukamoto extend to such credits as acting, co-director of photography, story, screenplay, storyboards, editing and special effects. This list is by no means exhaustive, although it was Chu Ishikawa who was responsible for creating the astonishing score.

In 1992 a sequel was produced, *Tetsuo II: Body Hammer* which, although far removed from the original in terms of its concept, narrative and style, shares Tsukamoto's incessant obsession with metal. A film with a definite storyline, *Body Hammer* tells the tale of an ordinary family man whose son is kidnapped by the minions of an evil scientist who has developed a process which creates men who can quite literally turn their bodies into weapons. Lurking in a fiery hell, an army of young bronzed men await their chance to become a part of one super-weapon and to destroy. The son is then murdered and this acts as a catalyst to the protagonist discovering a talent to assimilate metal which he can use to avenge those who destroyed his life. But who really destroyed his life? Why can he not remember his early childhood?

T2 is a far more linear experience, any temporal breaks are defined either explicitly or through change in stock and lighting. This is not the only area in which the film is less subversive and more coherent than its predecessor. The themes prevalent in *Tetsuo* are augmented but given a broad and clearly defined context. In T1 the mutation of man and metal is never specifically explained, in T2 the corporate and militaristic exposition justifies the existence of the phenomena. Both films use the man-machine fusion to create a super weapon; the former executes this in a passive manner lacking in vision and direction, but the sequel has a definite treacherous purpose and is set within a social environment. Some critics have levelled the accusation that T2, like its big buck American namesake, is just a re-run of the first film but with more money. This is not the case. Although both films end with a virtually identical sequence, the process by which that point is reached is fundamentally different. As *Tetsuo* works on a personal and existential level so *Body Hammer* initially sets its targets as the individual against the corporate. The corruption of metal and flesh that is seen as individual sexual weakness in the first film (redemption by admitting socially misunderstood sexual preferences) becomes mob corporate weakness in the face of the individual in *Body Hammer*. Woven into this smörgåsbord of conspiracy and self-loathing is a truly disturbing set of childhood traumas and parental indoctrination, reminiscent of Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960), in their clinically intense portrayal of a single-minded father willing to exploit his own children to further scientific ends. His success is perhaps a little too complete. The film's final scenes are distressing, confrontational and tragic, flashbacks filmed in the most comfortably nostalgic sepia tone and yet filled with horror.

Guns in *Body Hammer* have a more traditional phallic place than in its predecessor, as they are an assertion of male power and serve to emphasise this at every opportunity. That the guns emerge when the male is aroused, whether from internal genetically altered sources or in the more conventional sense from a holster,

adds strength to this interpretation. Late in the film this demonstration of gun as male sexual power is illustrated in a tense and highly unpleasant flashback that makes no doubt as to the violent nature of male urges. Whereas in *Tetsuo*, flesh is replaced directly by metal, his penis literally transforming into a powerful drill or his face developing a metallic bristle while shaving, in *Body Hammer* the metal becomes an extension of the body, a weapon awakening from the arm, which is much more representational.

The move up to *Body Hammer* allowed Tsukamoto the freedom to employ a larger cast and this is used to great effect in realising the scale of the powers involved. It is however still a triangular relationship with the corporation replacing the fetishist. The larger budget, about ten times that of its predecessor, also allowed Tsukamoto the luxury of 35mm colour film stock. The colours are very saturated and intense and in some instances virtually monochromatic; bleeding reds and electric blues, the contrasts of the colours complementing the emotional conflicts throughout the piece.

Within Japanese sci/fantasy cinema, there are various recurring themes that relate directly to the society and culture of a nation that until 100 years ago had virtually no contact with the outside world and then became one of the most powerful forces of the century. Science-fiction films in Japan do not necessarily look to the future for technological innovation and a Utopian society, but generally consider apocalyptic issues. Perhaps this harks back to direct experience. Whereas Western films that deal with the apocalypse project forward to the destructive possibilities of World War III, the Japanese refer back to the horrors of World War II, with the knowledge that not only did the nation survive, it flourished in post-war years. Science-fiction films, as a result of the nuclear holocaust, reflect the fears associated with atomic radiation and war. The Gojira films of the 1950s for example, feature a giant mutated monster rampaging throughout Japan, and *Akira* (1987) begins with the destruction of Tokyo. In the *Tetsuo*

films, the man-machine mutation dominates in a way that indicates that the welding of flesh with metal will produce an entity with more strength than the simple power of machinery (including weapons) or intelligence of the human spirit alone; a being which can face the future with confidence and defiance.

Tokyo Fist (1995) shares many of the themes and techniques of the *Tetsuo* films, but it is not a science-fiction film, being primarily concerned with boxing. Central to the plot is, yet again, the masochistic love triangle of *Tetsuo*, although here the female rôle is given greater depth, her masculinity increases progressively throughout the film and she wears her wounds and body piercings with pride. That she is seen to be physically superior to her boyfriend (Shinya Tsukamoto again) empowers her further and reinforces his masochism and repressed homosexuality. In some respects *Tokyo Fist* is even harder to watch than *Tetsuo* due to its grounding in reality; the boxing scenes are viscerally far in excess of *Raging Bull* (1980) and shot in saturated colour. In terms of character development, *Tokyo Fist* is a far more mature film and certainly more coherent, and like *T1* and *T2* it is epic in scale but not in length. What takes five minutes of Robert de Niro pontificating in his method manner is distilled into seconds here, and is no less powerful for that. If Scorsese had made *Tokyo Fist* it would still have been a masterpiece but seven-hours-long. *Tokyo Fist* leaves you with change from an hour and a half. A film, if you will, that packs a real punch.

Finally, there has been a (unsubstantiated) rumour circulating about another *Tetsuo* film going into production, only this time Tsukamoto would be partnered with director Quentin Tarantino. They met while *Tetsuo II: Body Hammer* and *Reservoir Dogs* (1991) were doing the festival circuit and have mentioned plans to produce *Tetsuo III: Flying Tetsuo*. Just as the Japanese have an ability to assimilate Western culture and adopt it to become their own, they too return many icons (*Godzilla* being the current craze) to the West, so an international *Tetsuo* would certainly be something to look forward to.

FEATURE FILMOGRAPHY:

1989 *Tetsuo: The Iron Man*
1991 *Hiruko*
1992 *Tetsuo II: Body Hammer*
1995 *Tokyo Fist*

VIDEO:

Tetsuo: The Iron Man and *Tetsuo II: Body Hammer* are available from ICA Projects both separately and in a two tape set. *Tokyo Fist* is available from Manga video in its original ratio with very clear subtitles. Amazingly, it is uncult.

NET RESOURCES:

Shinya Tsukamoto Homepage: <http://www.atom.co.jp/UNSOUND/Actual/Unsound/UnpopOffice/Artists/Tsukamoto/Backstage/index.html> — is a beautifully designed site complete with a couple of Tsukamoto's original storyboard pages and notes on Chu Ishikawa also.
Express 'zine: <http://www.express.co.jp/ALLES/2/tsukamoto1.html> — is a nice (Japanese but with an English-language version) site complete with interview, quicktime movies etc.

All Japanese names are quoted in the Western form — that is with forename preceding the surname.

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Colin and Mitch have written for us on Caro and Jeunet (V194), Luc Besson (V195), 2001: A Space Odyssey and 2010 (V197) and the sf films of 1997 (V199). When not watching Babylon 5 or Hong Kong cinema, they can be found exploring such culinary delights as pickled chillies and peking duck pizzas and juggling. They're nice people, honest. — Eds.

UNNOTICED AMONG THE QUEUES FOR TITANIC AND THE FULL MONTY, EARLY IN 1998 A SF FILM NAMED GATTACA WAS RELEASED.

ANDREW M BUTLER OFFERS AN ANALYSIS OF ITS THEMES, SYMBOLISM AND CHARACTER RELATIONSHIPS.

Gattaca: A scientific (queer) romance by Andrew M Butler

Assuming the cinema curtains haven't closed too soon, and allowing for two quotations, the film *Gattaca* (1997) ends pretty much as it begins, with a shower of white crescents, crashing against a blue background. In the beginning this was unexplained, and followed by what almost look like tree trunks and a shower of snow. It becomes apparent that these are off-cuts from the body, Ethan Hawke's hygiene routine writ large: finger nails, whiskers, flecks of dead skin. At the end of the film, it is clearly someone else's routine, as the circle begins again; if not

a circle then a spiral, as the task is easier the second time around.

But no sooner has the mystery been solved (if not yet the reasons behind it) then another is posed: the credits have certain letters highlighted, much as *Brassed Off* (1997) coloured the *p* and *f* for *pianissimo* and *forte* in its credits. Here the letters *a*, *c*, *g* and *t* are a different shade, and it is clear that these constitute the elements which make up the film's title — *Gattaca* — although the derivation of the neologism itself remains unexplained within the film. The letters *a*, *c*, *g* and *t* are the four purine or pyrimidine

bases (adenine, cytosine, guanine and thymine) which are the building blocks of deoxyribonucleic acid, itself the foundation of chromosomes and thus of all life on Earth.

Ethan Hawke sets the film up for us in voice-over, as we see his pinstripe-suited arrival at his place of work, Gattaca, the blood test at the entrance, the rows of computer terminals in cubicles within, his elderly boss (Gore Vidal) who is clearly proud of his protégé, then Jerome (Hawke) taking a urine test, and eventually the bashed-in skull of the institute's director. But as we are told that Jerome is training for a mission to Titan, something is niggling about the narration. Whilst the voice is clearly Hawke's (familiar from the voice-over he has also done for the updated *Great Expectations* [1998]), the actor is talking about his character in the third person. Indeed, we learn rather confusingly that this is not, in fact, Jerome after all.

Genetic technology has developed in this 'not-too distant future' to a point that an apparently simple DNA test from blood, urine or tissue samples can establish the precise identity and characteristics of the donor, along with their health profile and predicted time and cause of death. Genes can be, and are, manipulated to produce the best possible child, with the greatest prospects. Job interviews are reduced to a single blood test and, although discrimination on grounds of genotype is theoretically illegal, in actuality only the genetically perfect or Valid can advance up the career ladder in this society.

Vincent Anton Freeman (Hawke) is born to parents who rather foolishly allowed nature to select his genes, and consequently he is known to be likely to die from a heart attack. This certainly disqualifies him from being selected for training for any space mission. Having beaten his brother Anton at a swimming contest to see who dares to swim furthest out to sea (in the Detroit Riviera), Vincent drops out of society. He decides to become a 'borrowed ladder' or 'degenerate': he will take on the another genetic identity, with borrowed blood, urine, tissue and hair and apply for training at Gattaca. But with the murder, a team of detectives or Hoovers (including the wonderful Alan Arkin, best known as Yossarian in the underrated film version of *Catch-22*) descend, searching for the forensic proof which should expose the director's murderer and possibly Vincent / Jerome's deception; indeed as an interloper Vincent risks having the blame for the murder pinned on him.

This future is achieved on screen not with expensive effects; in fact the main (and recurring) effect is a piece of NASA stock footage of a spaceship being launched, overlaid against a number of landscapes. The extraordinary architecture of the exterior of the headquarters of Gattaca is the Marin County Civic Center. It has also learned a lesson or two from *Blade Runner* (1982). That film remains fresh and futuristic – rather than the products of their time that *Sleeper*, *Star Wars* and *A Clockwork Orange* clearly are – because it didn't just attempt to imagine the future: it borrowed the fashions of the past. Rachel's silhouette could slip unobtrusively into, say, *The Maltese Falcon*; in 1982 forty year-old fashions created a convincing forty-years-on. Gattaca thus has all of its characters in soberly pinstriped suits for most of its length, even down to characters wearing them instead of spacesuits. Obsolete cars with engine noises replaced by some kind of electric motor noise provide convincing futuristic transport. And the whole is shot – by the cinematographer, Slawomir Idziak, of Krystof Kieslowski's *Three Colours* trilogy – through a yellow-green haze. This is *Alphaville* without the pomposity; a film that remembers that the best sf has the awaken the mind as well as the senses.

As if it were a novel, the film sets up the genetic determinism of its future society only to question it. And, naturally, this questioning has a relevance even to a world where genes can't (yet) be selected to this degree. The easy way out would be for Vincent to be a lone revolutionary, who overturns the whole way of thinking of the society. Instead he can only provide a necessarily surreptitious example to others, or so we should conclude from the final urine test and the closing shot of falling nails.

Of course, what we have is a twentieth-century variant of the nature-nurture argument. What has greater impact on the individual – genotype or upbringing? Even though Vincent builds his body up by working out and knows the space flight manual off

by heart, he cannot be allowed to fly into space because that heart is genetically predisposed to be weak. By taking on the genetic identity of Jerome Morrow (Jude Law) and bluffing his way into the Gattaca institute, Vincent both undermines the genetic determinism (despite clear exertions in extreme situations, his heart is clearly still beating) and shifts the argument to one of accepting a given genetic identity versus self-determination.

As Vincent tells us early on, there is no gene for Fate, and so the blind chance of an accident can irrevocably alter a life, although – it has to be admitted – the accident which cripples Jerome from the waist down might not be so accidental. Jerome may have Valid genes, but he still lacks the determination to succeed; as a swimmer he was only second best. Vincent, with his In-Valid genes, takes first place in the swimming race with his brother Anton. It appears that will, with luck, is stronger than the fixed hand of genetic manipulation. In one scene, Vincent, having removed his contact lenses to escape detection, crosses a busy road because he does want to get to the other side; his limitations are no bar to his will.

A truly science-fictional moment opens this up for debate. Vincent as Jerome goes out with the woman from the next terminal, Irene (Uma Thurman), and they attend a piano recital on a date. (Their snatched glances at each other are a weak echo of Richard Linklater's excellent slackers-in-Vienna romance, *Before Sunrise* [1995] where Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy surreptitiously check each other out whilst listening to record about love). The fact that the pianist has twelve, incredibly agile, fingers is only revealed when he tosses his white silk gloves into the audience. Vincent claims that it doesn't matter whether twelve fingers or just the one is used, what matters is how you play. Irene responds with the assertion that the tune can only be played with twelve fingers. Sometimes genes can give a head start.

For in the film the determinism of genes isn't abandoned altogether, unless it is simply because occasionally it must be right by chance. The analysis of Vincent's eyelash found at the scene of the crime suggests that its 'owner' has a violent streak. Later in the film, escaping from a Hoover raid, Vincent attacks an agent and keeps hitting him long after it is strictly necessary. And it is DNA sequencing that does finally catch the killer.

But the authorities are blinded by their faith in their science of genetics. Having identified that the owner of the eyelash is an In-Valid, who worked as a janitor at Gattaca some time before, they cannot conceive that the same person could be working as a trainee astronaut. It's not so much the trust in their security measures, but rather the belief that no-one can outreach their potential; over-reaching is merely an illusion caused by a mistake in measuring potential.

Vincent's doubling for Jerome remains virtually undetected, and is but one of a series of doublings in the film. Vincent and Irene repeat the same snatch of dialogue, and she is finally prevented from going on the Titan mission by the diagnosis of a heart murmur, which presumably had been missed in earlier measuring of her potential. It is, of course, Vincent's heart that is the primary preventor of his advancement. But Vincent's heart is still beating, ten thousand beats after his predicted death. (Miscalculated potential? Or making his own luck?)

The rivalry with his brother is another clear case of doubling. Vincent's mother had wanted to call him Anton, after his father, but his father had decided that Vincent Anton Freeman was a better name, and their second, this time genetically-manipulated, child was a worthy bearer of their name. Anton soon outstrips Vincent, and refuses the offer of blood-brotherhood offered to him. It is only when Vincent can finally beat Anton in their swimming challenge that he has the courage to leave home and determine his own life. But Anton, like Vincent, is a success in his chosen field.

The doubling with Jerome is the heart of the film, although as Dave M Roberts observed in his perceptive review of the film in *Matrix* 131: 'What was intriguing, and was almost ignored, was the somewhat bizarre relationship between Vincent and Jerome'. Vincent and Jerome are both swimmers, share the same apartment, separated by a spiral staircase (a strand of DNA?) and the same identity, Vincent using Jerome to get what he wants, and Jerome on a number of occasions having to stand in for Vincent-as-Jerome to escape detection. Their facial resemblance is, to say

the least, superficial, and the script repeats the assertion a number of times that no one looks at identity photos anymore now that DNA provides the passport. Not here the kind of split screen technology that gave us two Jeremy Irons in *Dead Ringers* or two Leonardo DiCaprios in *The Man in the Iron Mask*. And as Jerome observes, in an odd choice of wording, he has prettier eyes than Vincent.

The relationship between the two is open to be read as if it is a platonic homosexual one. Actors bring to each movie the baggage of the other rôles they have played. The return of Robert de Niro's minor gangster in *Great Expectations*, specifically the danger his character is in, recall the scene in *Once Upon A Time In America* when the returning gangster casts glances over his shoulder, fearful of being pursued. This is not to suggest that de Niro is in any way a criminal. In a similar way, Jude Law comes to Gattaca from playing Bosie to Stephen Fry's eponymous *Wilde*, the character at the heart of arguably the most famous gay relationship in history. He is, at the time of writing, tipped to go to play Dickie Greenleaf to Matt Damon's Ripley in the forthcoming film of Patricia (Strangers on a Train) Highsmith's novel *The Talented Mr Ripley*. In the novel, Ripley steals the identity of Greenleaf, another good swimmer. Greenleaf, finding Ripley dressing up in Greenleaf's clothes – literally hiding in a closet – denies that he is a homosexual and accuses Ripley of being one.

Of course, as Leslie Fiedler has pointed out in *Love and Death in the American Novel*, much fiction has a male relationship at its centre which may be read as platonic homosexual or homosocial (to borrow a term that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick uses in *Between Men and The Epistemology of the Closet*). Films and television offer even more homosocial relationships: mismatched cops bicker throughout films in exactly the same way that, if they were male and female would lead you to expect marriage by the end of the final reel. (Think of Harry meeting Sally, or, much older, Shakespeare's Beatrice and Benedick). Further, these homosocial relationship tend to cross racial or national or even species boundaries (think *Lethal Weapon*, think *AlienNation*, think *Star Trek*).

Law's Englishness here acts both as a marker of difference, and of their queer romance. His uppercut accent and superior manners and their suited appearance recall both Hitchcock's *Rope* and the apparently more faithful account of the Leopold and Loeb murder case, *Swoon* (1991), a central film of early 1990s New Queer Cinema. There is also a moment of double-take (or *double entendre*) when, early on, the doctor admires Vincent's penis as he takes a urine test. Of course, the doctor is admiring an (apparently) superior genotype, but still...

Jerome even gives Vincent a lock of his hair to take with him on the Titan mission. On the one hand, this is a necessary item of physical evidence, but presumably Vincent would have a supply of blood, urine and dandruff with him that we don't see. On the other hand, a lock of hair is a traditional token of love, the sort of thing that maidens gave to knight about to embark on Crusades to remember them by. Whilst Vincent travels to new lands, Jerome is left to share the only course once open to gay characters in fiction and film – suicide.

It might be objected that Vincent's relationship with Irene undercuts a queer reading of the film, however Thurman sits prettily but uncomfortably in the film. Perhaps the character has been created to distract us from the possibilities inherent in the Vincent / Jerome relationship; it remains homosexual rather than homosexual. Having met her, Jerome declares that 'She likes us', a line open to a number of interpretations. It might be that he shares Vincent's desires as a red-blooded, healthy heterosexual. Or perhaps the line could be read as dismissive, seeking to undermine Vincent's relationship, bearing in mind that she has departed having seen the two of them together. During Jerome's meeting Irene, Vincent has waited just out of sight, ie loosened, as if he is about to claim (unconvincingly) that 'This isn't what it seems, honey' to her.

On the whole, *Gattaca* depicts a society of men. There is, of course, Vincent's mother (who vanishes early on), a couple of nurses, a teacher and a trainer, but the vast majority of the characters and all the significant parts besides Irene are male. It's almost as if genetic manipulation has dismissed the need for women altogether. But then, even in the late 1990s, Hollywood is still having problems finding strong rôles for women.

But this is one of the few true sf films to come out of Hollywood and director / scriptwriter Andrew Niccol is to be applauded for this work. If the success of his script for *The Truman Show* gains him any leverage on projects, we may see something even better, more science-fictional, less Cowboys-and-Indians or World-War-Two-In-Space. True, *Gattaca* draws, as reviewer Dave M Roberts noted, on the 'police procedural' genre. But the science is integrated into the narrative, the dialogue and the symbolism of the film.

Clearly *Gattaca* is not perfect: the formality of the society risks being mistaken for woodenness. Vincent's ambition (as Jonathan Romney suggested in his review in *Sight and Sound*) looks rather like 'single-minded social climbing, a sci-fi version of the yuppie Bildungsroman movie of the 80s.' But sf, particular Heinleinian agenda sf, has fetishised the efforts of the individual. How the society of *Gattaca* came into being is never – perhaps wisely never – addressed. Are the grizzled features of Director Josef and Alan Arkin's Detective Hugo a hangover from the pre-genetic days; if so how have they held onto power, if not how have they climbed to the second to top positions on their respective ladders? And, finally, whose nails are being clipped are the end of the film?

But the best sf films are those that leave questions like this, rather than the sense that there is a coach-and-horses sized hole in the plot. *Blade Runner* continues to generate arguments about who exactly was a replicant, *Brazil* encourages arguments about whether the ending is tragic or happy, *Twelve Monkeys* leaves the question of why Madeleine Stowe's character clearly recognised Bruce Willis's character and 2001: *A Space Odyssey* offers a whole raft of metaphysical questions. It is for this reason that fans of true sf should return to repeated viewings and discussion of *Gattaca* long after this season's crop of effects-led action adventures are eclipsed by the next round of comic rip-offs and disaster movies. *Gattaca* is the real thing.

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A DOZEN OR SO YEARS AGO, L J HURST WROTE AN ARTICLE FOR VECTOR CALLED 'WE ARE THE DEAD: 1984 AND DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS' IN WHICH HE ARGUED THAT '[B]OTH NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR AND DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS ARE ABOUT AN ETERNITY OF IRRECOVERABLE PAIN. THE ONLY WAY OF ESCAPING IT IS NOT TO HAVE IT START... THE PURPOSE OF BOTH NOVELS IS TO ACCOUNT FOR THE PERPETUAL HURT AND BOTH TITLES ARE IRONIC REFERENCES TO THEIR DOUBLE TREATMENT OF TIME. THE NOVELS ARE ABOUT IMMEDIATE SUFFERING BUT THEY PREMISE THIS GOING ON FOREVER.' NOW HE RETURNS TO THESE TWO NUMBERS, AND RECONSIDERS THEM IN REGARD TO TIME.

Remembrance of Things to Come? *Nineteen Eighty-Four and The Day of the Triffids Again* by L J Hurst

Perhaps I am slow, but it was only this year that I noticed the significant similarities of the opening paragraphs of two sf classics, and realised in turn their striking dissimilarity to any other sf work of their period. The similarity is in language and construction – what the French critic Gerard Genette called

'Narrative Discourse' – and this contrasts greatly with what other authors were doing at the time. Both authors were British – one an sf writer, one not – both produced unexpected best-sellers, and yet I've never seen a notice of the common construction underlying their work.

It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. Winston Smith, his chin nuzzled into his breast in an effort to escape the vile wind, slipped quickly through the glass doors of Victory Mansions, though not quickly enough to prevent a swirl of gritty dust from entering along with him.

The hallway smelt of boiled cabbage and old rag mats.

George Orwell *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949)

When a (then) minor British author of pre-war sf began his own dystopia, he chose an opening sentence that carried echoes of Orwell:

When a day that you happen to know is Wednesday starts by sounding like Sunday, there is something seriously wrong somewhere.

I felt that from the moment I woke.

John Wyndham *The Day of the Trifids* (1951)

When the critics have written about either of these introductions, they have tended to normalise them. Patrick Parrinder quotes Orwell and then says:

The world introduced by this sentence is not, fundamentally, an unfamiliar one. At most we would tend to react by thinking 'Huh! So they adopted the twenty-four hour clock.'

But supposing the clocks had been striking *fourteen*? That significant first sentence would have lost the weight carried by the unhappy significance of the number thirteen, and yet fourteen as the time at which Winston Smith came home in his lunch-hour would have been perfectly possible if Orwell had extended one feature of the war-years we have lost – Double British Summer Time. As another critic, Professor David Lodge, said in his inaugural lecture, the first sentence of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is realistic, yet the time struck makes it something more – Orwell took 'thirteen hundred hours' and abbreviated it, and he realised that he would have neither Double British Summer Time nor any other invention.

Patrick Parrinder goes on to describe the novel as an 'intentional Swiftian distortion of various aspects of [Orwell's] contemporary society.' Oddly, though, it is with the realistic 'thirteen' that Orwell chose to begin, even while Orwell was aware of other satirical uses of time, for example in Lewis Carroll or F. Anstey.¹ And just imagine what the metaphorical image of Big Brother's reign would have been if he could have introduced Double British Winter Time and made it as acceptable as all his other impositions. But Orwell did not – the rôle of time has repeated significance in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, but some of its possibilities he never took up. A metaphor such as Double British Winter Time would have been too easy, and the satire too obvious, suggesting that 'thirteen' was not chosen for its metaphorical power alone.

The normal constructs of time broke down in post-war England, and the first two major works of sf written by Britons in the modern era, chose a language of intense thematic similarity. Obviously Wyndham's construction was weaker, as his narrator has to spell out the significance of the day (although he has the benefit of the confusion of the secular and the sacred) and Orwell does not, but their joint use of uncanny time cannot be ignored. Now that some of the drafts of *The Day of the Trifids* have been published it is possible to see how Wyndham worked his way to something much closer to Orwell. Wyndham first wrote:

On the day when the Great Calamity put an end to the world I had known for thirty years, I happened to be in bed with a bandage all around my head and over my eyes. Just a matter of luck, like most survival.

I woke that morning with a feeling that something was wrong, and probably long after most people had found that things were disastrously wrong.

(Quoted in *The Times* 27 January 1998, p. 7)

¹ F. Anstey (1856-1934), although now almost entirely forgotten, was once popular for his satirical political novels, as well as frequent contributions to *Punch*. If his name lives on at all, it is probably for being the author of the 'body swap' novel, *Vice Versa*, or *A Lesson to Fathers* (1882) which has twice been filmed, as well as 'inspiring' such films as *Bigg*. — GSD, with acknowledgements to the entry Brian Stableford wrote for *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*.

We can see that the general reference to the Great Calamity has disappeared, as has the narrator's reference to his age, and the vague comment on luck. Exact days appeared instead, and the direct address to 'you'.

It is possible to see how Orwell created his first sentences, too. He first typed: 'It was a cold, blowy day in early April, and a million radios were striking thirteen. Winston Smith pushed open the glass door of Victory Mansions, turned right down the passage-way and pressed the button of the lift' (*Nineteen Eighty-Four: The Facsimile* [1984]). Then by a series of crossings out and insertions, the first sentence we know gradually developed. Nevertheless the original time – 'thirteen' – was there from the first (whereas the year 1984 went through a series of changes). And just as Wyndham later removed the big adjectives – 'Great Calamity', 'disastrously wrong' – so Orwell removed the large scale – 'a million radios' – leaving both author with a much more specific text. And the specifics of the text are time in its different formulations – 'day', 'April', 'thirteen', 'day', 'Wednesday', 'Sunday', 'moment'.

And this is unusual. In fact, these works are almost unique in science fiction of the period. Orwell knew the pulps, and the classic authors such as Verne and Wells, and the more modern authors such as Zamyatin, but used nothing of them. Wyndham had started writing for the American pulps before the Second World War, but *The Day of the Trifids* was written for the American slick magazine *Colliers* after the war. They called it *Revolt of the Trifids*, and Wyndham had to restore the rôle of time in the title of the work when it came to be published by Michael Joseph in hardback.

Compare these books with what was happening in other contemporary sf and their difference is clear. Equally clear is that sf authors had not found another language or narrative method, even though time travel and paradoxes were a mainstay of the genre. Just look at a few first sentences – from 'Masked eyes peered through the semi-darkness of the room' (Charles Harness, *The Paradox Man* [1953]) through to 'From the cold-storage locker at the rear of the store, Victor Nielson wheeled a cart of winter potatoes to the vegetable section of the produce department' (Philip K. Dick, *Time Out of Joint* [1959]) – and they are physical. I'm choosing titles from David Pringle's *Science Fiction: The 100 Best Novels* – but if I were to quote from many of the same period, I would be filling up the magazine, because the favourite opening gambit of the Golden Age authors was to quote a piece of text – an infodump of a *Galactic Encyclopedia*, or a piece of pseudo-legalise. Asimov did it in the *Foundation* series (1942-1950), but so did George R. Stewart in *Earth Abides* (1949) or even the political activist Bernard Wolfe in *Limbo* (1952). None of them seem to have chosen a style of telling in which the medium (the words, the tenses) can contribute to the message. And very few of these authors, contrary to the later teachings of Clarion and *How-to* books, chose an opening that is an obvious 'hook'. Meanwhile, the third British author in Pringle's listing, opened a novel with the sentence: 'The volcano that had reared Taratua up from the Pacific depths had been sleeping now for half a million years' (Arthur C. Clarke, *Childhood's End* [1953]), as if to prove that this narrative method were a British idiom. (There are exceptions: Ward Moore wrote 'Although I am writing in the year 1877, I was not born until 1921. Neither the dates nor the tenses are in error' [*Bring the Jubilee* (1955)], but he was writing and defining the boundaries of Alternate History.)

The most amazing example of an author failing to use the text to carry an implicit message is or was Robert A. Heinlein, one of the acknowledged masters of time manipulation in his fiction, who had become a major sf figure by the end of the 1940s. Consider the openings of his 'Future History' short stories such as 'If This Goes On' (1940): 'It was cold on the rampart' or 'By His Bootstraps' (1941): 'Bob Wilson did not see the circle grow'. 'All You Zombies' begins: '2217 Time Zone V (EST) 7 Nov 1970 – NYC – "Pop's Place": I was polishing a brandy snifter when the Unmarried Mother came in.' But that was not written until 1959, and Heinlein was aping the police procedurals which were filling the radio and TV, and the notebook dating is a variation on the infodump.

When they come to discuss the 1960s, Brian Aldiss and David Wingrove say: 'Growing stylistic awareness was, to a great extent, kept in check by economic necessity' (*Trillion Year Spree* Ch 12), but the difference between those with style who chose the medium of their narrative to carry part of the work and those without style was clear twenty years before.

Mainstream authors knew the power of Orwell and Wyndham's method; even the best-sellers used it (just think of the first sentence of Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock* (1938): 'Hale knew, before he had been in Brighton three hours, that they meant to murder him') but somehow the American sf writers missed it. So while an exact year did not matter to Orwell (the facsimile shows a series of dates in the 1980s – Orwell just wanted something in the near future rather than a detailed falsifiable prophecy) the detail he put into the first sentence shows his awareness of time as essential to the construction of his text, making it useful to identify exactly how it is done.

Gerard Genette's *Narrative Discourse* (1980), which describes how time and sequence work in fiction, it does it mainly through a discussion of Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*Remembrance of Things Past* [1913-27]). Rather than summarise Genette myself, I want to quote from the review which introduced me to his method. P N Furbank's review says:

merely to begin a section of a narrative by saying 'Three months earlier...' sets off a whole train of logical whirrings in the reader's mind. The fact that what comes after in a narrative comes before in the story means that the narrative and story are in dissonance. Our example would constitute an *analepsis*. Its opposite would be a *prolepsis* (narration or evocation in advance of an event that will take place later); and one has to distinguish a *completing prolepsis*, which to some degree doubles a narrative section to come.

Orwell and Wyndham both chose prolepsis as their method of unsettling their readers. How Orwell might have continued to write no one can be sure, but Wyndham lived and wrote for another fifteen years. David Pringle included his later *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957) in his *100 Best Novels*, and drew attention to the dissonance of Wyndham's work and its message: 'If the book is read as a parable of the Generation Gap, though I doubt whether that is what the author intended, it becomes very frightening indeed.' Wyndham again had shown the creatively powerful force which might be driven by the convergence of these hidden forces – the discrepancy between two generations representing types of time. Both Orwell and Wyndham were setting out to write dystopian novels and they were using the most powerful literary tools available to them Wyndham had had a year

or more to see how successful Orwell had been, should he have chosen to study Orwell closely (we will not know if he did until the Wyndham Archive yields up its secrets).

Other authors must have been aware of the relationship of dissonant time and dystopia, even if they could not express it well. For instance, the astronomer Patrick Moore, in his 1957 study

**...the favourite opening
gambit of the Golden Age
authors was to quote a piece
of text – an infodump of a
Galactic Encyclopaedia, or a
piece of pseudo-legalise.**

Science and Fiction discusses dystopian novels in just a couple of paragraphs within his chapter on time travel, perhaps partly because of his not consider dystopian fiction scientific enough to be considered as proper science fiction, but partly also, I suspect, to Moore's suspicion that the books he mention troubled the rules of (non-scientific narrative) 'time'.

Time, though, may be recorded in different ways. Furbank goes on to discuss an interesting feature: the narrative power that Genette assigns to 'the iterative' ('For a long time I used to go to bed early') and especially to the *pseudo-iterative*, in which one pretends by the use of the imperfect [tense] to be describing as a recurrent event some scene that could scarcely have happened more than once with those particular details. ('For a long time...' is the opening sentence of Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*). And that throws us back to Orwell – because the final summation of the year 1984 by its inhabitants is O'Brien's instruction to Winston Smith and we, the readers, who are addressed indirectly – 'If you want a picture of the future, think of a boot stamping on a human face – forever' – the ultimate repetition. Yet not the repetition of an event that has happened but that will happen. And will happen. And will happen. If *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has a purpose than that purpose is to stop the future happening. Orwell overrides the stereotype of 'this is how iteration happens' to show how it should not happen.

And going back, coming Furbank quoting that first sentence from Proust, I found that had forgotten Wyndham's first sentence of *The Chrysalids* (1955). How could I? – 'When I was quite small I would sometimes dream of a city – which was strange because it began before I even knew what a city was.' *Iteration, analepsis* and a syntax that reads like an almost direct quote from the world which set it all off. Was Wyndham so ignorant of what he was doing, as David Pringle suggests? I wonder if Arthur C Clarke can tell us if Wyndham ever talked in the White Horse of the methods he was using to grasp and unsettle his readers. Or did he and Orwell keep their secret to themselves – and is it only in the interplay and nuance of language and story can readers be held and troubled long after they have put the book down?

Acknowledgements

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L J Hurst has reviewed for *Vector* for many years, and his last article was a controversial appreciation of Mark Adlard (V195) – the back issue is available from Elizabeth and Paul Billinger, at the address on p. 2.

A grant of £85,500 from the Heritage Lottery Fund towards the purchase of the John Wyndham Estate Collection of manuscripts and correspondence, and donations from various members of the sf community, including Sir Arthur C. Clarke, have secured the purchase of this important archive for the University of Liverpool, also home of the Science Fiction Foundation Collection. The archive has arrived, but money is now needed to pay the balance of the purchase cost, pay various fees, and catalogue and conserve the material. Contact Andy Sawyer, Librarian/Administrator, Science Fiction Foundation Collection, Sydney Jones Library University of Liverpool, PO Box 123, Liverpool, L69 3DA, UK or email asawyer@liv.ac.uk if you wish to contribute. All donations are welcome

THE BEST OF BRITISH

compiled by
Andrew M Butler

PREAMBLE

We originally set up the Poll to mark the fortieth anniversary of the BSFA, but after a mixture of bad maths, poor communication and second thoughts (including a realisation that certain books by Clarke and Wyndham would be omitted if the cut-off point were 1958, and a chart would be meaningless without them) we extended the period by ten years. Fifty years – as half a century – is perhaps a more felicitous date, although there were then mutterings about *Titus Groan* (1946)... But a cut-off point had to be decided (although a poll of all British sf would be interesting, and something we are considering conducting).

But that term 'British' itself turned out to be a problem. There were relatively cases of authors that clearly had to be excluded: one person voted for Le Guin and Dick which was plainly void. Votes for Geoff Ryman posed more of a major problem: by birth he is a Canadian, but he has been resident in England since the 1970s, and several people consider him to be British. To define British as being British-born would of course exclude the Shanghai-born J G Ballard, and no doubt there are other writers (such as J R R Tolkien) who were born (to be Anglo-Centric) 'abroad' or in Commonwealth countries, but who would seem to most to be British writers. On the other hand, British-born would include Piers Anthony, although he took out American citizenship. British-based would include Pat Cadigan and Lisa Tuttle, although in the end no one voted for them. In the end, inclusivity came to be the golden rule: in came Ryman and Salman Rushdie, as writers whose careers have been predominately based in Britain, irrespective of whether they do have British citizenship.

Hydra-like, solving the problems of eligibility then throws up the problem of defining 'novel'. Fix-ups – perhaps loosely defined – were counted as novels so *Pavane* was eligible. Collections which weren't so closely connected – such as *The Best Short Stories of J G Ballard* – were excluded. In four cases trilogies or tetralogies (*Helliconia* and *The History of the Runestaff*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Stormbringer*) were allowed to count as novels, as strongly-linked novels

conceived of as a whole.

Given all this, 'science fiction' was left to be defined by the voters, and with the exception of the Tolkien novels, was unproblematic. On the grounds that Tolkien is discussed at length in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, these were allowed to stand.

THE MOST POPULAR AUTHORS

It soon became clear that, whilst one or two novels would clearly head the top ten, particular authors were splitting the votes cast for them between a number of novels. Brian Aldiss was the biggest victim of this, with seven titles (*The Dark Light Years*, *Greybeard*, *Helliconia*, *Hothouse*, *The Malacia Tapestry*, *Non Stop* and *Report on Probability A*), alongside John Brunner with five (*Jagged Orbit*, *The Sheep Look Up*, *The Shockwave Rider*, *Squares of the City* and *Stand on Zanzibar*) and Arthur C Clarke also with five (*Childhood's End*, *The City and the Stars*, *Earthlight*, *Rendezvous with Rama* and *2001: A Space Odyssey*).

Indeed, once the votes cast for the individual novels are totted up, Arthur C Clarke is by far the most popular British writer, with Brunner in second place. Much of Clarke's popularity comes from *Childhood's End*, as will be seen from the

The Most Popular Authors

1 Arthur C Clarke	25 Nicola Griffith
2 John Brunner	Eric Frank Russell
3 John Wyndham	27 Barrington Bayley
4 George Orwell	Ted Hughes
5 Brian Aldiss	29 Angela Carter
6 Christopher Priest	Mary Gentle
7 J G Ballard	Colin Greenland
8 Stephen Baxter	Ken MacLeod
9 Iain M. Banks	Salman Rushdie
Keith Roberts	Geoff Ryman
11 J R R Tolkien	Brian Stableford
12 Richard Cowper	E C Tubbs
Bob Shaw	37 Edmund Cooper
14 Michael Moorcock	Garry Kilworth
15 Peter Hamilton	Naomi Mitchison
16 Michael Coney	Jeff Noon
17 Anthony Burgess	Michael Marshall Smith
D G Compton	James White
Ian McDonald	Colin Wilson
Ian Watson	44 Alan Garner
21 Douglas Adams	D M Thomas
Paul McAuley	46 Ben Elton
23 Robert Holdstock	Robert Harris
Gwyneth Jones	Robert Irwin
	Stephen Palmer
	Terry Pratchett

top ten of novels. Wyndham's place at number three in the list of authors reflects the two novels he has in the top ten by novel.

It's rather depressing that we don't seem to be rating our women writers very highly (Gwyneth Jones jointly at #23, Nicola Griffith jointly at #25, Angela Carter and Mary Gentle at #29, and then Naomi Mitchison down at #37) when America clearly has a thriving scene of feminist sf. Given that she warrants a fanzine of her own, I'm surprised that Diana Wynne Jones didn't rate a mention among anyone's list.

THE MOST POPULAR NOVELS

The 1990s: Perhaps it's hardest to judge the most recent novels, as we are too close to really sort out the wheat from the chaff. It's a constant fear in voting for awards or writing reviews that tomorrow's classics might figure nowhere in the list. Stephen Baxter, who seems to be forever missing out on the Clarke Award (although he has won BSFA Awards) comes out as the top. British writer of the 1990s. Hamilton's massive volume is some way behind Baxter's top ten entry in terms of popularity. Peter Hamilton does not have an entry in the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (book or CD-ROM), although Nicola Griffith, third, does (CD-ROM only).

1st: Stephen Baxter, *The Time Ships* (1995); **2nd:** Peter Hamilton, *The Reality Dysfunction* (1996); **3rd:** Nicola Griffith, *Slow River* (1995)

The 1980s: Perhaps the doldrums decade in British science fiction, after the slow collapse of the 1970s (see Brian Stableford's article on this in V200). *Interzone* came to dominate the short fiction market, and new writer learnt their craft in short form before progressing to novels in the late 1980s and 1990s. That being said, two of the top three for the decade were writers who started in the 1960s, and the other was an established writer before he started publishing sf. The most popular books of the decade all came in at just outside the top ten. Banks's relatively poor showing surprised me: *Excession* and *The Bridge* were the only other titles to receive nominations.

1st: Christopher Priest, *The Affirmation* (1981); **2nd:** Iain M Banks, *Consider Phlebas* (1987);

3rd: Bob Shaw, *The Ragged Astronauts* (1986)

The 1970s: To some extent these novels mark the ending of the New Wave: the half-forgotten three Cs of the 1970s (Coney, Compton and Cowper) and Brunner also mark the edges of the overall top ten. These are novels where the quality of the writing is as strong as that of the ideas; experimentation here with viewpoint and narrative technique reinforce the themes. Clarke's *Rendezvous with Rama* is the last written of the five books by him voted for, an undoubted classic of the Big Dumb Object subgenre.

1st: Michael Coney, *Hello Summer, Goodbye* (1975); 2nd: John Brunner, *The Sheep Look Up* (1972); 3rd: D G Compton, *The Continuous Katherine Mortenhoe* (1974), Arthur C Clarke, *Rendezvous with Rama* (1973) and Richard Cowper, *The Road to Corlay* (1978)

The 1960s: There is a perception (from those outside the field) that sf, which after all makes up a world and can therefore avoid 'real' problems, is escapist, wish-fulfillment, adventures. But none of these titles from the 1960s are particularly cheerful or escapist; Burgess's violent classic, filmed a decade later, is just outside the top ten. Another Brunner disaster novel makes a top three, and Keith Roberts's classic alternate history novel rounds out the list. None of the 'high' New Wave writers (such as Moorcock, Ballard and Aldiss, focused on by Colin Greenland in *The Entropy Exhibition* [1983]) make it into the top three or the overall top ten, having split the votes between several books.

1st: John Brunner, *Stand On Zanzibar* (1968); 2nd: Keith Roberts, *Pavane* (1968); 3rd: Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange* (1962)

The 1950s: And this is more like it, all top ten, all of these are clearly sf classics. For more on John Wyndham see the article by L J Hurst in this issue, or by Ian J Simpson in V199. Whilst Wyndham has been stuck with the label of a writer of 'cosy catastrophes', they clearly have a place in many of our hearts; this is perhaps due to their cosiness. But I came to *The Day of the Triffids*

through the BBC version, which certainly scared me, and I definitely picked out a dark undercurrent about evolution and the end of humanity through my own reading. *Childhood's End* is perhaps another novel that gets to us early, and in conversation with voters who took part in the poll in person, it looked to be favourite for coming out top over all.

1st: Arthur C Clarke, *Childhood's End* (1953); 2nd: John Wyndham, *The Day Of The Triffids* (1951); 3rd: John Wyndham, *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957)

THE TOP TEN

9 – *Hello Summer, Goodbye* (1975), *The Sheep Look Up* (1972)

Michael Coney seemed to drop out of sight after the BSFA award-winning *Brontomek!*, although he returned with some fantasy in the late 1980s. His joint ninth novel is a love story which comes highly recommended. *The Sheep Look Up* is one of Brunner's disaster novels, this time concentrating on pollution.

8 – *Pavane* (1968)

An (historically unlikely) victory of the Spanish Armada maintains Catholic domination of Europe in this, the most significant British alternate world novel.

6 – *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957), *Lord Of The Rings* (1954-1955)

As I've noted, Wyndham has this reputation for cosiness, but certainly a sense of unease and horror underlines his classic novels of the 1950s; this is the novel where mothers become inexplicably pregnant, by aliens. *Lord of the Rings* is clearly considered sf by enough readers to get it into the top ten; it is the clear forerunner of almost all fantasy, and indeed provides a template for many trilogies. Another depiction of a cosy world shattered. As one respondent noted: 'The 1960s start here. The new generation is literally alien. "Homo sapiens has outgrown its use/ All your nightmares came today/ And it looks as though they're here to stay."

5 – *The Day Of The Triffids* (1951)

Wyndham's second top ten novel, much misremembered as to the mechanics of narrative cause and effect, where carnivorous plants take advantage of a blinded population. Perhaps a nostalgic

choice, probably many people's introduction to sf, but certainly the British disaster novel.

4 – *The Time Ships* (1995)

The most recent popular novel: Baxter's award-winning sequel to *The Time Machine*. This is the novel where Baxter found his voice, and the one that has won the awards.

3 – *Stand On Zanzibar* (1968)

Brunner's second top ten entry: modernist techniques depict an overpopulated future, and gained him the 1969 Hugo for best novel. As one voted points out, it is 'A hysterical warning, but it was the destiny of Cassandra not to be believed.' Or, alas, to be out of print...

2 – *Childhood's End* (1953)

Clarke's seminal parable of alien encounter, where humanity is given a helping hand in developing to its next stage of evolution – ideas returned to in 2001: *A Space Odyssey*. This is curiously anti-sf: you'd generally expect humanity's own strengths to be its own reward, rather than interventionist quasigods.

1 – *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949)

And again, hardly a cheerful choice, and the only Orwell title to be nominated. His nightmarish vision of a totalitarian society is one I find too uncomfortable to re-read, and it stays with me even fifteen years after I last tried. 'Frighteningly close to the truth, conspiracy fans,' one voter noted. Curiously this is also the earliest written book to receive a nomination, and despite some competition from *Childhood's End*, it actually remained in the first place from very early on in the voting.

In summary, the membership is clearly impressed by serious novels, whether dealing with the end of the world as we know it, or the oppressive nature of political systems of one shade or another. There's very little which is clearly a fun read, nothing aside from *Mort* or, perhaps, Iain M Banks's novels which might be considered comfort reading.

The question remains of how popular these books would be if we widened the scope to include all science fiction, and this is something we're considering for the future. In the meantime, our thanks to all those who voted, and especially to all those who took the trouble to annotate their listings.

'Zine Sifting

by Stephen Williams

Doctor Who Magazine no 263, April 1998. Published every four weeks (thirteen times per year) by Marvel Comics. £3.00, subscription £39 pa (including free binder) for PO Box 503, Leicester, LE94 0AD. Editors: Gary Gillett and Alan Barnes.

For the uninitiated, this magazine has been published since late 1979, when the programme had been on the air for just under sixteen years, and Tom Baker was the incumbent Doctor. It started as a weekly kiddies' comic, with easy to read features and lots of comic strips. This included the comic strip of the Doctor's adventures which had been published in one form or another since the earliest days of the programme, spin-off cartoons (including reprints of TV21 Dalek comic strips) and adaptations of classic sf novels. After nearly a year the magazine went monthly, allowing the magazine the (sometimes painful) process of growing-up. But it's still a sense of wonderment that the maturing process has not meant that the magazine has turned its back on the programme that spawned it (unlike many fans and other originally *Who*-based magazines – *DWB / Dreamwatch* being the most notorious example). In other words, what we have here is still on hundred per cent unadulterated *Doctor Who*.

Issue 263 has fifty-two glossy pages, including only four pages of adverts and is in full colour with the exception of the comic strip. It contains a number of features, ranging from the totally trivial (the ubiquitous Jackie Jenkins fangirl page) to the distinctly detailed (the astonishingly all-encompassing Archive) plus a range of interesting interviews with actors and technical staff who have worked on the programme.

The Archive deserves further mention, as it is both a strength and weakness of the magazine. It is a detailed look each issue at one programme from the series' television history (in this case the classic *Seeds of Doom* [1976]). Just recently I had the pleasure of rewatching this for the first time since its initial broadcast, and there is no doubt that a features as incredibly detailed as this can immensely add to one's enjoyment. However, I do occasionally feel swamped by it all – do I really want to know the exact date of the scripts' deliveries to the production team (episode one on Thursday 2 October if you're interested, for the rest see the magazine). Perhaps I'm unfairly carping – if you're going to do something, do it properly. The archive will undoubtedly become the most fully-documented history of the programme imaginable.

Other regular features include a news page (the 'Gallifrey Guardian' – for the *Who*-ly-challenged this is named for the Doctor's home planet, although the news it reports is thankfully more Earth-bound), letters page and reviews of new publications.

And the range of new publications is astonishing, considering that the programme ceased regular production nine years ago. Two novels per month from the BBC (one furthering the story of the Doctor beyond the 1996 TV movie, the other delving into unrecorded stories of earlier incarnations) and one per month from Virgin, featuring Benny, a former companion of the Doctor (although this is to be reduced to a bi-monthly schedule – signs of beginning of the end?) There is also a huge range of non-fiction in book and video format, original spin-off videos, audio tapes, short story anthologies, not to mention figures and other collectibles.

Unfortunately, while the review page does a reasonably comprehensive job, it's not all-encompassing. It was in the pages of another magazine that I found out about the ongoing series of new adventures being released on audio tape. I may have missed

the review of them in *DWM* – but it clearly didn't stick in my mind, and this is new *Who*.

This illustrates my other big quibble with the magazine that is exemplified by the Archive. *DWM* concerns itself almost solely with televised *Who*, and is therefore in danger of seeming very insular. I don't for one second mean it should go the way of *DWB / Dreamwatch* and become yet another *Starburst* clone, but there is new (if peripheral) *Who* being created, and I feel it deserves more than the review page and a (very) occasional article. The recent outcry amongst readers when the reviews of the Benny books were threatened with extermination would seem to go some way to supporting this view.

The only fiction is the comic strip, which has had its share of clinkers over the years, but generally it maintains a high standard of story and art. The current storyline, *The Final Chapter* part 2 (story: Alan Barnes, artwork: Martin Geraghty and Robin Smith) has the eighth doctor (who bears an uncanny resemblance to one of the protagonists in *Withnail and I...*), who, having been grievously wounded saving just about everyone in the previous story, is taken back to Gallifrey by his remarkably resourceful new companions. (Anyone can pilot a TARDIS, it seems. Oh for the days when Hartnell called it 'her the ship', and it / she was as mysterious as he was). Needless to say, once he's there he recovers and becomes embroiled in yet another plot about corruption amongst the Time Lords. This is something we've seen before, ever since Robert Holmes's *The Deadly Assassin* in the 1970s made corrupt Time Lords a way of life. For all that, it's energetic and great fun, with a new doctor, interesting companions, and a very welcome reappearance by Shade, a cross between Batman, the chap who delivers chocolates in the middle of the night and a bowling ball (see it to believe it). The strip and the new BBC novel are the only professionally published way to experience ongoing *Who*, and I've read a lot worse than the strip.

Two other features are definitely worthy of note. The semi-regular 'Telesnap Archive' is a fascinating set of off-screen photographs taken at broadcast of stories that the magnanimously foresighted BBC wiped from their collection in the 1970s. These are often now the only way to see these stories – I just wish the pictures could be bigger, fuzzier or not.

Highlight of this issue, however, was the lead article 'All Creatures Great and Small'. A fascinating account of monsters in (televised) *Doctor Who*, it draws the parallel with *Star Trek*, and postulates that in *Star Trek* we have alien races, in *Who* we have monsters. (This ignores a number of – by the article's own definition – alien races in *Who*, such as the Draconians, but never mind). What does make the article worth perusing is the argument that the Borg in *Star Trek* are a traditional *Who* monster, as opposed to the usual *Star Trek* alien race (they certainly don't have a Mars Bar on their heads, I suppose. That has to count for something). Apparently only the makers of *Star Trek* cannot see that the Borg are *Who*'s Cybermen writ large, claims the article, although it points out that 'the episode which introduces the Borg has a very peculiar title, one which makes little sense in terms of the story: *Q Who*'. Fascinating, captain – our sensors should have picked this up before now.



In summation, what of the magazine overall? I have every issue and don't plan to stop now. It is probably for fans of the show only, really, but it is fun all the same.

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First Impressions

Book Reviews edited by Paul Kincaid

Note: All novels marked  are eligible for the 1998 BSFA Award for Best Novel. All collections and anthologies marked  contain stories that are eligible for the 1998 BSFA Award for Best Short Fiction.

John Barnes

***Earth Made of Glass* **

TOR Books, 1998, 416pp, \$25.95 ISBN 0 312 85851 5

Reviewed by Farah Mendlesohn

John Barnes is one of those writers I've always intended to read but never quite got around to, so I was glad to receive *Earth Made of Glass*. Unfortunately, if we accept the concept that science fiction is built on the novum, or big idea, this book is a wash-out, in part because the real 'big idea' is being, as Baldrick would say, 'cunningly disguised'.

The Big Idea we are expected to be wowed by is the opening of almost instantaneous transportation portals and their fairly immediate effect on any planet which accepts them. So far so unoriginal, but more important is the 'inevitability' of the effect which these portals will have, because Barnes's real big idea is that all planets will succumb to free market capitalism of the kind advocated by Thatcher and Reagan in their heyday and that this will be a GOOD THING. Our protagonist explains that whilst the opening up of the free market Bazaar 'always resulted in a short but very severe economic depression, followed by skyrocketing inflation, followed by an ugly boom and bust cycle' within a decade or so this was replaced by economic stability. Oh to live in his alternate economic universe! The book is an argument for the trickle-down benefits of capital accumulation which I thought had been discredited somewhere in the early 'caring' '90s, but apparently not in Colorado. I wondered if this naïveté was present in his earlier book, *A Million Open Doors*, but sadly it was even worse: religious but repressive culture which manages to feed every one is replaced by non-repressive free market culture which doesn't: locals are held responsible for mitigating the 'natural' effects of the free market.

I could have excused such thumping naïveté and capitalist propaganda if the book had not made me uneasy in two other ways. Superficially, *Earth Made of Glass* is about the free markets creating a

scenario which will encourage cultural tolerance (if not friendship). Unfortunately, this seems to be at odds with the real effects of several decades of neo-imperialist penetration into ex-colonial markets (one of these days our ex-colonies are going to realise that they would be better off fighting us than each other). Beyond the superficiality, however, is a more disturbing notion: that sometimes there is nothing one can do and that if a culture wishes to blow up it will. This would be fine if Barnes didn't introduce both a messiah scenario and the message that we are all controlled by our cultures. We are left with the sense that some cultures are intrinsically superior to others. I really hope that this wasn't intentional.

My final problem with the book may not bother all you New Men out there, but if you are either a confirmed MCP or a feminist this book will make you squirm. The protagonist, Giraut Leones, is the product of a planet called Nou Occitan which had developed a courtly culture based on French romance. When a 'romance' collapses, Giraut looks for adventure and on the dreary planet to which he is assigned meets Margaret who is very plain but intelligent. On the way we are told in a casual remark by Giraut's ex that rape of women was extremely common on Nou Occitan, particularly as a way for men to insult other men but – guess what? – Giraut was never guilty of this; how fortunate for our abilities to identify with the main character. Throughout *Earth Made of Glass* we see Giraut and Margaret's marriage in crisis, not surprising really because Giraut is engaging in the attention-seeking behaviour classic of the New Man: as Margaret becomes more unhappy, he spends lots of time in self-pity wondering if she realises how she is confusing him, but continually congratulating himself on deserting his culture enough to fall in love with a plain woman, effectively 'exoticising' her. There is never any serious attempt to enquire into Margaret's state of mind.

As can probably be gathered, I wasn't impressed. *Earth Made of Glass* is a deeply inferior Iain M. Banks culture novel, and why go for second best?

John Barnes

Kaleidoscope Century

Millennium, 1998, 252pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 75281 657 8

Orbital Resonance

Millennium, 1998, 214pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 75281 659 4

Reviewed by Mat Coward

These two novels, though quite different in tone, are set in the same 21st century universe – not a very jolly century for humans, according to Barnes.

Orbital Resonance is the story of Mel, a thirteen-year-old girl who lives with her family on the 'Flying Dutchman', a 'domesticated asteroid'. Exploiting the wealth of the solar system is the only way that human civilisation might recover, following its collapse back home. Mel was born in space, and finds her parents' Earth attitudes and habits incomprehensible at best. When a new boy arrives in her school class, teenage rivalry develops into violence – and Mel and her friends begin to learn just how far their elders were willing to sacrifice free will in the interests of survival.

Kaleidoscope Century begins with a man waking up on Mars in 2109 with no clear idea of who he is or how he got there. It takes him, and us, the rest of the book to find the answers to these puzzles, because the memories that he does have are massively

contradictory. The short version is that he is a mercenary – but this is one story to which no short version could ever do justice.

Both books feature reluctant narrators unsure of their own reliability as autobiographers, and both debate how far personal identity is determined by freedom of action. (Both touch, by the way, on working-class politics, usually the greatest of taboos in American sf!) *Orbital Resonance* is charming and intelligent, if not exactly action-packed. It features conscious echoes of Heinlein, *Lord of the Flies*, and especially *Catcher in the Rye*. *Kaleidoscope Century* is much more ambitious in theme and structure, a hugely satisfying mixing of many sf streams: satire, future wars, socio-political extrapolation and so on.

Barnes is a terrific writer and storyteller. Unpredictable, though not inconsistent, he confidently and invisibly changes gear from very funny to genuinely shocking and back again. His talent for creating convincing alien eras and places is exceptional. Perhaps his only serious fault is that his fiction is a little overstuffed with good ideas, as his ability to invent occasionally runs ahead of his ability to imagine. Still, I can't think of a better writer of near-future sf currently working.

Stephen Baxter

Traces

Voyager, 1998, 359pp, £16.99 ISBN 0 00 225427 1

Reviewed by Andrew M. Butler

I have to begin by confessing to a dislike of the early stories of Stephen Baxter – or more precisely the short stories published as by S.M. Baxter in *Interzone* up to about 1991. On the other hand, I have enjoyed his recent novels and was quite happy to see *Voyage* and *Titan* on the Clarke Award short lists of their years. So it was with mixed feelings that I came to *Traces*, a collection of twenty-one short stories published between 1988 and the present day, rather confusingly mislabelled a novel on the copyright page.

I've read the volume through in chronological order and in the book's printed order, and on the whole Baxter's development is one of improvement. In some of the early stories (and this is something he hasn't yet thrown off) too many characters are lecturing each other, and even noticing that they are lecturing each other. It is, after all, one of the hard things about hard sf to know how to get the scientific component across without infodumping or the old fashioned, clichéd "As you already know, Colonel," said the Professor" style of dialogue.

A sense of the old fashioned hangs over the whole collection, and this is part of its strength as well as its weakness. An air of nostalgia, but a nostalgia which fortunately isn't always escapist. The stories mostly fall into one of two distinct camps: the alt.space (which he described in these pages in *Vector* 197) and the 'Surface Tension' story. Blish's 1952 story depicted life in a puddle, and the discovery of an outside world by one of its inhabitants, leading to a paradigm shift or conceptual breakthrough. There is perhaps less of a sense of the breakthrough in Baxter's stories, rather there is a quasi-realistic account of life in various extreme conditions, particularly the liquid environment. Take 'Downstream' as an example. A family, perhaps survivors of some ancient crash, live hazily in a stream, which seems to be composed of superliquid rather than water. Following an accident, Stone and Flower are cast adrift downstream, apparently cut off from their

origin. Downstream they begin to learn more of their history, and so they elect to keep on going, in search of answers.

The alt.space stories are more interesting, and more clearly nostalgic than the use of a nearly fifty-year old story as a model. The Challenger explosion has all but killed manned space travel – the horror of the institution which seems inevitably likely to lead to such a situation, together with post-Apollo apathy and post-Mir entropy now means that only a miracle (or a comet heading their

way...) could kick-restart humanity's travels beyond the atmosphere. So we have plural space programs in parallel worlds in 'Moon Six', an astronaut blown by an overheated Cuban missile crisis into a different reality in 'Pilgrim 6', Gagarin sent to Venus rather than dying in an air crash (a cover story for the failure of the mission discussed in the story itself) in 'Zemlya'. But it's not just alternate Cold Wars, we also have alt.Wells or alt.Verne. In 'Columbiad' H.G. Wells learns of a space mission involving a kind of super gun (*à la De la terre à la lune*, but with multiple explosions to achieve acceleration and escape velocity) and in 'A Journey to the King Planet' an anti-ice spaceship is described in language closer to steampunk than you'd expect from a British writer. In 'No Longer Touch the Earth' and 'Mittelwelt' we have two alt.Axis stories featuring Hermann Göring; the former features the Axis Powers finding a literal south pole, the latter a Final Solution for Japan.

Baxter has said that alt.space is not nostalgic, but given this constant harking back to what might have been, it's difficult to see how else to describe it. In these stories Baxter very rarely describes any later than a near future, rather alternative twentieth

centuries. But the nostalgia isn't for a lost golden age that might have been; thankfully for the drama of the stories it's for lost opportunities for things to go wrong.

The most interesting story in the collection is 'Darkness', a title taken from Lord Byron's poetic fragment written around the time that Mary Shelley was writing *Frankenstein*. Having read the poem, and thought that it was a prophecy, a research scientist creates a simulacrum of Byron in order to ask him about the vision. The researcher, Hillegas, seems to be named for Mark R. Hillegas, author of the seminal *The Future as Nightmare: H.G. Wells and the Utopians*, whereas his superior is named Philmus, presumably



named for critic Robert M. Philmus, *Into the Unknown: The Evolution of Science Fiction from Francis Godwin to H.G. Wells*. The prophecy, of ecological disaster seems to be as much a warning of the future destruction of humanity as a revelation of the past. Just as *Homo erectus* was wiped out and made way for *H. sapiens*, so the same could happen to *H. sapiens*. In other words, exactly the same sort of message offered to us by Wells in *The Time Machine and War of the Worlds*.

Taken as a whole, this collection indicates the story-so-far of Baxter's career, and illuminates the obsessions (and weaknesses) of novels such as *Titan*. Perhaps we are just too close to the end of the millennium to be original, but Baxter seems to be looking backwards at the moment. But more often than not, the looking-glass is worth examining.

Greg Bear

Blood Music

Vista, 1998, 263pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 575 60280 5

Reviewed by Gary Wilkinson

Blood Music is one of the classic sf novels of the 1980's. Expanded from a Hugo- and Nebula-winning short story, it was nominated for the 1986 Hugo. For some reason I did not read it when it first came out and it has been on my must-read list for some time. It is therefore a pleasure to read and review it now.

More bio-punk than cyber, it starts in the near future in California's 'enzyme valley' where a researcher is helping to produce a breakthrough in bio-computers. However, behind the company's back he is researching into something more radical with the intention of leaving to start his own company. He goes much

further than producing organic computers by shrinking the computing power down into the cell itself using DNA as the memory/instruction base. The final result is intelligent human lymphocytes (white blood cells) or as he labels them noocytes.

Unfortunately he is discovered in his activities and sacked. In order to protect his experiment and avoid killing his progeny he takes the rather drastic step of injecting them into his own blood stream. The noocytes soon adapt to their new environment and then start to adapt the environment to suit their own ends. This eventually results in an apocalyptic transformation of the whole North American continent. And even more spectacular transformations occur when we move from the realm of biology to physics.

Blood Music is reminiscent of Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End* in its depiction of the evolution of mankind into something other, while Greg Egan's *Permutation City* also comes to mind with its exploration of an 'after-life' of infinite pure thought. Although over ten years old it has only dated in its inclusion of cold war political attitudes.

One quibble is that once the book widens out to the transformed America (and, I assume, from its short story origins) Bear's characters merely describe events without influencing them and some disappear from the plot before the mind-expanding conclusion. However, that aside, this is brilliantly executed sf of the purest kind with that 'sense of wonder' you get with nothing else. It kept me reading into the small hours and gave more respect to the flu virus I had just recovered from. If like me you had not got around to reading it, now's your chance

Gregory Benford

Cosm

Orbit, 1998, 372pp, £10.00 ISBN 1 85723 627 0

Reviewed by Edward James

Cosm is 'a thriller at the cutting edge of science', proclaims the jacket – a claim presumably guaranteed to win more readers than 'the latest exciting offering by the best-known writer of hard sf'. Indeed, Benford may well win readers from outside the sf fold: this book does not need a familiarity with sf themes for it to make sense, as *Great Sky River* (1987) did, and the hard science can be ignored or glossed over much more easily than in *Timescape* (1980). *Cosm* has been optioned by Hollywood: if treated straight it is going to make a science fiction film with a difference – one in which academic politics play a much larger rôle than special effects. It will be interesting to see who they cast as the main character, 'a big black woman with the classic African bulging bust and rear' (p. 6). Maybe he'll just be white.

People whose nostalgia is better developed than their memory sometimes think that in the Good Old Days (back in the 19–s), science fiction used to be about science. Maybe it was; it certainly wasn't about scientists. Indeed, right up to the 1950s, decades after the phenomenon had disappeared in the real world, we had futures in which scientists built gadgets in their back yards, following the Edison model. If we do try to think of science fiction which actually portrays scientists – as opposed to engineers – behaving and thinking as scientists actually do, and showing science as a process and as a job, well, what is there? Benford is one of the few who do it, let alone do it convincingly. *Timescape* stands as one of the best sf books concerned with the process of science, and *Cosm* to some extent updates it. The science involved – the accidental creation of a pocket universe – is much as one would expect from an articulate theoretical physicist, and if one is really interested there is a reading list at the end. The science – in the sense of the knowledge of the universe that it investigates – is fascinating. But in the novel it is rather subordinated to the modern process of science: the endless round of inter-institutional bickering, interdepartmental rivalry, dealing with grant applications, with ambitious PhD students, with pressures for tenure and publication. The setting alternates between the Relativistic Heavy Ion Collider on Long Island and the campus of the University of California at Irvine: Gregory Benford, currently a professor of physics there, has obviously retired (or, God forbid, died), since he plays no part in the action. The academic

background rings true (rather than jarring unbearably, as in Connie Willis's *Doomsday Book*); the characters relate to each other just as convincingly. It is all slick, fast, entertaining, and sometimes even thought-provoking. If it doesn't have the depth of *Timescape* that is perhaps as much to do with the difference between the late 1970s and the slick and superficial world in which we live. But one does get the feeling, as one does with every word that Michael Crichton has written, that it was written with the big screen in mind; and, as with *Artifact* (1985), Benford, the former fan, is not really writing for us, but for that wider audience who is repelled by anything too science-fictional.

Ray Bradbury

Quicker than the Eye

Earthlight, 1998, 262pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 671 01784 5

Peter Crowther & James Lovegrove

Escardy Gap

Earthlight, 1998, 543pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 671 01605 9

Reviewed by L. J. Hurst

Perhaps a mind worm has been let loose, infecting its victims so that they lose their sense of judgement. Under the influence of that worm, some unfortunate soul might go into a bookshop with six pounds and see these two paperback releases from Earthlight. Unfortunately, they can afford only one. It will be the imp of the perverse that makes them pick up Ray Bradbury, find some rationalisation come into their mind, such as 'Oh, he's old', and then take *Escardy Gap* to the counter, feeling happy that they're getting twice as many pages for their money. Because the worm will be rejoicing.

The worm is in *Escardy Gap* already. It has arrived in a train at this small mid-American town, where nothing ever happens, and it is forever 1954. And the worm is in the mind of an unnamed narrator, a man who has sat down at a typewriter in hot New York City, taken a copy of some unidentified sf author from the past, and then found that the typewriter wants him to start feeding it. From the story that follows, the typewriter was manufactured by the same firm that made Theodore Sturgeon's 'Professor's Teddy Bear' – the train brings monsters who will feed on the townsfolk they have isolated.

The town of *Escardy Gap* is cut off, and only one young American boy may be able to use his wits to overcome the

intelligence that drives the monsters. Otherwise the only other escape is the one that narrator makes a couple of times – from his fiction back to his New York City home.

Strangely, the unidentified sf author who drove on the nameless narrator must be Ray Bradbury, and *Escarday Gap* is a pastiche of *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. But what the gap of thirty or forty years shows is that the market has changed. *Escarday Gap* is a 'conte cruel' writ large – a closed community in which near-invincible creatures can inflict any cruelty they wish. Crowther and Lovegrove have the opportunity to describe this cruelty in more detail.

By contrast, what Bradbury himself has done is something completely different. Some time near *Death Is A Lonely Business* he seems to have been reborn and in his latest short story collection he re-discovers the magic of everyday life, and discovers that it need not

be treated twee to be magical. There is some science fiction, such as 'The Finnegan' or 'Dorian in Excelsus', where the creature that maintained Dorian Gray is discovered to be something more alien. But Bradbury also discovers the magic much closer – out of a window, on the lawn, in the stairs at the side of the house. In a house on a steep LA hillside a couple hear the spirits re-working their act on the concrete staircase below their window – Laurel and Hardy forever. A composer listens to the birds in the trees bringing him new melodies. Or the ultimate story of Los Angeles, a family discover the old highway beside the big freeway, winding so much it can never run parallel to the interstate as it takes them through the interior and what remains of the old America.

Of course, Bradbury was there in 1954, so his accounts should be more accurate. Unless he is also a greater fiction-maker. I struggle against the worm to find out.

Lois McMaster Bujold

Memory

Earthlight, 1998, 467pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 671 01607 5

Reviewed by Colin Bird

Lois McMaster Bujold continues her ongoing space opera saga which centres on the exploits of Miles Vorkosigan – aristocratic member of an elite military cast from the planet Barrayer and occasional mercenary. In *Memory* Miles discovers his reanimation treatment – described in the previous award-winning volume, *Mirror Dance* – has left him with a disabling condition which causes occasional seizures. Returning home after a rescue mission in which he had a seizure and seriously injured a hostage, Miles is unable to admit to his superior, Barrayeran security chief Simon Illya, that the accident occurred as a result of his own disability. When his secret is discovered Miles is forced to accept a medical discharge which plunges him into an orgy of despair and self-loathing.

As Miles faces his own demons – not to mention the nightmare of explaining his situation to his parents – Illya develops a crippling disability of his own. A memory chip is malfunctioning within his skull, dumping random memories into his brain; a condition redolent of Alzheimer's. Miles is recalled to duty as the Auditor assigned to investigate whether the security chief's implant has been sabotaged. Miles willingly grabs the chance of redemption.

Memory is yet another dose of intelligent space opera which fans

will enjoy. The scope of this series is mind-numbing; just flick through the appendix which summarises events from eleven other books. This is a more leisurely paced affair than most space opera and any newcomer to Bujold's work may be misled by the bulging blasters and dogfighting spaceships on the cover, inside it's typically Bujoldian intrigue played out against a backdrop of aristocratic social functions.

Although I find the Vorkosigan books crisply written and unpretentious, I think the main character's backstory is beginning to get a little too congested. This sharply reduces the Bujold's capacity to ring the changes and the series is developing a stale quality. Vorkosigan's universe, although inwardly consistent, is totally unbelievable as any kind of fully realised vision of the future, it's too heavily structured around old-fashioned ideals of heroism and honour for that and consequently feels stuffy and constrained.

It's interesting to find a space opera dealing with disability (Miles's brittle-bone disease featured heavily in the earlier volumes). In *Memory* the ramifications of the heroic Miles Vorkosigan developing an epilepsy-style illness (hardly compatible with front-line service) are handled maturely. Unfortunately, the rather feeble accompanying detective strand of the story suffers from a far too obvious villain. However, this is another highly enjoyable, well characterised chunk of elegant space opera.

Orson Scott Card

Heartfire

TOR Books, 1998, 301pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0 312 85054 9

Reviewed by Andy Mills

The first thing to know about *Heartfire* is that it's the fifth book in Card's well-regarded sequence, *The Tales of Alvin Maker*. I know it's well-regarded because I checked the reviews of previous volumes, as well as the trusty *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, in order to make sense of what I was reading. Otherwise this reviewer would certainly have floundered (a résumé of what had gone before would have been useful, perhaps also to those readers who, unlike myself, have been following the adventures of Alvin, given that it's three years since the last volume).

Card depicts an early nineteenth century alternate America. There is a United States, but it co-exists with a number of other independent countries, including one which harbours the English king in exile from a Puritan England. Alvin is the seventh son of a seventh son, and is blessed with miraculous powers in a world where many are, even in a small way, 'talented'. He and his followers are seeking to build a great and just city. Card's portrayal of this alternative world is expertly handled, though I cannot help but feel that he has vastly underestimated the effect that the existence of magic would have on the cultures he depicts. One feature of his series is the appearance of real historical figures (such as the novelist Balzac or the naturalist and artist Audubon) in cameo roles, or sometimes, as with would-have-been President John Adams, with a crucial intervention.

With *Heartfire* Alvin and his companions take on New England's witchfinders, whilst Margaret, Alvin's wife, pits herself against the institution of slavery; indeed, this is a blatant attempt to confront and thus revise two of the darker aspects of American history. The whole is great fun, with a series of vignettes in which Card reveals the talents

of Alvin, Margaret and others (particularly Alvin's rogue younger brother, Calvin) at work. These talents are prodigious: Alvin, for instance, can reshape material (from iron to neural paths), can travel as with seven league boots, and has a 'doodlebug' which can cleanse his body, stimulate glands, or observe events elsewhere. Margaret's talent enables her to see into people's 'heartfires' and read their thoughts and their futures.

The downside of all this is that Alvin is so powerful there is no sense of vulnerability, and thus little real tension in the book: we know he will prevail. Still, the message of the novel – that everyone has the capacity to do good or evil to others, and we must constantly strive to do good – is an important one. Orson Scott Card has admitted that he enjoys 'returning to unfinished acts of imagination, warming myself at fires that only burn the hotter for having lain dormant during all the intervening years'. Given that Alvin doesn't seem any nearer reaching his wonderful city by the end of this novel than he did at the beginning, we can perhaps anticipate many more volumes in this series.

Jonathan Carroll

Kissing the Beehive

Gollancz, 1998, 251pp, £14.99 ISBN 0 575 06612 1

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

Novelist Sam Bayer has a problem. With a signing tour for his last thriller and a fresh advance for the next book he has run up against writer's block. Then he meets and falls for a young woman incongruously named Veronica Lake, an obsessive fan who is determined to do whatever it takes to help him find his muse and complete his Great Work. Inspiration for that comes to him on a visit to his old home town of Crane's View, where, aged 15, he

pulled the body of Pauline Ostrova from the Hudson river. He will tell Pauline's story, and unravel the mystery of her death and that of her boyfriend, convicted of her killing and later found hanged in Sing Sing gaol.

Oddly, as Carroll tells a story of a novelist venturing into new territory, he seems to be doing something of the same himself. *Kissing the Beehive* has none of the supernatural elements or personifications of good and evil or life and death that mark much of his fiction through to *Outside the Dog Museum* and *From the Teeth of Angels*. Not that Carroll has lost any of his scary power; the tension towards the close of the almost mainstream thriller *Kissing the Beehive* is wound tighter than a drum. One of his favourite tactics is to introduce nice people, allow you to get to like and be charmed by them, then he does horrible things to them. Here, though, because of that absence of supernatural intervention, he allows them to do it to each other, which comes as a double shock when people you've invested time in liking, and starting to care about, turn out to have a quite nasty hidden side.

Typical of Carroll, there are moments that totter on the verge of cuteness: Veronica sings 'Uptown Girl' in her sleep; Sam's relationship with his daughter Cassandra has a shade to much of the

doting father/bright, sassy child relationship of American sitcoms.

And, also typical of American sitcoms, there is a rather misguided brief epilogue that ends the book on a cloying note and would have been better left unstated. In between, though, there is a continual alternation of tension and release in the pursuit of the clues to Pauline Ostrova's death, each turn just a bit tighter than the one before. Sam finds a series of mysterious messages and hints laid in his path. Previously close relationships start to degenerate into suspicion and evasions as skeletons come tumbling out of closets. The closer he gets, the nastier things become, finally breaking out into violence, murder and kidnapping, although it seems that someone wants him to uncover the truth and is clearing the path for him. Of course, it's not as simple as that, and what seem like clues may in fact be misdirections and deliberate obfuscation, for the reader as much as for Sam Bayer.

Kissing the Beehive is a fine psychological thriller. Many of the Carroll hallmarks are there, although both it's packaging, absence of overt supernatural elements, and perhaps the price (at £14.99 it is noticeably cheaper than most current genre novels) suggest that this is being pitched towards a mainstream crossover.

Tom Cool

Secret Realms

TOR Books, 1998, 304pp, \$22.95 ISBN 0 312 86417 5

Reviewed by Jon Wallace

'*Secret Realms*, like the work of Roger Zelazny, is sf adventure with a superhero twist' or so it says on the cover blurb. Hmm.

Secret Realms is a future war novel, and it does have a twist; whether it measures up to Zelazny, well maybe not.

A quick plot synopsis: we start in a landscape that is obviously fantastic. Although built on a foundation of our Earth, it quickly becomes apparent that this isn't our Earth. The characters are the Tribe, a small group of super-soldiers who lead vast armies into battle against foes drawn from history: Vikings, Syrians, etc. As we discover that their technology isn't our technology, and that they can manifest themselves as a variety of avatars, it is confirmed that they are not in our reality and it all seems to be like a computer game. But it isn't a game: early in the novel a quick glimpse of the 'real' Earth tells us that these soldiers are controlled from there, or a near-future there, and that the skills that they have developed will be needed very soon...

Louise Cooper

Sacrament of Night

Headline, 1997, 344pp, £17.99 ISBN 0 7472 1716 5

Reviewed by Kathy Taylor

Sacrament of Night is fantasy with a light sprinkling of horror set in the twilight world of the fairy and an alternative Earth. The fairy world owes nothing to Disney, it is a cold colourless world whose pale and dangerous creatures are lured to the vitality of Earth, which is a kind of twisted mirror of a Victorian age where magic is real and fairy hated and feared. The cleverly textured descriptions of these places add to an interesting and original plot but the strength of the book lies in its characterisations.

The three main characters, Charn, Calliope and Foss Agate, are well drawn with interesting and realistically complex motivations. Foss Agate is a well-to-do town physician and a scientist of the arcane arts in a world where studying these arts is the equivalent of

the Victorian Geographic or Royal Society. As the patriarch of his family he expects loyalty and obedience from his second wife and children, but many of his actions are motivated not by the intellectual drive of science nor care for his family but by what occurred to end his first marriage to Calliope's mother. Calliope is a scientist: one of her major drives is the need to know how and why, another is her need for acceptance when there are few women scientists and the chance to join the Institute of Natural Sciences is very important to her. Her compassion for Charn also wars against her well-ingrained filial obedience. Charn is the latest emissary from the twilight world who travels to Earth to find out what happened to his friend, the Queen's son, who vanished there many years before.

I cannot discuss Charn's motivations too deeply as it would give away too much of the plot and diminish the reader's pleasure and, indeed, I recommend this book as a pleasure to read.

Dennis Danvers

Circuit of Heaven

Avon Books, 1998, 373pp, \$14.00 ISBN 0 380 97447 9

Severna Park

Hand of Prophecy

Avon Books, 1998, 307pp, \$14.00 ISBN 0 380 97639 0

Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

J.G. Ballard's chief complaint about science fiction is that it is not a literature won from experience – which might allow its writers a degree of creative freedom barred to others, but also allows them to

fudge hard choices, claiming (say) that this is the way their future society works and readers must either like it or lump it. As a result, it's difficult to accept some of the claims made for sf's relevance – the characters may be engaging, the plots satisfying, the story well-told, but the message not firmly grounded in reality.

This is the case with Severna Park's *Hand of Prophecy*, set in a complex multi-cultural far future space-going society reminiscent of C J Cherryh and early Elizabeth Lynn. The author herself says on the dust-jacket that she is 'obsessed with the balance of power in relationships', and how people manipulate both others and

themselves to get what they want, but any message we might draw about our own behaviour in the here and now is undermined by the thumping illogicality of a far future space-going society based on slaves and slavery – because cheap space travel necessarily implies cheap technology, so why not use that instead of squandering money on servants who have to be clothed and fed every day? That the story ends in an arena, in a gorily over-detailed gladiatorial combat, only increases its irrelevance.

Dennis Davies's *Circuit Of Heaven*, which is better written, is set in the middle of the next century, when most people have downloaded their consciousness into a computer and only a few rebels – survivalists, dissenters and fundamentalists – remain outside in the real world. This, of course, engages with one of today's

Robert Holdstock

Gate of Ivory

Voyager, 1998, 287pp, £16.99 ISBN 0 00 224604 X

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

Gate Of Ivory is Robert Holdstock's new excursion into Ryhope Wood, and explores the territory – in both the physical and spiritual sense – from the point of view of Christian Huxley, the brother of Stephen who was the protagonist of *Mythago Wood*. One of the interesting aspects of the book, in my view, is the way that the shift of perspective throws new light on the events of the earlier novel.

This may have been one of Holdstock's intentions, for shifts of perspective are very much at the centre of this new work. The title refers to Homer's *Odyssey*, quoted by Holdstock, where false dreams come through the Ivory Gate, and true dreams through the Gate of Horn. Many characters in the book are challenged to discover what is true and what is not. In Ryhope Wood, different truths can be valid for different characters, or for the same characters at different stages of their quest. Nothing is necessarily as it seems. For Christian, the question 'what is true' becomes vital as he tries to discover how his mother really died, and whether the wood can give her back to him.

Holdstock expresses his themes in an adaptation of the Arthurian story of Culhwch and Olwen from the *Mabinogion*. In the original version, the young warrior Culhwch is aided by Arthur's warriors, notably Kei, in performing a vastly complex series of tasks to win the hand of Olwen, daughter of the giant

fantasies about life beyond 'the spike', and ought to be interesting – but it takes half the novel for the plot to finally get under way, and in the end is merely a soppy tale of two parents already inside the computer trying to entice their rebel son to join them. The far more interesting sub-plot, about the religious response to the downloading of consciousness, resolves into cartoon bomb-throwing terrorism, utterly avoiding the question which real theologians will ask themselves if consciousness ever is computerised: what happens to the soul?

That would have been a much harder novel to write, and perhaps not one with a great audience. But it would have been much more relevant.

Yspaddaden. Holdstock plays down the Arthurian elements and presents Culhwch (Kylhuk in the novel) as a Celtic warrior leading an enormous band of followers in the completion of his tasks.

As a young boy, Christian Huxley is marked *slathan* by one of these followers, and part of his purpose in the book is to discover what that means. Kylhuk also has discoveries to make, that the set of tasks he was given is not just the usual testing to discover his worth as a husband for Olwen, but conceals a secret purpose. Their mutual discoveries lead to a stunning climax where Celtic legend gives way to Greek myth, and Christian finds himself in the role of Orpheus.

I enjoyed this book very much. While it contains what we have now come to expect from Ryhope Wood, such as the changing nature of the mythagos, the importance of masks and ceremonies, at the same time I felt the narrative line is stronger than in Holdstock's previous novels. This may be because I'm familiar with his source material, but I think there's also a greater clarity in the writing. It's also very funny. I have never thought of Holdstock as a humorous writer, but he sees here an absurdity in the posturing of warriors, and in Christian's wry reaction to his situation, which I found very successful.

I recommend this book without reservation. I have read the earlier Ryhope Wood novels, and this was not what I expected. Holdstock is opening up whole new areas of his material. And it has sent me back to read *Mythago Wood* again, for the light which it sheds on the earlier work.

Harry Harrison

Stars and Stripes Forever

Hodder & Stoughton, 1998, 323pp, £16.99 ISBN 0 340 68917 X

NEL, 1998, 323pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 340 68918 8

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

In November 1861, a matter of months after the first great battle of the American Civil War at Manassas, a Union warship stopped a British vessel in international waters and forcibly removed two Confederate representatives bound for London and Paris. The resultant incident almost brought Britain into the war (the British forces in Canada were reinforced by 11,000 extra troops) before Lincoln quietly backed down and released the two diplomats. Given that the American Civil War has generated whole libraries of alternate histories, this event, the Trent Incident, which could have changed the course of history so dramatically, has been crying out to be exploited. What a shame, then, that when Harry Harrison finally gets round to doing so the result should be so dire.

It doesn't start out all that badly. Harrison understands the period reasonably well and if there is no depth whatsoever in his portrait of events before the point of change, such has never been Harrison's strength anyway and he can do action and adventure as well as ever. But once things divert from the course of history, his grip fails him completely.

There are (relatively) minor technical points which make the story hard to take. He has naval vessels taking out forts with a single volley, when experience during the Civil War itself suggests that ships could pound away for days or even weeks without much effect



(and the accuracy of every single gunner, or rifleman, is next to miraculous). And Harrison has taken rather too literally the claim that the Union's ironclad Monitor spent the immediate doom of the wooden warship: every single encounter between British and American navies results in the total destruction of the British fleet and barely a scratch on the American ships.

But it is the big picture that disappoints so monumentally. If there is a point to using the Trent Incident as the starting point for an alternate history, then it is surely to examine how the Union would fare suddenly faced with a war on two fronts. It seems, therefore, at the very least wilful and at the worst lunatic to end the Civil War the moment the British come on the scene: but that is exactly what Harrison does. The British army is portrayed as being as powerful and battle-hardened as indeed it was; but the troops are ludicrously undisciplined and every single officer is shown to be a

dolt. An intended raid on Deer Island off the coast of Mississippi, a base for the Union blockade of Southern ports, goes wrong and the British army actually attacks Biloxi, still in Confederate hands. Now mistakes like this happen in war, but what does the air-head Commander in Chief of the British army decide? We'll pretend it was intentional and go on to invade the Confederacy. Instantly William Tecumseh Sherman comes out from behind Union lines at Shiloh to help the South repel the invaders, peace between North and South is declared in the face of a common enemy, Sherman is made head of both armies (another no-no, the Southern generals

alone were so obsessed with rank and precedence that this would have precipitated a mass mutiny, beside which at the time (1862) Sherman was a long way down the Union pecking order), and the re-United States go on to humble the British. I don't believe a word of it. This is not a serious working out of a possible alternate history, it is just playing fast and loose with the facts. None of this could have happened.

And this is only the first volume in a projected trilogy. What on earth is Harrison going to inflict on us next?

David G. Hartwell (Ed) *The Science Fiction Century*
 Robinson, 1998, 1005pp, £14.99 ISBN 1 85487 861 1
 Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

There are two ways to look at David Hartwell's latest massive anthology: one can either look at it as an accumulation of unrelated fiction, or one can examine it in terms of the apparatus that holds all these stories together.

There is an apparatus: the title, the introduction, the introductions to individual stories all tell us as much. Unfortunately, it is impossible to work out what that apparatus actually is. We might guess that it is in some way a survey of science fiction over the last century. But if so, it is a very incomplete survey: major writers (Asimov, Heinlein, Clarke, Stapledon, Ballard, Aldiss, Dick, Le Guin) are all missing. There is no attempt to illuminate the development of the genre in any way: the stories are not in chronological order, many are not even dated; it is only about half-way through that the story introductions start to cross-refer to each other; major movements (feminist sf, the British new wave) are ignored completely. If there is a theme, then the introduction insists it is that science fiction is overwhelmingly

American, at least in terms of its most profound influences; yet the anthology includes (in translation) more non-English language sf than any other anthology I can recall, with no attempt to tie it in with what was being done in American sf. By comparison, there are several early British writers (Lewis, Wells, Forster, Kipling) but none more recent than John Wyndham, and the only Australian writer represented is George Turner. We don't even know for sure what the century is that Hartwell refers to: his introduction begins: 'The twentieth century is the science fiction century', but he includes two stories from the 1890s and (other than a story in which the translation is copyrighted 1996, though it was presumably published in its original Polish some years before that) no story more recent than 1991. If we try to look at this book as guided by an historical or critical apparatus, we look in vain.

The picture is far, far brighter, however, if we see it simply as a random collection of science fiction stories. There are a couple of duds here: 'Ministering Angels' by C.S. Lewis is an embarrassment

that should never have been allowed to see the light of day, and others – by Mildred Clingerman, William Tenn, Frank Herbert and Eddy Bertin, for instance – aren't really likely to set anyone on fire. There are some authors represented by stories some way short of their best – James Tiptree Jr., Margaret St Clair, Rudyard Kipling, Cordwainer Smith – while others are represented by stories so over-familiar they have become cliché – how many times must William Gibson's 'Johnny Mnemonic' be reprinted when he has written other stories as good if not better? Those quibbles out of the way, however, this is a collection that is full of delights. H.G. Wells's 'A Story of the Days to Come', for instance, clearly pin-points a half-way house in the evolution of the Eloi and the Morlocks from the haves and have-nots of Victorian society. 'The Machine Stops' by E.M. Forster and 'The Scarlet Plague' by Jack London are excellent stories that are important in the history of science fiction but all too rarely reprinted these days. Come to that, when did you last see Charles Harness's wonderful 'The Rose' in print? And this is the first time that 'Another World' by J.H. Rosny aîné has been published since it was first translated by Damon Knight for his *A Century of Science Fiction* in 1963, though it remains to my mind one of the very finest science fiction stories there has been.



pleasure, therefore, to be able to find such huge and generally excellent stories as John Crowley's 'Great Work of Time', John Wyndham's 'Consider Her Ways', Roger Zelazny's 'He Who Shapes' and Nancy Kress's 'Beggars in Spain' together in one place. The last two, for instance, have both been expanded into novels, which makes it doubly unlikely that these original novellas would find their way into print once more.

Ignore whatever it was Hartwell might have been trying to do with this anthology, and just relish this unprecedented opportunity to discover so many great science fiction stories all together in one very readable book.

John Kessel *Corrupting Dr Nice* [1]
 Gollancz, 1998, 287pp, £16.99 ISBN 0 575 06611 3
 Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

'The best time-travel novel ever written,' says Kim Stanley Robinson in his cover puff. Perhaps not, but *Corrupting Dr Nice* is still corruptingly brilliant.

The rapaciously exploitative Saltimbanque Corporation has established time-stages in various parts of the past – not to observe,

but to take over. So, in early first century Jerusalem, the tempanauts have booted out the Roman occupying forces (but then immediately rehired them, with assault rifles, as a local militia), turned Herod's palace into a hotel, built a baseball stadium next to the Temple, and commenced flogging imported (from the twenty-first century) trinkets to the local youth – who respond by aping the new conquerors' music and fashion styles, and dreaming of escape to the promised land up-time. The Zealots, disgusted by this corruption, have weapons smuggled in from the future, for an eventual assault on the time-travellers. They include the former disciple Simon the

Zealot, enraged at the tempnauts' snatching Jesus away just before the Crucifixion, so that instead of ascending to Heaven he now does dogfood commercials and celebrity spots on twenty-first century TV chat shows. You don't need to read much of this to grasp the object of Kessel's satire: First World tourism to exotic Third World locations, and the socially and culturally disrupting effects it has on the local people pushed aside to make way for our luxury hotels and private beaches. And economically distorting effects, too: just as Third World locals receive poverty wages for menial cleaning jobs while the money we spend in the hotels' bars and poolsides is repatriated to their First World owners, so Kessel's tempnauts treat the inhabitants of first century Jerusalem as idiots and steal their possessions for souvenirs.

Inevitably, the Zealots' revolt fails, and a group of them are taken up-time to stand trial for taking, in Herod's hotel basement, the three hostages who are our viewpoint characters: Genevieve Faison and her father August, swindlers and con-artists; and Owen Vannice, a rich innocent pursuing some ludicrous theory of dinosaur socialisation. In the twenty-first century, they collect a ripe

assortment of venal and self-deluding associates and hangers-on, all out for whatever they can get – but, as in first-century Jerusalem, Kessel's characters are less important than the second target of his satire: the post-modernist relativism which reduces human history to a cultural smorgasbord, and our consumerist desire for ceaseless novelty.

Thus cocktail parties at which the real inhabitants of the twenty-first century appear in the archaic clothing styles of the past, while transplanted 'historicals' show up in the fatigues of lunar colonists – Shakespeare, Benjamin Franklin, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky – and the musical super-group of John Coltrane, Frank Liszt and Wolf Mozart plays some nifty blues. (Kessel acknowledges Bruce Sterling's 'Mozart in Mirrorshades' as his prime source of inspiration in a magnificently cod-Hollywood note of thanks at the end.) Elsewhere, Abraham Lincoln and Jesus deliver the closing addresses at Simon the Zealot's trial. He gets off.

I don't think I ever really laughed out loud during any of this; but I snorted and giggled quite a lot. You lot better vote for it next year's BSFA Award, or I'll rip your heads off.



Elizabeth A. Lynn

Dragon's Winter

Macmillan, 1998, 358pp, £16.99 ISBN 0 333 72372 4

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

Dragon's Winter is Elizabeth Lynn's first foray into fantasy since her well regarded '*Chronicles of Tornor*' trilogy some ten years or so ago.

Two sons are born to the Dragonlord, Kojiro Atani, but they are certainly not identical twins. The elder, Karadur, inherits his father's shapechanging abilities, whereas Tenjiro, the younger and physically weaker of the two, is a sorcerer. Jealous of his brother's ability to change into a dragon like his father, Tenjiro devises a way to steal Karadur's ability away from him using forbidden and arcane magic. Having successfully stolen Karadur's 'magic', he flees to the frozen wastes of the north; there to build his empire and fortress against the certain coming of Karadur.

This is a fairly bog-standard fantasy in a world peopled by those with magic, and those without. Magic generally takes the form of shapechanging, and is represented throughout the book by bears,

wolves birds and, of course, dragons. It's nicely handled, and one develops a liking instantly for some of the major characters in this book. This is marred however, by Lynn's seeming coldness towards her characters and her penchant for removing them from the story before the reader has really found out a great deal about them, and usually doing so in an extremely brutal way. It is difficult to care too much about characters when the author appears to care so little about them herself.

As in a lot of fantasies of this kind, Tenjiro's nastiness is a result of him tampering with forces no mortal should, and his actions throughout are therefore not his own. The temptation to feel sorry for him at the end of the book is sadly ruined by the impermanence of any of the characters throughout – good or evil.

This is a well crafted tale by an author whose return to fantasy has been long-awaited by many of her fans, though it may not be the return the fans hoped for. It is a cold book, and is devoid of any semblance of human warmth and hope. *Dragon's Winter* left this reader feeling strangely drained by the unremitting scheming, deaths and betrayal – rather than intrigued.

Ian McDowell

Merlin's Gift

Aconoxia, 1997, 251pp, \$5.99 ISBN 0 380 78197 2

Reviewed by Kathy Taylor

This is the sequel to *Mordred's Curse* but, provided you have the usual background knowledge of the Arthurian legend, you don't really need to have read the previous book in the series.

Merlin's Gift has a most attention grabbing first line: 'None of this would have happened if Guinevere's little sister hadn't grown a penis' – and it maintains this interesting, slightly off-balance tone for most of the book. The Arthurian story is told from Mordred's viewpoint which gives it a different voice to most of the hero-centred recitals of the tale. After all, the tale of poor doomed Arthur and Camelot 'sounds like the basis for a grand, sad story, doesn't it? Well perhaps it is, if you're not one of the ones it happened to.' Instead of concentrating on chivalry, great battles, betrayal and a doomed love affair we get people, people who have real complex relationships and motivations, whose emotional responses arise from the history of their experience. Mordred is more concerned with the petty problems of his everyday life – such as being cold, or having wet clothes, or how much a person smells – than with the future of the Kingdom. Arthur has faults: at times willingly blind to events,

he struggles with his failing faith and sometimes acts against his judgement. Guinevere married Arthur for a modicum of comfort and autonomy. Her great love is not for one of his knights but for her little half-sister who, in part perhaps, replaces the child she cannot have.

The first person viewpoint works very well and by seeing through Mordred's eyes we are given not just a sense of the people but of the place. The descriptions of the rebuilt Roman palace with its luxury of under-floor heating contrasts well with the more primitive conditions encountered elsewhere. There is also a sense of realism in the mores and social conditions described.

Merlin's Gift is a novel I recommend for the skilled writing as well as for a pleasing version of the oft-retold Arthurian legend

Ken MacLeod

The Cassini Division

Orbit, 1998, 240pp, £15.99 ISBN 1 85723 603 3

Reviewed by Gary Dalkin

These are the adventures of Cassini Division starship trooper Ellen May Ngwethu, who falls to earth in search of Isambard Kingdom Malley, the physicist whose early work led to the creation of a wormhole near Jupiter, but who has since opted out of the Solar

Union. Malley is required to plot a course through the wormhole to the 'lost' colony of New Mars. Meanwhile descendants of the 'post-human' cybernetic intelligences which created the wormhole and attempted to 'crash' human civilisation in the 21st century have emerged in Jupiter's upper atmosphere. The Division intends to destroy the Jovians with a cometary bombardment, but Malley refuses to co-operate unless an attempt at contact is made – and that contact brings evidence to suggest that a beautiful, peaceful society has arisen in the Jovian clouds. The question is, are the Jovians what they seem, or a deadly threat to humankind?

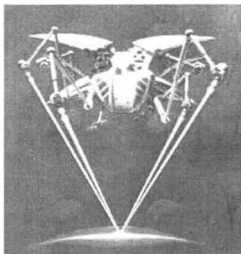
In essence this is same plot, with the same dilemma at its core, as Greg Bear's *Anvil of Stars*, while Ellen's approach to various cybernetic and 'post-human' intelligences brings the book into the philosophical territory explored by Greg Egan. MacLeod, though, is deeply conservative, where Egan explores the cybernetic life from the inside, Ellen looks on from outside, filled with fear, paranoia and xenophobia. There is a moment when we think she is about to be proved wrong, but MacLeod chooses the conventional, intellectually lazy, path which leads to a moderately exciting space-opera finale playing like a reactionary Hollywood inversion of *Permutation City* or *Diaspora*. If it's alien, kill it.

The Cassini Division endorses a primitive, barbaric philosophy derived from Crowley's 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law', here described as 'The True Knowledge', that morality is an ideology, that good is 'good for us' and that you should do what you want for as long as you can get away with it. Even if you do not conclude that this is infantile, irresponsible and dangerous, MacLeod fails to make his tale convince, for although there is much ingenious detail scattered throughout the book, and several pleasing in-jokes for fans, the whole is beset by implausibility.

Ellen is over 260 years old, and several other characters have similarly extended longevity, yet though her memories inform the plot wherever necessary, MacLeod never really addresses how it feels to have lived so long. Our heroine could be seeking revenge for something which happened 20, not 200 years ago. Her crew have been together for almost two centuries, yet they behave like a pack of promiscuous students with a spaceship. More a stale 60s left-over than a visionary semi-utopian future.

Malley has, because of moral and philosophical objections, lived

in self-imposed exile from the Solar Union for over a century; yet we are expected to believe that he will, on the basis of one short conversation, join Ellen, leave his job and flee half-way across the solar system. Conveniently, he has no attachments. We are also expected to believe that the 70-year-old Yeng, who is a computer



programmer and member of Ellen's crew (and not a total recluse or an imbecile), has never encountered the concepts of 'morality' or 'God'. This absurdity is compounded when Suze the Sociologist explains: 'We know now that if we want other people to stop doing bad things...' The absurdity being, of course, that Yeng understands what 'bad' means. Later in the book this comes to appear even more ridiculous when the crew exchanges religious ideas and find that they are quite familiar with such concepts.

The Cassini Division is a short book by current standards. Which is not to say it lacks content; indeed, it could be considered a large book made small, with many implications condensed into a comparatively small space. It is a rare example of a book which would benefit from being much longer, for considerable chunks of the story are conveyed in 'info dumps' which would be more gripping by far expanded into fully dramatised sequences: too much telling and not enough showing. That said, this is a work filled with original technological and scientific details, and while much will be broadly familiar to anyone who has read the two Gregs, or indeed Iain M. Banks or Peter F. Hamilton, MacLeod applies his own perspective.

The Cassini Division is more imaginative and much less prone to becoming mired in interminable political hair-splitting than *The Star Fraction*, the first volume in this future history. Although this is the third book in the sequence, it stands alone and requires no knowledge of *The Stone Canal*. The writing is frequently admirable, the humour wry in a very Scottish way (the chapter titles are appropriately chosen from the tides of classic leftist/utopian genre novels), and the narrative frequently cleverer than you might imagine, though not as clever as the author probably imagines. There are good ideas here, but the characters do not live and much of the thinking strikes an odd balance between sophisticated self-awareness and political and philosophical naiveté. Entertaining and frustrating in roughly equal measures, *The Cassini Division* is not in the Premier League.

Sean McMullen

The Centurion's Empire

TOR Books, 1998, 383pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0 312 85131 6

Reviewed by Graham Andrews

'Vitellian's journey to the twenty-first century began on the Tethyrian Sea, during an equinox gale in the autumn of the year 71, Anno Domini': kick-start paragraph of *The Centurion's Empire*, by Sean McMullen.

It was in Britannia where (Vitellian) learned that by embracing coldness he could indeed live forever, and in an act of petty revenge he designed and built the world's second human-powered time machine'. After that, McMullen doesn't let the chlorophyll synthesize under his Mercurian feet. Frigidarium Glacial, Tempiorians, Furtivus Legion, Venumm Immortale, Doria (the current Mistress of Revival), Primus Fort ... and Jove knows what all else.

I hate the précis school of book reviewing to pieces: 'And then he does this, and then he does that, and then he does something else' – and so on, *ad nauseam*. In any case, a necessarily partial plot summary of *The Centurion's Empire* would be worse than no plot summary at all. It reads, essentially, like *The Once and Future King* crossed with *When the Sleeper Wakes*. (Also *Highlander* – the good bits.)

McMullen eschews humour, for the most part – mainly because his characters have little to laugh about. At times, however, I was

reminded of Ron Goulart's *When the Waker Sleeps* (1975). Frigidarium Glacial might be Latin for 'cold bath' (rough translation) but it gave me this mental picture of a fridge with the Glacier Mints fox locked inside. *Mystic Meg's Dream Book* is silent on the subject. More seriously, McMullen tends to tell, not show (as pp.100-106), but he can also make the dead past come alive. My favourite 'sidetrip' is the Prince Alfred bit (Wessex, the British Isles: 16 February 870, Anno Domini). Far-fetched? Hey! The records from that era are a bit spotty at best.

If Vitellian lacks any real vitality, he isn't the novel's only undramatic persona; Celcius – the Hari Seldon-type founder of the Tempiorians – should have held centre stage for much longer. But McMullen would be justified in asking us: 'All this non-stop leapin' about – and you want in-depth character stuff as well? Strewth!'

Eric S. Nylund

Signal to Noise

Avon Books, 1998, 371pp, \$23.00 ISBN 0 380 97513 0

Reviewed by Alan Fraser

Don't blurb writers ever read other books? Nylund's *Signal to Noise* is lauded on the cover as the first book to go beyond cyberpunk into a new genre christened 'hyperpunk': 'science fiction for the new millennium with the boundary between reality and virtual reality wherever we want to define it'. Well, Jeff Noon's *Vurt* and

Alexander Besh's *Rim* have already explored much the same territory, to name but two.

Signal To Noise is set in 2070, when the map of the world is much changed because of global warming and a cataclysmic Californian earthquake. Nylund, a Californian who now lives in Seattle, has drowned most of his home state including the cities of Los Angeles and San Francisco. Jack Potter, a struggling university researcher into cryptography, lives in the new city of Santa Sierra, on an island off the West Coast (where the Coastal Range now is). Like all cyberpunk heroes, Jack is a hustler – he takes on questionable contracts in order to finance his research, which of course soon leads him into trouble when a rival for Jack's tenure shaps him.

In true timely fashion, Jack discovers an intelligent message from the stars hidden deep in the background radiation of space, and quickly establishes faster-than-light communication with some 'friendly' aliens who are keen to trade information with us. Needless to say, once the powers-that-be and Jack's rivals get a hint

that something big is going down, Jack finds himself in a fast-moving and very dangerous game in which no-one, not even his closest friends, can be trusted. He has no idea who is on his side, or even what side he's on!

The first trade from the aliens involves a 'virus' which repairs DNA faults in humans, curing radiation and toxicological damage, as well as killing cancers and other diseases. The downside is that it does such a thorough job of editing your genes that you don't necessarily stay yourself. Jack's girlfriend Isabel takes the alien virus and has a personality change, becoming much harder and amoral, and eventually his enemy. The bad guys infect Jack with terminal cancer so he is forced to take the virus himself. One would therefore have expected Jack's behaviour to change after his recovery, but it doesn't as far as I could tell. He still keeps on a-hustling to save himself, the planet and the human race!

Verdict: nowhere near as cyberpunk as one is led to expect, let alone hyperpunk, but nevertheless a fast-paced space opera with a hard science infusion and a climactic finish!

Christopher Priest

The Extremes [11]

Simon & Schuster, 1998, 393pp, £16.99 ISBN 0 684 81632 6

Reviewed by Janet Barron

Christopher Priest is big on minutiae.

In his hands, these small details are assembled into narratives where themes echo and re-echo, obliquely reinforcing the main thrust of the narrative, adding depth with each iteration. In *The Extremes* Priest does this more overtly than ever before, taking virtual reality and extrapolating it into Ex-Ex, Extreme Experience, where sex, violence, and the best and worst of human nature are available on tap. In so doing he makes it his own.

Meet Teresa Simons, who has to make sense out of a harsh and uncompromising reality. Her husband is dead. She is drawn back to her English roots, and to the small town of Bulverton where, on the same day as her husband was shot in a senseless killing by a Texas gunman, another gunman went on a spree and carried out a massacre with haunting similarity to the US killings. Her life has already encompassed Ex-Ex in the form used by the FBI to train operatives to respond correctly in violent situations. She is trained to re-entering the same shocking scenario of carnage and interacting until she can 'get it right', but nothing has trained her to deal with personal grief and the finality of bereavement.

Teresa does not find the commonality she had hoped for. Bulverton is a town where grief is not manifest. It shows in what is

absent rather than what is present and those who experienced similar losses, while not unfriendly, are not forthcoming in sharing their experience. In order to assuage her need to understand the killings, to find some trigger for the apparently motiveless explosion of slaughter, Teresa will not accept this surface calm. Probing into the events of that day, she discovers discrepancies and mysteries. The movements of the killer leave some time unaccounted for. Then Teresa finds herself in conflict with the powerful and wealthy corporation responsible for creating scenarios for Ex-Ex, who have their own reasons why she should leave well alone. Frustrated, and faced with the blanketing inertia of the Bulverton residents, she also uses the local outlet of Ex-Ex, in its booming commercial form, to satisfy her need to be doing something. Thus begins her weaving of a complex network of linked virtual experiences, and the emergence of pattern from chaos.

Where *The Prestige* relied on the impact of its sheer cleverness of plot and virtuoso world-building, *The Extremes* adds an element of emotional power stronger than in any other of Priest's works. *The Extremes*, whether or not the reader anticipates the twists as they occur, is immensely satisfying in its final resolution. It deals with questions – Is my reality your reality? How can we make sense of random, hurtful events? – that haunt us all. The concept of virtual reality might have been invented in order for Priest to use it in this way.

The best yet. Read it and re-read it.

Mickey Zucker Reichert

The Children of Wrath [11]

Orion, 1998, 516pp, £11.99 ISBN 1 85798 445 5

Reviewed by Lesley Hatch

The trouble with this book is that the length could be cut by half with no problems; however, it's not a bad story.

It takes place in the Kingdom of Bearn, where we get introduced to one of the book's main themes: babies, the lack of them, and the curse which caused sterility for the Bearne and surrounding realms. The only way to combat the curse is to make sure a woman conceives within two weeks of her giving birth. Sounds complicated? It is. The other main theme is the quest for the Pica Stone which, if the elves living in Bearn are to be believed, may help to lift the curse. This piece of information only emerges after considerable exposition, which is a trademark of every discussion that takes place.

However, when the elves summon the Stone, it materialises minus seven shards, located in various realms, requiring a group of seven to visit each realm, find the shards, and bring them back. After more discussion, the quest begins; then a further problem manifests itself when one of the party turns out to be an imposter, but they're stuck with her, as there have to be seven individuals and the transport spell is keyed only to them.

The quest itself is fairly ordinary – there are tasks to perform,

and each realm yields a shard, with varying degrees of difficulty. The most chilling experience occurs early on, when we encounter a village of 'females', actually spirit spiders, who steal peoples' souls. For one group member it's a terrifying prospect, as she hopes to enter Valhalla one day and she needs her soul for that. Much later on, she discovers it was her unborn child's soul that was stolen (the child, incidentally, is the product of rape, and is destined to become the King of Pudar's heir).

The novel also includes a seemingly interminable and irrelevant battle between the Norse gods and an immortal warrior. Then it ends with the curse being lifted, and the soulless baby is returned to its mother. I concede some of the explanation in this novel is necessary, as it's the second volume in a series: I'd recommend it to the dedicated Renshai fan, which I'm not.

Mike Resnick

A Hunger in the Soul

TOR Books, 1998, 221pp, \$21.95 ISBN 0 312 85438 2

Reviewed by John D. Owen

Mike Resnick seems to have carved a niche for himself as the author who writes about Africa. Many of his earlier novels and short stories were based on African themes and characters, and his latest work is no exception. Sure, the setting is an alien planet but the story being played out upon it is pure Stanley searching for Livingstone in an analogue of the Dark Continent, with a few elements of H. Rider Haggard and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of*

Darkness thrown in for good measure.

The narrator is a former explorer in reduced circumstances who is contacted by Robert Markham, a powerful journalist. Markham wants to organise an expedition to find Michael Drake, a famous medical researcher who disappeared into the jungle of Bushveld years before. Drake might hold the key to a cure for a plague that is devastating populations on a large number of worlds. The narrator soon finds that Markham's ruthless need for attention-grabbing stories to maintain public interest in the expedition make him a dangerous man to be around. And as Drake may have a very good reason for remaining hidden in the jungle, the outcome of their expedition might well end in a deadly confrontation between hunter and quarry.

Roger Robinson (Re)Commended Science Fiction

Becon Publications, 1998, 44pp, £3.50 ISBN 1 870824 40 7

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

This booklet is part of an on-going project: the building of a core library at the Science Fiction Foundation. As part of that project, Roger Robinson has a list of novels that have won or been shortlisted for major science fiction awards, or which have been listed as 'notable books' in one of five reference sources: *Modern Fantasy: The Hundred Best Novels and Science Fiction: The Hundred Best Novels* both edited by David Pringle, *Anatomy of Wonder* edited by Neil Barron, 333: *A Bibliography of the Science-Fantasy Novel* edited by Joseph H. Crawford, James J. Donohue and Donald M. Grant, and *Science Fiction: The Illustrated Encyclopedia* edited by John Clute. The resultant list of over 1,200 books which came out of this trawl are simply listed by author with date of original publication and a code saying which source it came from.

As a basic list of books that should be in a core library, such as that at the Foundation, this is, of course, invaluable. As a reference work for the rest of us, its value is less clear. For a start, not every award is listed – the BSFA Award is probably the most notable omission. The titles taken from the reference books are largely a matter of editorial whim, there is no consistent standard that says what Pringle, for instance, considers a notable book is the same as what Barron or Clute would choose. And why these five books but

As a fast and colourful story, *A Hunger in the Soul* works well. Resnick keeps the narrative stripped down and simple and moves the plot along at a cracking pace. The characters are best pulp cardboard, but Resnick does keep a nice ambivalence at the end about Markham and his ruthless and manipulative drive to attain his journalistic goals. Where the story falls down is in its lack of ambition – overall it is simplistic, its storyline predictable and filled with clichés, its protagonists Hollywood stock (just fill in the appropriate character actors). In many ways, this is a throwback to pulp sf history, which is a shame as Resnick has proved himself capable of much better work in the past. But it's certainly entertaining, as long as the brain is left in idle throughout.

not, for instance, C.N. Manlove's *Modern Fantasy* or Nicholas Ruddick's *Ultimate Island* or even David Pringle's *The Ultimate Guide to Science Fiction*? The fact that Spider Robinson's *Melancholy Elephants* scored in the annual *Locus* poll earns it an entry here, though nobody else seems to consider this is in any way a notable book.

Not only that, the listings tell us very little, not even whether the titles are novels, collections or anthologies. The books aren't even listed in any recognisable order under each author: thus, under Geoff Ryman we get *The Child Garden* (1988, a novel) followed by *Unconquered Countries* (1994, a collection) followed by *The Unconquered Country* (1986, a novella) followed by *Was...* (1992, a novel, though the variant title, *Was* (without the ellipsis), is not given). Close examination shows that these are actually in alphabetical order not allowing for the article (*The* or *A*), but without moving the article to the end of the title to make clear the nature of the order. A listing of titles not just by author but by award or by source would have given us a little more.

As a basic list of titles, this is interesting. But it has to be an on-going series to be useful, and it has to give us more than is contained here to be really useful.

(Re)Commended Science Fiction is available from Becon Publications, 75 Rosslyn Avenue, Harold Wood, Essex RM3 0RG

Jane Routley

Fire Angels

Avon Books, 1998, 436pp, \$13.00 ISBN 0 380 79425 X

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

It is always a pleasure to come across a new author (well, new to this reviewer, although *Fire Angels* is Jane Routley's second novel) who can be unreservedly recommended to any reader who enjoys fantasy. Even the most biased fantasy fan has to admit that the genre does have a tendency towards 'more of the same', so an author who manages to find something original to say about magic, mages, heirs to thrones and the like is always welcome.

Fire Angels continues the story of the young mage Dion begun in *Mage Heart*, but it is not necessary to have read the first book before reading this one. Dion is an extremely powerful mage. Those who have only heard her described as the 'Demon-Slayer of Gallia' are usually surprised to discover that the mage who fought and overcame a demon is only a young woman, particularly as in her world women who possess any sort of magical power are expected to restrict themselves to healing the sick. Dion is living incognito in an out-of-the-way village, working as a healer, when two of her brothers seek her out hoping to enlist her magical aid in locating another sister who they fear has fallen prey to a necromancer. The renewed contact with her family, whom she has not seen since she was apprenticed to a mage as a child, leads to Dion being drawn into the political machinations surrounding the Duke of Gallia and his ambitions regarding the throne of Mona, Dion's homeland. She also finds that once again she must confront a demon with her magic. The demons, who inhabit another 'plane' but can be summoned into the human world by necromancers or find a way through mirrors, are just one aspect of this multifaceted novel that makes for compelling reading. While Dion, politically naive and out of her

depth at the Duke's court, fearing that she cannot protect the people closest to her from the jealous rage of a demon who considers that she is his alone, aware how alluring a demon can be, and yet determined to fight against witch-burners and necromancers, is a particularly sympathetic heroine. Because even the 'good' characters in this novel have their faults, they retain their credibility, and the reader retains an interest in discovering their fates – hopefully in another novel. Jane Routley is certainly a writer to watch.

Lucius Shepard

Green Eyes

Millenium, 1998, 275pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 75281 613 6

Life During Wartime

Millenium, 1998, 438pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 75281 614 4

Barnacle Bill the Spacer and Other Stories

Millenium, 1998, 292pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 75281 609 8

Reviewed by John Newsinger

The publication of new editions of Lucius Shepard's *Green Eyes* and *Life During Wartime* makes available to readers two of the classic works of contemporary sf. In both, Shepard crosses genre boundaries, with *Green Eyes* climaxing to great effect as a voodoo zombie horror story and less satisfactorily *Life During Wartime* degenerating into magic realism. Nevertheless both are tremendous books that must be read if you have not already done so and re-read if you have.

Green Eyes starts as a scientific investigation into zombie phenomena: the Ezawa bacterium is bringing the dead back to life but with different personalities animating the revived corpses. A few of the resurrected develop extraordinary abilities and one in

particular, Donnell, sets out to find his own salvation, if that is the right word. Donnell, with his nurse/lover Jocunda, escapes from the research centre at Tulane. After a tremendous encounter with Papa Salvatino's Christian revivalism, they find their fate bound up with the voodoo pantheon. Tremendous stuff.

Life During Wartime is a much more important novel, much more adventurous in technique, although it just falls short of success. The novel opens with a powerful account of a new future war in Guatemala, another Vietnam, that has wreaked havoc with the American psyche. It chronicles the odyssey through illusion to understanding of one particular soldier, Mingolla, a member of the Psicorps. There is some tremendous writing as Mingolla undergoes a

series of weird encounters, including a remarkable death-by-butterfly episode! At last Mingolla discovers the truth of human history and conflict. This involves a rather tepid descent into South American obscurantism that for my money is a serious flaw in the novel. Despite this, it remains an important and significant achievement that Shepard unfortunately shows no sign of excelling.

Also available is a collection of his short stories, *Barnacle Bill the Spacer and Other Stories*. Apparently the title story won a Nebula Award, although personally I cannot imagine why. Much more impressive is the eighty-odd page long 'Human History'. There are a number of other accomplished pieces, making this an interesting if uneven collection but not in the same league as his novels.

Brian Stableford

Inherit the Earth

Forge, 1998, 320pp, \$23.95 ISBN 0 312 86493 0

Reviewed by Chris Hill

In the twenty-second century a series of artificial plagues have greatly reduced the world's population, and caused almost total sterility. Conrad Hellier consequently perfected an artificial womb which saved the human race from extinction. Some decades after Hellier's death the human life-span has been extended by various techniques, including nanotechnology, until true immortality is possibly just over the horizon.

Damon Hart is the biological son of Hellier although, as is acceptable as a way of keeping the population down, Hart was not born until after his father's death. Hart has avoided any involvement in his father's work, despite being brought up by other members of Hellier's team. But now one of his foster parents has been kidnapped and is accused of having helped develop the sterility plague. Damon is forced to become involved when he is declared an enemy of mankind by the Eliminator cult (which kills people that it does not believe worthy of immortality).

Initially it was difficult not to do a compare-and-contrast job between *Inherit the Earth* and Michael Marshall Smith's *One of Us*

(which I read immediately prior to it). Both are by British authors but set (mainly) in Los Angeles. Both initially appear to be fairly straightforward sf thrillers but in the end become something else. However, Smith's book becomes a fascinating and surreal fantasy whereas Stableford's heads off in a different direction altogether.

Ultimately the book is about power. Not political power, but technological power. Who controls research? Should independent teams be allowed to research the same areas as they see fit or should their lines of research be controlled or directed? As always Stableford makes full use of his background in biology to make the language of science and the possible developments sound right. However, the weakness of the book lies in the hero. Hart is a catalyst rather than a true protagonist. Most of what happens seems to be set up purely for his benefit. For example, he is kidnapped three times by different parties to get him where he needs to be to hear the next bit of the meta-conversation that is the core of the book.

That aside, although not Stableford's most intelligent book (*The Werewolves of London* or *Man in a Cage* probably qualify for that award) or most entertaining (for my money, the *Hooded Swan* novels are that) it is still a thoughtful and enjoyable novel.

Lawrence Watt-Evans

Touched by the Gods

TOR Books, 1997, 388pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0 312 86060 9

Reviewed by Kathy Taylor

Touched by the Gods is set in the Domdurd Empire, an Empire which for many years has been favoured by, and to some extent run by the Gods. When anyone wants to make an important decision, they ask the oracles. The gods speak through their oracles, the priests pass on the instructions and life is peaceable and predictable. The Empire long ago conquered or colonised most other places, some of which didn't even bother to fight as there is no point in opposing a place so openly favoured by the Gods. At any one time within Domdurd there is a Champion of the Gods, who is supposed to come to the aid of the Empire in a crisis. There hasn't been a crisis lately and

some Champions have passed their whole lives in obscurity. This would have suited Milled fine. Chosen at birth as the Gods' Champion, all he wants to do is have a peaceful life as the village smith with his wife and children. Predictably the crisis comes, and you can guess the rest.

The novel provides a couple of interesting viewpoints on who would or wouldn't want to be a hero and why, and about leadership, but the overall plot is predictable.

Would I recommend it? It is well enough written that you don't notice the writing although you won't marvel at the command of language either. It's interesting and the pace flows enough to keep the pages turning, although you won't come away with any sense of wonder or startling new ideas. It's a good read but not good enough to inspire me to go out and hunt down the rest of his books.

John Whitbourn

The Royal Changeling

Earthlight, 1998, 288pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 671 01785 3

Reviewed by Chris Amies

In 1649, the year of the Regicide, a baby is born to a not-quite-human mother in Rotterdam. This child will grow up to be James, Duke of Monmouth, pretender to the English throne after the death of Charles II in 1685; and in John Whitbourn's engaging alternate history, renegade with Elven blood. The Fair Folk have not entirely vanished, and gaze at human history from an all-seeing but unpowerful viewpoint.

Against Monmouth's ambition stands one of the few who know him well: Theophilus Ogletorpe, soldier and gentleman, a knight clutched round the hilt of Excalibur – which he rescued from a Surrey pond on a morning walk. He and the Elves are all that stand between England and the rule of not one but two 'promised' kings: Monmouth and the grim spectre of King Arthur, who would return from his deathsleep to enslave Britain and the world. The result of

this standoff threatens to tip England into civil war again and has repercussions across the multiverse that is the Elves' world. Arthur confronts Ogletorpe many times, but the doughty warrior will not yield the sword which the dead king needs to be born again in power.

As untrammelled by time as his near-immortal Elves, Whitbourn's viewpoint takes in the 20th Century with its cars and bureaucracy, and allows plenty of good jokes – such as a diatribe by Charles II against both fox-hunting and the then-as-now mania for all things French. The dying words of an Elven prince are 'nothing is real. All is permitted': thus Hassan I Sabbah, and the Illuminati, Hail Eris. Ogletorpe, his redoubtable wife, Ellen, and the passionate and capable Charles II are remarkable characters, and if Whitbourn draws national characteristics with a broad brush – the Irish are fiery, the English savage, the Welsh mysterious and the Dutch phlegmatic – it is permitted in the headlong rush of things. Nor is it a problem that he occasionally reminds the reader that here is a 20th Century man writing about the past; and when the supernatural characters can lead the human characters to other times

and places, the time-shifts make more sense.

This is a fierce, bawdy fantasy, dark and humorous, and it has no place for puritans. Whitbourn's 17th Century is recognisable both

in terms of recent treatments of the time (*Restoration, Invitation to a Funeral*) and in the present-day nation of England; and at the same time it is sufficiently strange to be alluring.

Tad Williams *Otherland 2: River of Blue Ice* [1]
Orbit, 1998, 634pp, £16.99 ISBN 1 85723 599 1

Reviewed by K. V. Bailey

The voluminous second volume of a tetralogy of which you haven't read the equally voluminous first volume is daunting. There is a two thousand word synopsis of *City of Golden Shadow*, but, because this inevitably provides only the bare bones of a multi-stranded plot, it is at first more putting-off than helpful. It was only when I plunged into *River of Blue Fire*, and, as reading progressed, turned back to the synopsis for information and orientations, that I discovered its value. I advise 'new readers' accordingly. The complicated and interwoven strands continue through Volume Two. Prominent are the quest of Renie Sulaweyo to retrieve her brother from his Net-imposed coma, and that of the forward-transported World War I soldier, Paul Jonas, whose mysteriously inspired journey proves to be Odyssean. These and other characters and groups perform mostly within the Otherland virtuality which is the creation of the world's oldest man, Felix Jongleur, who, while his body is sustained biochemically, dwells in a virtual Egypt, resisting attempts by fellow tycoons of the Brotherhood to wrest from him control of the Grail Project, the network they aim to make their permanent and eternal home. It seems now that there is instability in the cyberstructure itself which may derive from an independent 'Other' super entity; and Jongleur has enemies too in the 'Circle', in defaulters who have

renounced the ruthlessness of the Brotherhood and in the less aware yet actively hostile river-questers.

Even the most assiduous of these questers find it hard going as they negotiate waves of virtuality. Paul Jonas at one point 'as he struggles towards the surface of yet another river' thinks 'I could get tired of this quickly' – and he has another 430 Odyssean pages to go before reaching Ithaca. The persistent Renie, on page 401, 'watching the dark, faintly oily river' thinks 'Another day, another world. God help me.' – but she is still determined 230 pages later. The reader, however, stays fresh, because the writing is episodic, constantly shifting its focus; and the mutable river endlessly spawns novelty of scene and incident. Renie and her gang floating on a leaf are so miniaturised that fish are giant submarines; the encounter with pirates of the odd couple Fredericks and Orlando is surrealistic high comedy; the sim-cities of Wellisian/Martian London and carnival Venice are marvellously wrought stages on Paul's journey, while his watery passage through virtual Xanadu is a chapter of poetic, but not purple, prose.

I suppose all adventuring, questing, fanciful epics attract a Tolkienian comparison. It's true that there could be in Jongleur a remote suggestion of Sauron, that his minion, Dread, can assume dragonish aspects, and that there is a coveted instrument of power (a cigar lighter!); but the fact is all such fantasy draws on traditional structures and archetypes. What Tad Williams has succeeded in doing is to give them an acceptable and colourful cyber-spin.

David Zindell *War in Heaven* [1]
Voyager, 1998, 618pp, £11.99 ISBN 0 00 224297

Reviewed by Brian Stableford



War in Heaven concludes the 'Requiem for Homo sapiens' trilogy begun with *The Broken God* and continued in *The Wild*. The trilogy is itself a sequel to Zindell's first novel *Neverness*; its chief protagonist is Danlo wi Soli Ringess, the son of the protagonist of *Neverness* – who is now retired from the game, having accumulated enough points to have ascended to the next level of proto-godhood. Although the first volume of the trilogy was published ahead of the book which has become the principal reference-point of contemporary futuristic fantasy, Frank Tipler's *The Physics of*

Immortality (1994), the project was presumably always headed for the same Omega Point. The notion that the destiny of all life within the universe is to enter into belated immortality and discover paradise by courtesy of the ultimate computer-god (which will mop up all the lesser computer-gods as it rises inexorably to its apotheosis) is now so widespread as to constitute a consensus without precedent in the annals of speculative fiction. Nietzsche – who must have hoped that God, once convincingly declared dead, would stay that way – would probably be spinning in his grave had he not died insane.

As with most books of this expansive stripe, *War in Heaven* moves with glacial slowness as its early chapters recapitulate the substance of its equally-massive predecessors, and the pace does not pick up overmuch when the promised war finally gets under way. As is the modern fashion, we see very little of the actual fighting; the bulk of the wordage is taken up by the characters moaning on about what a terrible thing war is and by angst-ridden dialogues, punctuated by rhapsodic expository bursts of purple philosophy. The chief difference between Zindell's purple philosophy and everybody else's is that because he is a mathematician, the heroic demigods of his far future qualify for the angelic status of Master Pilot (Lord Pilots are a bit too big for their boots) by being extraordinarily good at difficult sums. That, I fear, excludes me as firmly as the more familiar qualifications (the touchy-feely girly ones). I suppose that come the end of time, I will simply have to ask the ultimate computer-god to leave me out of any scheme of resurrection it may have in mind; in the meantime, I would be grateful if the reviews editor would send me shorter, leaner books which are complete in themselves.

I used to be able to read this kind of stuff with some pleasure when it was brand new, succinct and written with style (by the likes of Cordwainer Smith, Samuel R. Delany and Roger Zelazny) but I no longer can. Life is too short to waste on 2,000-page epics whose sole raison d'être is that genre editors (who are not waving but drowning) are desperately clinging to the strawlike thesis that the last faint hope of making a profit out of non-TV-related sf is to disguise it as fantasy, fatten it to the limits of obesity and issue it in three volumes. As David Zindell goes to enormous pains to illustrate in *War in Heaven*, although we all knew it already, whom the gods destroy they first make mad.

Particles

Edited by Paul Kincaid

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.

Nathan Archer – *Predator: Cold War* [M]

Millennium, 1998, 266pp, £4.99 ISBN 0 71281 653 3
More from the Aliens™ stable, if that's the right word, has an alien spaceship crashing in Siberia and a crack team of US experts dispatched to save the world from the Predators.

David Bischoff – *Quoth the Crow* [M]

Voyager, 1998, 277pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 00 648364 X
Based on characters created by James O'Barr, but with a very large debt to Edgar Allan Poe, this is another in the series in which 'the grave is the doorway to truth'.

Vera Chapman – *The Three Damosels*

Vista, 1998, 381pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 575 60108 6
Originally published in the mid-70s as three separate novels, *The Green Knight*, *The King's Damosel* and *King Arthur's Daughter*, this novel retells the familiar story of King Arthur and his knights from what was then an unusual female perspective.

Chris Claremont – *Shadow Dawn*

Bantam, 1998, 511pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 553 30482 7
Written by Chris Claremont from a story by George Lucas, this is the second volume in the pair's *Shadow War* trilogy. 'The threads are strongly woven but the prose is full of horrid wordiness and clumsy bits', Janet Barron said in *V195*, 'the net effect of which is of trying to run with chewing gum sticking to your shoe.'

Peter Dickinson – *The Flight of Dragons*

Paper Tiger, 1998, 134pp, £13.99 ISBN 1 85028 411 3
'I am not going to prove that ninety-foot lizards once floated in the skies of earth and scorched whole villages with plumes of flame...'. First published in 1979, and with superb illustrations by Wayne Anderson, Peter Dickinson's account of dragons in history, literature and mythology has long been considered an elusive classic, so it is good to welcome this new edition from Paper Tiger.

Jonathan Blum & Kate Orman – *Seeing I* [M]

BBC Books, 1998, 281pp, £4.99 ISBN 0 563 40586 4

David A. McIntee – *Mission: Impractical* [M]

BBC Books, 1998, 280pp, £4.99 ISBN 0 563 40592 9

Simon Messingham – *Zeta Major* [M]

BBC Books, 1998, 282pp, £4.99 ISBN 0 563 40597 X

Gary Russell – *Placebo Effect* [M]

BBC Books, 1998, 281pp, £4.99 ISBN 0 563 40587 2

The BBC continues to produce *Doctor Who* novels at a rate of more than one a month. Of this latest batch, *Mission: Impractical* has the sixth *Doctor* forced to play master criminal, while *Zeta Major* features the fifth *Doctor* and is a sequel to the TV story 'Planet of Evil'. Both *Seeing I* and *Placebo Effect* concern the eighth *Doctor*: in the former, Sam has run away from him and the *Doctor's* search brings him up against an all-powerful corporation; in the latter, an Interplanetary Olympics brings him up against old enemies the Wirrn.

David & Leigh Eddings – *Polgara the Sorceress*

Voyager, 1998, 807pp, £7.99 ISBN 0 586 21314 7

Already a bestseller, this companion volume to *Belgarath the Sorcerer* and continuation of Eddings' *The Belgariad* and *The Malloreon*, induced in Vikki Lee (V199) 'A feeling of having been there before, having heard it all before, even having slept through parts of it before.'

Greg Egan – *Diaspora*

Millennium, 1998, 376pp, £6.99 ISBN 0 75280 925 3

Egan's epic novel of the far future, incorporating his story 'Wang's Carpets', was acclaimed as the best of novel of 1997 by Gary Dalkin in *V197*, who went on to say: 'here is such a superabundance of imaginative ideas, fused with such a vast perspective that the novel assumes an elegiac Stapledonian grandeur... 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.'

Terry Goodkind – *Temple of the Winds*

Orion, 1998, 528pp, £11.99 ISBN 1 85798 550 8

When this fourth volume in the continuing *Sword of Truth* series first appeared, Lynne Bispham greeted it: 'Be warned: if you get hooked, you will most likely be turning pages for a very long time, for the conclusion to the story is nowhere yet in sight. However, if you are into epic fantasy you won't object to the length of the tale for it is fast paced with plenty of suspense, treachery and bloody battles – the very stuff of which this genre is made.' (V199)

Steve Harris – *The Devil on May Street*

Vista, 1998, 381pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 575 60162 0

Steve Harris – *Straker's Island* [M]

Gollancz, 1998, 384pp, £16.99 ISBN 0 575 60582 6

Two novels of supernatural horror. In *The Devil on May Street* a rip in the fabric of reality is letting something very nasty come through from May Street, which was torn down twenty years ago. *Straker's Island* has the rather more familiar premise of a successful horror writer who emerges from a writer's block to find that all those books weren't coming from his imagination alone.

M. John Harrison – *Signs of Life*

Flamingo, 1998, 253pp, £6.99 ISBN 0 00 654604 8

Set today or tomorrow, in a gritty realistic London where the central characters work dumping scientific waste in a hinterland somewhere between legitimacy and illegality, this is a highly charged story of trying to achieve your dreams, and the costs that are involved. In *V195*, Paul Kincaid said: 'it is a gripping, challenging novel, a work that keeps you intellectually on your toes while being thoroughly and emotionally engaging. It is a world you don't want to leave when you finally come to close the book, but at the same time it is a world you are

glad you don't live in.'

Dean Koontz – *Fear Nothing*

Headline, 1998, 503pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 7472 5832 5

Since he changed from writing science fiction to horror, Koontz has become one of the world's top-selling authors. In this new novel he tells the story of a man suffering a rare genetic disorder which means his skin and eyes cannot be exposed to sunlight, so he lives exclusively by night.

Stephen Molstad – *Independence Day: Silent Zone* [M]

Voyager, 1998, 268pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 00 648342 9

This prequel to the movie *Independence Day* is the story of Dr Okun from the 1970s to the time of the alien attack, and features a string of icons familiar to all UFOlogists: Roswell, Area 51, and a government cover-up of alien visits through the years.

Eric S. Nyland – *Dry Water*

Avon Books, 1998, 362pp, £3.99 ISBN 0 380 79614 7

A sharp and original fantasy novel revolving around the struggles of a psychic writer and a necromancer in a small desert town. Reviewing the book in *V193*, Andy Mills said: 'It's a snappy, thought-provoking read which whirled the reader around from start to finish... had the author's name been missing from this book, I'd have pegged this as a short [Tim] Powers novel.'

Thomas Richards – *Star Trek in Myth and Legend*

Millennium, 1998, 180pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 75281 645 4

A critical study of *Star Trek* and its various spin-offs which looks at how the series uses story devices drawn from or reflecting literary, mythic and legendary sources, how the social history of the Federation parallels actual world history, and how the tales of wonders, marvels and miracles appeal to the sense of religion.

R.A. Salvatore – *Tarzan: The Epic Adventures* [M]

Arrows, 1998, 280pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 09 926599 7

Based on the TV series, this novelisation jumbles together various bits of Edgar Rice Burroughs to tell of an ancient crystal that can throw open the gates to Pellucidar and unleash grotesque reptilian armies, and how Tarzan is the only person who can stop the conquest.

John Saul – *The Blackstone Chronicles*

Arrows, 1998, 527pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 09 927023 4

Can echoes of H.P. Lovecraft be buried far below the surface of this horror novel set in a small New England town where the demolition of a brooding old Asylum unlocks a terrible evil? First published as a six-part serial, this is the story's first publication in one volume.

A.C. Crispin – *Star Wars: Rebel Dawn*

Bantam, 1998, 392pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 553 50548 3

Barbara Hamby – *Planet of Twilight*

Bantam, 1998, 391pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 553 50529 7

K.W. Jeter – *The Mandalorian Armor* [C]

Bantam, 1998, 389pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 553 50601 3

Michael A. Stackpole – *I, Jedi* [C]

Bantam, 1998, 463pp, £12.99 ISBN 0 593 04242 7

One of the surprising features of *Star Wars* novelisations over the years has been the number of reputable writers who have contributed to it. Both Barbara Hamby and K.W. Jeter, for instance, are far too good to allow themselves to be trapped in overly formulaic work. Hamby's novel is in what we might call the main sequence: a warlord tries to trap Leia and Luke on a backwater planet. Jeter's novel is an aside from the main story, a typically vicious tale of the Bounty Hunter Wars, fomented by Darth Vader. Another aside from the main action is the Han Solo Trilogy, Crispin's prequel to the first film is

described in the blurb as 'The explosive conclusion of the blockbuster trilogy that chronicles the never-before-told story of the young Han Solo.' Meanwhile Stackpole manages to replay many of the familiar aspects of the films with his novel of an X-Wing pilot coming to terms with his latent powers as the grandson of a legendary Jedi hero.

Michael Swanwick – *Jack Faust*

Orion, 1998, 321pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 75281 646 2

Michael Swanwick's inventive variation on the Faust legend featured high in *Vector's* Books of the Year feature, and was praised by Joseph Nicholas in V197: '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.'

Thomas Tessier – *Fog Heart*

Vista, 1998, 319pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 575 60250 3

This elegant horror novel was hailed by Stephen Payne in V195: 'a novel about the ways in which we brutalise and exploit each other, where nothing is simple and motives are complex... It is about love and hate and (particularly) those who feel neither. It's about facing up to the truth without guilt.'

Philip Trewinnard – *The Pastor*

Vista, 1998, 311pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 575 60132 9

This is the story of one twin sister who follows the other into a 'twilight world of semi-morals and eternal slaves'. In V195, Stephen Payne decided: 'It all seemed a bit daft to me and overlong.'

Acknowledgements: The images illustrating the reviews section are taken from the covers of some of the reviewed books: page 22 – *Traces* by Stephen Baxter; page 26 – *Stars and Stripes Forever* by Harry Harrison; page 27 – *The Science Fiction Century* edited by David G. Hartwell; page 28 – *Corrupting Dr Nice* by John Kessel; page 28 – *The Cassini Division* by Ken MacLeod; page n – *The Royal Changeling* by John Whitbourn; page 33 – *War in Heaven* by David Zindell

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CB1 – Cherith Baldry, CB2 – Colin Bird, CH – Chris Hill, E – Edward James, FM – Farah Mendlesohn, GA – Graham Andrews, GD – Gary Dalkin, GW – Gary Wilkinson, JB – Janet Barron, JDO – John D. Owen, JN1 – John Newsinger, JN2 – Joseph Nicholas, JW – Jon Wallace, KT – Kathy Taylor, KVB – K. V. Bailey, LB – Lynne Bispham, LH – Lesley Hatch, LH – L. J. Hurst, MC – Mat Coward, P – Particles, PK – Paul Kincaid, SJ – Steve Jeffery, VL – Vikki Lee,

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