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## Vector

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#### THE CRITICAL JOURNAL OF THE BSFA

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**COVER:** Photo of Martin Millar, taken at the November BSFA Meeting in London. <sup>©</sup> Tanya Brown 2000. Image jiggery pokery by Tony Cullen

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#### Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial • Editorial

#### The View From the Millennium's End

We end the century, nay the millennium, with an embarrassment of riches. We've got so much good material on hand that we've had to hold some of it over – there's an article on comics, and a couple of letters that just wouldn't squeeze in (including one singing the praises of China Miéville as the most sensible contender for the BSFA Award). And there was me thinking the cupboard would be bare when Gary Dalkin left.

Of course Gary is back, in this issue. With the millennial date of 2001 coming up, it was obvious that we had to cover the film of the year, so to speak, and take another look at Kubrick's sf masterpiece. It seemed wise to get in early, and so I aimed this tribute for the start of the year, asking four long time contributors for 2001 words each. Well, you don't always get what you ask for, and so I've 2001 words from Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc and from Tanya Brown, but I've got 4002 words from Gary Dalkin. It all averages out, in the end.

I'm not quite clear when Colin and Mitch last graced these pages – too long ago, I fear, and Mike Cross's reliable

database informs me that it was May 2000 with an article on A Clockwork Orange. It's been difficult to catch them free to write for us, with their prolific production rate of Pocket Essentials on directors like David Lynch and on Jackie Chan, and commentary on fantasy films and horror films on magazine covermounts. It's nice to see them remembering their roots, and good to have them back. They are joined by one of the other authors from this excellent range of cheap and compact reference works -Ellen Cheshire, author of Jane Campion and co-author of The Coen Brothers (alongside former Matrix media editor, John Ashbrook). Ellen interviewed Terry Brooks for us, and you can read the interview here. Meanwhile Tanya Brown, our intrepid Webmistress, interviewed Martin Millar at a BSFA London meeting, and speedily transcribed the results for us.

So, we're into a New Year, a new millennium, and though the editorial staff is slightly depleted, I hope we can bring you the same service of articles, interviews, and reviews. Don't forget, we're always on the look out for articles, or ideas for articles, so make it a New Year's resolution to get in touch, and write something for us.

by Andrew M Butler, High Wycombe, Winter 2000

## **Expecting Something a Bit Grimmer**

### an Interview with Martin Millar by Tanya Brown

Tanya Brown: You first published under your real name of Martin Millar, but the Thraxas books are published under the name 'Martin Scott'. Why the pseudonym?

Martin Millar: Just so as not to get them confused at first, and because I didn't think they were respectable enough for a proper author

#### TB: Do you feel that fantasy's a ghetto literature?

**MM:** My reputation as an author – as Martin Millar – is okay, but my book sales... well, it keeps me going but it's not fantastic. Little, Brown probably wouldn't have been that keen to start publishing fantasy books by Martin Millar. As for fantasy being some kind of ghetto, I changed my mind about that quite quickly. I quite soon decided that it was okay to say it was me. But yes, at first thinking they were not respectable enough. Science fiction would have probably always seemed more respectable.

### TB: Are the Thraxas novels selling better than the Martin Millar books?

**MM:** About equivalent. They haven't taken off to the extent we'd like, but on the other hand, with the way sales figures are on books in general, they're selling about equivalent in Britain and they're starting to sell in other countries. I don't really have proof of it yet, but it would be no surprise to me if they were to keep me going in my old age.

### TB: How do you feel being labelled – as Martin Millar – as a cult author?

**MM:** I don't mind because I'm so used to it, but my dad groans every time he sees that. I don't like it too much really.

### TB: The Martin Millar books have all been reissued, haven't they?

MM: They're in the process of being reissued. It'll be a while until they all come back out. It does mean that the book of mine

which I get most email correspondence about, *The Good Fairies of New York* [hereafter *Good Fairies*], will be back in print in a while.

#### TB: That book, in particular, is very popular in Germany, isn't it?

**MM:** I get a lot of email from young German women who want to be fairies! I have fairies in my house that people have sent me, more than one from Germany. When I started off writing, twelve or thirteen years ago, Fourth Estate did sell *Milk*, *Sulphate and Alby Starvation* [Alby] to quite a lot of countries. That tailed off afterwards in most of them, but Germany carried on. I'm really not sure why.

TB: I could see *Dreams of Sex and Stagediving* [Sex & Stagediving] having a wider audience, because it's less rooted in the Brixton location. Perhaps the world of startup bands and pub gigs is more accessible.

MM: I guess so. I've suffered for this a little bit. It never seems to me that it particularly matters where books are set, if you like them. I've never broken through in America and I would seriously like to, and that tends to get stymied at the start with American editors saying 'What's this? Brixton? Our readers won't understand that.'

## TB: You've put some of your rejection letters for Love & Peace with Melody Paradise [Melody Paradise] on your website.

**MM:** That was a strange experience, not being able to get *Melody Paradise* published. I had been kind of relying on Fourth Estate: it was a surprise to me when they didn't want to publish that book. I never really knew why that was. I think they just kind of changed direction, really.

#### TB: They seemed to be expecting something a bit grimmer.

MM: Yes. I'm not really a grim writer in that way. I could never have been Irvine Welsh. I was going to say I wasn't interested in

people's sufferings, but that's not exactly right. I like to write about people who aren't in the best circumstances, making the best of it and having a good time. The trouble with *Melody Paradise* was that it was never going to be grim, because basically they were people who were going to have a good time in some manner.

I mailed a manuscript of *Melody Paradise* into the publisher. It went to an editor that I had never met, who was new at the company, and she didn't like it. That was about it really. It did make it quite hard to change publishers. If there's other authors at my kind of level, that's probably an experience they would have shared, trying to change publishers. Publishers like either taking on new people that they can build up, or taking on very successful people. But if you're in the middle, actually changing is difficult.

TB: Melody Paradise is a bit of a departure, because the previous novels are very urban, and this novel's set mainly in the countryside. The other novels are possibly more paranoid, less cheerful.

**MM:** Well, the first book, *Alby*, is very urban paranoia. I live in Streatham now, up the hill, but I lived in Brixton for a long time, so I wanted to write about that. The things that I really like, the books that I really like, and that influence me, don't really fit into 'urban paranoia'. If I was trapped on a desert island with just an English novelist then it would probably be P.G. Wodehouse – I'd probably want that to entertain me. I wouldn't really want to be reading about drug problems in the city! Everything I read is pretty old. Another of my big favourites is Somerset Maugham, and after reading a lot of Somerset Maugham, I consciously wrote a story in

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his style, or at least with his method of narration, which was published *in Disco Biscuits*<sup>1</sup>. *Melody Paradise* is kind of an extension of that. It's me as Somerset Maugham reporting what I've been doing.

TB: Another of your literary influences is Jane Austen. You co-wrote a play about her, which was produced at the Edinburgh Festival. It's soon to be out as a book, isn't it?

**MM:** That's from a small publisher, Nick Hern Books, that specialise in play texts. They have paid us for it, but it's dragging a little bit coming out. The play was great, though; I wrote it with Doon MacKichan,

who's a fairly well-known face on TV. She's one of the Smack the Pony women. I met her at an abortion rights benefit in Brixton. I can't remember how, but we just became friends, and we both liked Jane Austen, so we thought we'd write the play. We wrote it years before it got put on. It was the most co-operative thing I ever did. Writing is usually sitting at the computer, not speaking to anybody for a long time, and it was quite strange to be involved in this play. I was a bit dubious at first, but it was fun writing it with Doon. Then it had to go to a director and actors... That was really fun, I enjoyed that, and we got quite well reviewed, which was a big surprise to me.

TB: "Jane Austen would spin in her grave," according to one reviewer.

**MM:** Which I say is a mistake. Jane Austen was such a mighty genius that I'm sure she wouldn't have spun in her grave. She had to live a kind of conservative life, because she was constrained by her circumstances, but I'm sure if she was living today she'd be a big media giant or something. She wouldn't be sat embroidering somewhere

TB: Is the play going to be put on again in London?

MM: I wouldn't really think so, no.

TB: Any other plays, or theatrical productions, coming up?

<sup>1</sup> Anthology edited by Sarah Champion, 1997

**MM:** No, but... My favourite programme of all, maybe my favourite thing in the world, *is Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Buffy* is just fantastic: I love *Buffy* so much. So I thought I'd have a go at writing a film script, for a change, influenced by *Buffy*. Other than *Buffy*, one of my favourite films is *Clueless* – what a fantastic film, and it's Jane Austen again. As you can see I'm not really into the harsh realities of a lot of things, and my tastes are not really the harsh realities of life. I wrote a film script, which is a teen comedy set in Britain, which almost nobody knows about. And that's not really a very British thing, because our films are like *Trainspotting* and so on, but this is more a *Clueless* kind of thing. My agent has been sending it round film people, and they've managed to raise some interest...

This is part of my long-term plan to get to write *Buffy*. I get this film done, that introduces me to the film world, and I go to Hollywood and get to write *Buffy*... I had to connect to Sky, which I resisted for years, even though I like football: I thought 'I'm not bloody connecting to Sky, that Rupert Murdoch'. The BBC are just awful when it comes to the programmes they import. They have no respect for these programmes. They just kept messing around with *Buffy*, and I had to connect to Sky to keep III.

TB: In Sex and Stagediving, you create a computer game where there's a raft on the sea occupied by famous historical personages: you never put Jane Austen on the raft, though!

**MM:** It was a bit disrespectful. I do love Jane Austen: I don't know if she's an influence or not. She wrote such beautiful, perfect prose that I try to emulate her. And the world is so different now. Life is not the same these days. I've got a fairly

short attention span. I need all the chapters of my books to be brief. So I could never really keep going at her sustained prose. However, after *Alby*, which contains slang, and incomplete sentences, I did consciously decide not to do that, and to form proper sentences and paragraphs, which is important to me. I think that's probably not important to anybody else. I like the grammar and the composition to be good. Maybe that's Jane's influence.

TB: Is there an element of magic realism in some of your Martin Millar books? The example that springs to mind is in *Ruby & the Stone Age Diet [Ruby]* where the nameless narrator goes down into the hall. He meets the postman, the woman from downstairs,

and Ascanazl, the Inca god of lonely people. I had this flashback to Marquez and Louis de Bernières, with the fantastic elements intruding into real life. Where do you stand on this? And are your characters seeing things that are real, or are they just taking too many drugs?

**MM:** I find that quite hard to answer, really, for that character. The narrator of *Ruby* was slipping out of reality at times, for reasons which are not entirely explained. It was more like he was building a fantasy world because of his loneliness and alienation, and just stepped too far into it at times. On the other hand it was slightly drug-induced. That's just what he thought.

TB: Quite a few of the narrators of your Martin Millar novels have magic in their lives. Or do they just concentrate hard enough on what's real to make it into something magical?

**MM:** Do they have magic in their lives? It's probably more fantasy than magic. Personally I have an extensive fantasy life: out shopping or on the bus or whatever, I find myself in various characters, some of which are really warped to a surprising degree. I think that everyone must do that: I'm sure that everybody must have some degree of fantasy life. I don't know how much everybody works it out. Scoring for Scotland has always been a popular one for me.

TB: There's the fairies, in The Good Fairies of New York, which

is probably the point at which the fantasy world intrudes into reality.

MM: When it gets to the fairies, that's no longer the characters' internal fantasy lives, or the drug influences or anything. The fairies are meant to be real, which is a conceit, I guess. I always loved music. I never had any particular talent for it, but I did manage to play chords, and play in punk bands, which was fun. A lot of the crusties and squatters in Brixton played Irish music in pubs, and one good thing about Irish music is that if you're not such a good musician, you're kind of aware of the tunes, and you

can join in. I liked playing with people, l'm but not particularly good musician, so with the tin whistle and later with the flute, I started playing at the The fairies sessions. came out of that, out of my keenness for playing Irish music. I get slightly obsessed with things, and I always like to go with that, because it tends to lead to something worthwhile, like Irish music to the fairies, or Buffy to the film script. I'm always about to



Mr Millar and his interrogator, Tanya Brown, at the November 2000 BSFA meeting.

do another 'Good Fairies' book. Quite often it doesn't seem like quite the right time, but I'll definitely do another one some time.

TB: "How pleasant fairies are. I wrote a book about them once, and will do so again as soon as public disapproval for the first one dies down." (That's the narrator, one 'Martin Millar', in Melody Paradise). Was it that much disapproved of?

**MM:** No, it wasn't really: that was more or less a joke. Writing *Good Fairies* probably did end my chances of being a serious author – reviews in the *Times*, and the Booker Prize, and so on.

#### TB: Just how much of the narrator of Melody Paradise is you?

**MM:** This is the Somerset Maugham-influenced one. There's been bits of me in other ones – in *Alby*, in *Ruby*, in *Sex and Stagediving* – but those were more fictionalised and made-up. The 'Martin' in this one is more like me: anyway, it's meant to be.

TB: "My best endeavours in the world of literature have led to very little and I am now being superseded by younger authors with more enthusiasm and better ideas," he says. Is that how you feel?

**MM:** If I'm putting bits of me into it, I can put parts like that in: but I don't really think in such a depressed manner as the narrator in that one. But I do think in the Ancient Greek-obsessed manner of the narrator of *Melody Paradise*.

#### **TB: Why Ancient Greece?**

**MM:** I'm not sure, but it's a long-term interest. It's probably one of the oldest things I can remember being interested in. I can get really tedious on the subject. I don't know why. But I do love the thought of ancient Athens: I'd kind of like to be there – apart from the slaves, and the poor status of women – but I could institute constitutional reforms.

TB: You've worked it into various books, like the bag lady's delusion in *Good Fairies* – she *is* Xenophon...

**MM:** That might even be a plot weakness, really; there might have been something better for her. But they were very interesting, the Ancient Greeks. Such a huge outpouring of civilisation, and they were all fighting each other all the time, which was a pity. I kind of regret that. They left all these beautiful

artefacts, and I just love them. I don't want to give them back.

TB: You managed to work the Venus de Milo into the novelisation of *Tank Girl*! Why did you do that novelisation – was she a particularly appealing character, or was it a lot of money?

**MM:** It was a lot of money. By the time they'd organised the contract between Jamie Hewlett, the originator of *Tank Girl*, and Penguin, the publisher, and the film people, it left me five weeks to write that novelisation, and the fee was £10,000. None of my other books was at a comparable rate. That's why I wrote it: it was

such a lot of money for so little time. When 1 started writing my professional ethics took over and I thought "Well, I must just try and make this good". It wasn't a good film, and it really was a lousy script. ı thought "Well, I just can't make this into a novel that isn't rubbish". So I tried to capture the spirit of Tank Girl. Tank Girl let me down in the end, because she

was just an icon. I think most people who came across *Tank Girl* just saw the picture and thought "that's fantastic, what a great picture", but if they actually read the comics – well, I don't think they were particularly well-written or anything. But they have a good spirit and I tried to get that into the book.

TB: She did strike me as in the same spectrum as Elfish and Melody Paradise. Tank Girl is completely self-obsessed and vain, like quite a few of your other characters are.

**MM:** There's something appealing about heroic vanity. Lux (in *Lux the Poet*) was my first heroically vain character. Think back to the teen movies and American teen TV; you come across that character in there, but I can't quite think of a British equivalent. Alby was always worried about being ugly and grotesque. Lux, who is in some ways a kind of anti-Alby, is just so pretty and so good-looking. I think that must be nice. Tank Girl's vanity was different, but that fitted into the whole thing.

TB: Someone just gave me this review, which you may not have seen, of *Alby*. "A look at Thatcher's Britain from the point of view of a comic collector with a bad speed habit, a milk allergy and Triad enemies. It's for anyone who's ever wondered what life is really like in London in the Eighties, and anyone else who likes to read cyberpunk and is prepared to overlook a total lack of cyber' [SF Eye]. So, are you a cyberpunk author then?

**MM:** No, not at all. I guess it was Thatcher's Britain. I never really felt that at the time: it was just what life was like, through that period. I was never thinking about Margaret Thatcher.

TB: They seem quite dated to me: I reread the Brixton novels and there's a real sense of period as well as place.

**MM:** There are some things that I would revise, in the way that Brixton has changed: the squatting and suchlike is very different now. There may be more things. It's too hard for me to comment on, being inside them. I really like to write about people, generally, and about friendship. I've really never tried to write cool characters, or make them hip in any manner. I was just interested in them as people, and all this stuff that they were surrounded with in the Eighties are just the things that I was surrounded with. I guess that's come and gone now, but when I wrote *Alby*, about 1984 or 1985, Brixton was not hip. At the end

of the '70s and start of the '80s, if you couldn't really afford to live anywhere better, you went to live in Brixton. Slightly later there were the riots, and Scarman, and it developed a kind of hipness around it. But that was accidental as far as I was concerned.

TB: On to the Thraxas books... it seems that it just came as a shock revelation from the publishers: guess what! Martin Scott is really Martin Millar! Is that how it was, or was the connection just not particularly advertised?

**MM:** The pseudonym was partly my idea at first, and partly theirs, because they wanted to establish it as a different author. It was outed by me. I think it struck me one day that if I was American, there's no way that I'd be hiding books that I had published.

#### **TB:** How did you start writing them?

**MM:** I didn't write the first one for money at the time. I'd finished *Good Fairies*, and I had some time before it seemed right to write another novel. And I always like being busy: I get itchy and unsatisfied if I'm not writing something. I wrote a version then, and that lay about for a couple of years. I had quite liked it but not

been too concerned about it. It wasn't until the time when I had the publishing problems that I looked at it and thought "well, that wasn't bad, I should try and make money out of this." I have a slight Scottish Protestant thing about earning a living, and it seemed better to me to be earning my living by writing Thraxas under a pseudonym, rather than not doing anything at all. I had some good fortune, because my agent handed the Thraxas manuscript to the right person, which was Tim Holman at Little, Brown. He liked it. I had written it as short stories

at first, and at his suggestion I rewrote it as a novel. Then he said he'd publish it, but he wanted three. It wasn't actually a trilogy, it was just three in a series. And they're pretty short, you know: you could fit three of them into various meaty books that you see on the shelves. They're probably the same length as the Brixton novels: about 60,000 words.

## TB: The first three all came out in 1999, but you'd been working on them for quite a bit before that.

**MM:** I wrote them quite quickly. The first one was written a long time before. I can't exactly think how long I took to write the other three, but certainly within a year.

#### TB: Isn't Thraxas' world rather grittily realist for a fantasy novel?

MM: I have quite a lot to say about Thraxas that would probably not be apparent to anybody else reading them. For instance, Thraxas being fat is very important to me. He's the only large character I've ever written, and that's quite liberating, because I have an uncomfortable relationship with food. Most of the characters in my books have been thin: nobody eats enthusiastically, and I don't eat enthusiastically. Having Thraxas as an extremely enthusiastic eater, and being large, is almost therapeutic for me.

Another influence from real life is that I get to write about a character in a chain mail bikini. My other books have been heavily influenced, in rather a good way I think, by hardcore Brixton feminism. Having a character busting out of a chain mail bikini was kind of liberating. I always liked my Red Sonja comics when I was young, and I could never get that out in my Martin Millar books. As for the gritty realism... it's meant to be a city which is somewhere between ancient Rome and medieval. It's dirty, and there's bad weather, and poverty and suchlike.

## TB: One thing that did strike me about the Thraxas novels is that he's more mature than your other narrators.

**MM:** Yes, he's reached the 'cynical about life' stage.

TB: He thinks people should cut their hair and get jobs!

MM: In the same way that he's able to eat properly, or over-eat,

it's a release for him to be grumpy at these young people with funny hair. I don't personally feel like that, but I just like writing him. He could probably do with being slightly more grumpy and unsympathetic, but I have problems making my central characters too unsympathetic. They end up a bit friendlier than I intended.

## TB: You write in the first person, and in the present tense, a great deal.

**MM:** The Brixton books were present tense because I liked that, and then I moved into the past tense, thinking that it was really time to grow up. Thraxas was just back to the present tense because it seemed to suit the detective theme. It would have been nice to write them in a completely noir manner, but that is a very specialised art. I don't think many people can do noir detective fiction really well.

#### TB: Especially noir fantasy detective fiction.

**Having Thraxas as** 

an extremely

enthusiastic eater,

and being large, is

almost therapeutic

for me.

**MM:** Yes, it would be very hard to pull that off.

I'm unashamedly fond of Tolkien. I still use *The Hobbit* as a comfort book. What I would have most liked to do would be to

set the investigator in the world of Tolkien, because I thought that would be rather funny, really, to investigate things from *The Hobbit*, into Minas Tyrith and over to Mordor and suchlike. But I knew there was no point doing that because there's no way that the estate would have allowed anybody to do that.

## TB: You've done it on a different level, subverting the myth of the nice, friendly, pretty elves.

**MM:** I'm not a theorist about science fantasy or fiction, so I'm sure I have nothing

particularly original to say about it, but one thing that always struck me, that I didn't really like, was that Tolkien's orc civilisations are savages, but that's not really credible. Any time you've got swords, then you have blacksmiths, and there'd be a king, and there'd be religion, and a whole culture grows up. Likewise, the elves couldn't all just be happy in trees, because society is never like that. Maybe a lot of them will be happy in trees, but there'll be some things going wrong, jealousies and stuff like that, so I was interested in that as well.

## TB: Well, the other problem with Tolkien is that he hasn't got enough women.

**MM:** Well, his women are just awful, really, and they're idealised figures.

## TB: So you've introduced the chain mail bikini – and the Association of Gentlewomen, which is a fine thing.

**MM:** Yes – the feminist organisation. Makri is meant to be very intelligent as well as a savage fighter, the reason for her wearing a chain mail bikini is to get tips as a barmaid.

## TB: It's a shame that the Thraxas novels are marketed as comic fantasy: there's a lot more to them.

**MM:** I don't mind the comic fantasy aspect. We haven't got to the World Fantasy Award yet. I have something to say about that with regards to the marketing. The first Thraxas novel is up for the World Fantasy Award, which is judged at a convention in Texas on Sunday. I think the judges of the Award have already made their decisions, but I'm kind of hopeful about that [he won – *Eds.*]. I've never won a prize for anything. I have no inside information except that Little, Brown tell me that they want to offer me a two-book contract, to do two more – which kind of makes me wonder "Oh, have I won the prize or something?" And they say they want to put them out in rather more serious covers.

#### TB: Who do you read, in fantasy and SF?

**MM:** I read hardly any contemporary things, because in contemporary non-SF writing, I don't find too much that I like. The reason, really, is that I just avoid contemporary literature so I

can write my own. I've had a childhood and youth, growing up pretty happy with Michael Moorcock books, his long series of Eternal Champion books – he's no doubt a strong influence for my fantasy thoughts. I am more a 'books about Ancient Athens' person than a contemporary literature person. The fiction I read is mainly from the last century.

TB: In *Melody Paradise*, the narrator is asked: "Will you write the Ancient Greece book that only ten people will read?" Well, will you?

MM: I tried that. I tried to reincarnate Lux the Poet in ancient Greece, and it just didn't work very well. That was my best idea for writing a book in Ancient Greece, so I'm stuck on that now. I just would love to write something which was set in Classical Athens, but I'm not able. I'd have a slight worry that nobody would want to read it. At the start of my career I really couldn't give a fuck who liked the first book, and I didn't think anyone was going to read it anyway, and so I wasn't really bothered what I wrote about. The second one was the same. I just changed over the years – you've got to make a living. I would rather never have to think about what people are going to think, or what people are going to buy, or read or whatever, but I can't really avoid it. I regret that but it's true.

TB: Are you an optimist or a pessimist?

**MM:** I think I'm a pessimist. I'm not completely pessimistic. As I've got older I've become more career-oriented, in fact: I like my career in writing, and I refuse to give up. I'm fairly ambitious about various things, ambitious in a way that I wish I'd been when I was younger. When it comes to income, health, personal relationships, I'm pessimistic.

Claire Brialey: You seem to have a knack of writing short short stories which maintain the authorial voice of your main 'Martin Millar' novels. Is writing short stories something you particularly enjoy doing, or find easy to do, compared to writing novels? And will there be a collection?

**MM:** I like writing short stories a lot, but I don't do it for pleasure. I've collected nine or ten of them on my website, and they're all commissioned, which is why I start doing them. Yes, there probably will be a collection some time. I do like writing odd bits, but I might get slightly carried away with the thought that they have to be funny. I'd probably find that if somebody asked me to write a short story I'd have to be amusing in some way. That probably comes from P.G. Wodehouse, who wrote very funny short stories. I often mention P.G. Wodehouse if someone comes to interview me for the *NME* or something, and it always just gets me a blank look.

TB: Martin Millar, Martin Scott, thank you very much.

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## Give Me Your Answer, Do

## by Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc

If you understood 2001 completely, we failed. We wanted to raise far more questions than we answered

Arthur C. Clarke, quoted in *The Making of Kubrick's 2001*, edited by Jerome Agel, Signet, 1970

2001 is a paradox. Greeted with acclaim by the critics, it was also dismissed by the critics. It came at a time when science fiction was at its most controversial, when the Arts Council-funded New Worlds was banned from W.H. Smith's on the grounds of obscenity and libel, and yet it was passed uncut as a U-rated film, the lowest rating available at the time, despite its famously indecipherable ending bearing many similarities to the prevalent direction of the genre. It was breathtakingly simple to follow yet infuriatingly difficult to understand. Cinematically its language was slow in pace but not unusual, even the much touted jump cut between the bone and the spaceship was hardly revolutionary, albeit temporally audacious. Here we have a film that was advertised as 'The Ultimate Trip' but whose maker (in an interview for *Playboy*) categorically denied ever having taken consciousness-expanding substances stating that 'drugs are of more use to the audience than the artist.' Here we have a film that audiences responded to in a religious manner, some claiming to have seen God in its celluloid majesty, yet was written by a confirmed atheist. It was granted the 1968 award for Best Film of Educational Value from the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures yet was made by the same man who was condemned for producing Lolita (1962) and later A Clockwork Orange (1971). It sweeps historically through hundreds of thousands of years but is ultimately about one man's self-discovery. Or is it?

It began with 'The Sentinel' (1950), it became clay with *Journey Beyond The Stars*, it was sculpted into 2001. As such it began with the middle, it began with the Moon, it began with the object. 'The Sentinel' saw Wilson, a geologist (selenologist, if you want to be pedantic), climb a tricky Lunar mountain overlooking Mare Crisium to confront a relatively small, obviously constructed

pyramid surrounded by a spherical field. The pyramid gives the story its allusions to Egyptian ancestry as well as its affinity towards Greek ("I knew that the creeping moss of Aristarchus and Eratosthenes was not the only life she had brought forth in her youth") that is fitting to the discovery; the science of the new is but an extension of the mythologies and reasoning of the ancient. Conceptually the pyramid works best in the story, a tetrahedron would perhaps be more profound outside of it, but in the film it has become a monolith. In terms of imagery the monolith appears to be the simplest idea despite being a more complex shape, it has also become black, indeed how more black could it be?

Art is not created by the artist but by the spectator. The person who views the work interprets it, not the creator. Any work, be it a film, painting, poem or prose that is not open to interpretation is not art, it is naïve reproduction. All views are valid as each other, each element of the piece needs to be open to a multitude of spiralling interpretations that drift from the actuality. Semiotics give art depth. HAL may be one letter back (not forwards) from IBM, but so what? Is it Dave that we follow or HAL's recollection of Dave; in a computer all things in memory co-exist and so does Dave. In HAL's simulation of Dave the reasonings of life on Earth and the progression of the argument are simply the running of an algorithm. The whole film is HAL's coming to terms with Dave's attempted destruction of his consciousness by sabotage, the Dawn of History to metaphysical discourse are HAL's way of tracing Dave's behaviour to it inception. HAL can trace a route from that of primitive brutal destruction for the sake of power to Dave's similarly primitive act of violence against him. Humanity has not changed. In this sense HAL is the alien, preventing man from spreading the disease of violence throughout the universe. Can HAL have a consciousness and therefore a conscience? In this scenario the monolith isn't an actual entity but a conceptual root of man's propensity to violence.

The cut from bone to spaceship has the significance that they are ultimately used for the same purpose – to dictate man's belief in his own supremacy as a phallic wand of power to assert. In

developing from the evolving ape, humans have chosen the path of conquering inferior beings. The bone started as a by-product of survival, it became a weapon. Every piece of technology we created derived from that bone. Not only have we come nowhere since the dawn of mankind we are as intellectually inferior to the greater universe as our ancestors were. The discovery of another form of life that's no doubt greater and more significant than we is represented by a child, basking in its glorious innocence and potential.

That the film opens with the potent image of the glory of the universe should make us feel dwarfed by its opulence and beauty but we are told by the ape-man sequence that man's ego is beyond this, his lust for power cares not for the grandeur of the void. The significance of using Strauss's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* as the accompaniment shows the arrogance of man – God is dead and we are living in his shadow. He does not realise however that he needs to step into the light.

Great art provokes. This is not to say that it must offend or shock but it must elicit a reaction. 2001 has and still does, it is the power as a film that can engross some, bore others, enlighten and mystify. The great Ray Bradbury said at the time (in *Psychology Today*) that 'Clarke, a voyager to the stars, is forced to carry the now inexplicably dull director Kubrick the albatross on his shoulders through an interminable journey of almost three hours' before commending the film on every other level, its failing entirely Kubrick's. Clarke, on the other hand, refuted the allegation: 'Ray also claimed that I had been raped by Kubrick. I assure you it was mutual', as the project was most definitely a long collaboration between the two men. In some respects Bradbury is right when he asserts that we do not care when one of the astronauts dies, citing Antonioni's similar disinterest in

empathising with his characters, but in many ways this is the point. Audiences were, and still are, too familiar with traditional narrative structures and forms, whether they know it or not. They have certain expectations that require satiating and to some extent 2001 gives them a hint of this by including characters, but ultimately the film stands as a visual poem that revels in its cinemascope glory and majestic presence. It is designed to impress and to provoke thought and debate. Emotion has nothing to do with it.

If Kubrick is following in the footsteps of Antonioni it is because the film has a higher

purpose than narrative cohesion and such lowbrow concerns as characterisation or emotional symbiosis. The audience's scopophilic tendencies in approaching cinematic readings become redundant in the face of a film whose primary visual purpose is sublimation as further signified by the decision to film in the ultra wide Cinemascope format. In many ways 2001 can be seen as a minimalist film, certainly in pace, but the contrast between the redundancy of common plotting and the need to provide a spectacle provides a further paradox. Spectacle is in some ways what commercial cinema is about, science fiction cinema in particular dares to show what isn't, what cannot be or what might be. Its boundaries are defined only by the limits of the imagination. Those unfamiliar with the genre often ridicule it for a lack of prophetic accuracy, missing the very raison d'être of its popularity. 2001 doesn't show the world in 2001, at least not from where we stand, but a world in 2001. Technically there was nothing to stop space travel technology increasing to the level as featured in the film, the fact that we have not arranged such grandiose space stations or moon excavations does not alter the fact that we could have. 2001 tries its hardest to ensure that these possibilities are not only natural corollaries of the situation at the

time (the process between Clarke and Kubrick was underway in early 1965 and the film released prior to the moon landings) but also justifiable.

To this end virtually every aspect of space travel and its consequences were explored to strive for further realism. This was not limited to the normal 'big' science fiction, the glamorous stuff like how the engines would function, where the thrusters would be positioned or the mechanics of docking procedures but in the minutiae, those details normally ignored in favour of showing a big spaceship thrusting into the void or a homely breast of a space station with its nipple central hub feeding the milk of gravity to its occupants. Kubrick and Clarke's meticulous attention to detail went so far as to discuss clothing fasteners, the possibility of Velcro shoe soles (so that hostesses could dispatch complimentary meals during zero gravity space flights), the intricacies and practicalities of a zero gravity toilet ('Passengers are advised to read instructions before use' followed by a necessarily detailed 10 step guide to use), the picturephone and so on.

Kubrick's single-minded focus and occasionally perplexing working practices are of course the stuff of legends. He was a man who did everything to realise his vision on the screen and stopped at nothing. The final budget came in a staggering 4.5 million dollars over its allotted funding, nearly twice the agreed amount. 2001's making alone was an epic undertaking – although he and Clarke had been working some considerable time on the film before production in earnest began on 29 December 1965, a process that culminated in its world premiere in Washington on April 2 1968, but even then the film was not finished. Following the premiere Kubrick re-edited the picture down by a total of nineteen minutes to give us the 'lean' version that we see today. Sadly, in the UK at least, opportunities to see the film properly are

exceedingly rare. Occasionally there is a showing in Bradford, which has the facilities to project Cinerama films in all their curvy glory but other than that it is down to television to supply the experience first hand, a task that in all honesty it really isn't up to. Even then your choice is limited to the commercially available video which is an atrocious pan 'n' scan travesty or any of the (usually incorrectly cropped) showings on television; one ancient BBC transmission even tried to disguise that they were showing a letterboxed print by putting starfields in the black masked bits! Your only real choice is to go for the frills-free

region 1 DVD which is a bit of a missed opportunity.

In the final tally we are looking at a film that had its origins in a short story written half a century ago and premiered as a film but a fortnight after the elder of these two authors was born. Despite the fact that it is not the most oblique or avant garde science fiction film ever made (there are many but as a starting point try a double bill of Tarkovsky's enigmatically laid back philosophython *Solaris* [1971] or Shinya Tsukamoto's breathtakingly impenetrable *Tetsuo*: *The Iron Man* [1989]) it is probably the nearest the average cinema-goer or science fiction fan has come to viewing an intentionally 'art' film with very little scope for identification. Possibly one of the most watched art films of all time. Can it really hold ground next to such modern examples of the genre as *The Matrix* (1999) or *The Lost World: Jurassic Park:* (1997)? Yes. And no.

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## Voices in Time – The Lost World of 2001 by Gary S. Dalkin

#### Also sprach Zarathustra

ollectively and individually there are sentinels in the landscape of our soul. People, events, places, become ✓ icons; archetypes of the Jungian unconscious; beacons lighting our way in search of lost time. In 1968 they do things differently; that nostalgically remembered time now, another country where men still wear hats (you can see year by year the decline in popularity of male millinery in contemporaneous feature films and newsreels of the 1960s - movies finally switched almost entirely into colour at the same moment as men stopped wearing hats). Popular music revolved around a beat combo from Liverpool who sang about 'Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds'; surely a coded comment on the vast wealth of pre-decimalization currency the band were making. No man had boldly gone to walk on the moon, and while the programme had debuted on US television four years earlier, the BBC had yet to air a single episode of Star Trek.

#### The Proverbial Good Science Fiction Film

In this alien land, in 1964 a film had gone into production, a 70mm epic which would take four years to complete. Premiered

in Washington, where the Space Race had been launched, on the 2 April 1968, and slowly gathering pace to become the biggest hit of the year, the film lost out in the race to the Best Picture Oscar to the traditional musical *Oliver!* (1968). Reviews show bewilderment, anger, wonder, amazement, boredom. No one had seen anything like 2001: A Space Odyssey.

# ...the end of 2001: A Space Odyssey suggests that humanity's time has come...

In 1968 the European Union was only the embryonic Common Market, a trade association of six countries of which Britain was not a part. Airstrip One was, as usual, on excellent terms with the USA, and so we were party to the Cold War between Uncle Sam and the Soviet Union; a seemingly implacable monolith now a decade dust. And the Cold War was at its height, both driving the Space Race, and being fought by proxy in Vietnam and Cambodia. Caught between a newly unleashed hedonism of sex and drugs and rock & roll and a revulsion at the carnage in Asia, youth in the US and Europe were in open revolt against the values of their parent's generation. The gulf between the jolly exploitation of exploitation in Oliver! and the unanswered questions of 2001: A Space Odyssey. It would all come to a head two years later, on the 4 May 1970: as 2001: A Space Odyssey still played across the globe, Big Brother showed his willingness to employ the same the same brutality at Kent State University as he was showing in Vietnam.

For most in the UK television was still in black and white. BBC2 presented Britain's first colour TV broadcast on 2 December 1967, exactly four months to the day before the world premiere of 2001: A Space Odyssey, but BBC1 did not began colour transmissions until 15 November 1969, and in both cases to receive the programmes in colour one had to have a then very expensive new colour TV set. Against this, some films were being made on a larger canvas than ever before. Hundreds of cinemas had closed across the US and UK in the preceding decade, and in an attempt to win back audiences a handful of ever more lavish and spectacular films were being made; soon everything would collapse in the event horizon of the commercial failure of a

succession of 70mm roadshow pictures in 1969 and 1970, leading to several cinematic wilderness years in the early 1970s.

In 1964 Stanley Kubrick had released the nuclear war comedy Dr. Strangelove, or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb. Now, as the sheer scale of endeavour of the Cold War and Space Race escalated all kinds of rocket technology, it seems they also propelled the scale of movies to ever greater heights; inspired film-makers to expand their ambitions and artistic horizons; to throw off the shackles of all previous commercial considerations. As MGM issued Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke's 2001: A Space Odyssey, the Soviet Union unleashed Sergei Bondarchuk's monumental adaptation of Tolstoy's War and Peace (1967). At five hundred minutes of 70mm film, with a single battle scene lasting over an hour, with a cast of over twenty thousand, War and Peace remains unarguably the biggest, most ambitious, most spectacular movie ever made. Nothing Hollywood has made before or since has come remotely close in terms of size of production. Not Ben-Hur (1959), not Dr. Zhivago (1965), not Titanic (1997) and certainly not Gladiator (2000).

Yet that same year Hollywood released 2001: A Space Odyssey, running at a hundred and forty minutes, just over a quarter of the length of the full cut of War and Peace, but in terms of ambition, conception and scale of imagination, it was also like nothing the cinema goer had ever seen before. Something was

going on, as if both films were on the largest of canvases confronting the ultimate terror of absolute destruction. War and Peace's apocalyptic scenes of total war, complete with a masochistic sacking of Moscow, suggesting both a commentary on the war in Vietnam – the French invasion of Russia paralleling the American invasion of

Asia – and the horrors that might come with nuclear attack. The French retreat from Moscow through the killing snows calls to mind the predicted desolation of a nuclear winter. While the end of 2001: A Space Odyssey suggests that humanity's time has come, and may end in a ring of nuclear flame:

'A thousand miles below, he became aware that a slumbering cargo of death had awoken, and was stirring sluggishly in its orbit. The feeble energies it contained were no possible menace to him; but he preferred a cleaner sky. He put forth his will, and the circling megatons flowered in a silent detonation that brought a brief, false dawn to half the sleeping globe.'

2001: A Space Odyssey – A novel by Arthur C. Clarke based on the screenplay by Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke

#### **Fallout**

Whatever the implications for the future of humanity, real sf had finally made the transition from the printed page to the silver screen, and hope among readers of the genre was for a brave new world full of such future cinematic wonders as the eye had yet to behold and the imagination contemplate. It was not to be, for apart from the Soviet *Solaris* (1972), directed by Andrei Tarkovsky from the novel by Stanislav Lem,<sup>2</sup> there have been disappointingly few further attempts to make truly serious sf films. And such films as there have been have never been on the scale, either in terms

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Tarkovsky later adapted Arkadi and Boris Strugatsky's novel *Roadside Picnic* as *Stalker* (1979) and ended his career with the nuclear nightmares of *The Sacrifice* (1986)

of imagination or technique, of 2001: A Space Odyssey.

Not only was 2001: A Space Odyssey unlike anything that had come before it, it remains isolated in time as an aberration, unlike anything that would come after. A singularity arcing 186,202 miles a second across the dark gulf between projection box and screen, fifty, sixty, seventy feet wide, becoming a mysterious rectangle which hangs in the dark space before our eyes, a cinematic sentinel from 1968 now cut free from time sending out a message for future generations until mankind is able to move onto the next cinematic level, the hollow grunting of the average commercial feature left forever behind.

2001: A Space Odyssey leaves a trail of echoes across the century about to end. It is the millennial event, designed for the dome all those years ago, the dome of the grand architectural picture palaces of old – now themselves lost in time – but surely better suited to projection in Greenwich's Millennium Dome than a Black Adder sf time travel comedy. How can we be expected to

take the future seriously if a *Black Adder* special is how we collectively choose to chronicle our past? How trivial the changing of the calendar has become

For of course, 2001: A Space Odyssey is the millennial movie, so far ahead of its time the connection is so obvious we may not even think of it until we consider the title. Made at the dawn

of 'The Age of Aquarius', as the popular 1960s musical Hair had it, 2001: A Space Odyssey opens with the end of one age, and closes with the dawn of a new stage in human - or post-human existence. The 1990s arrived, and as they ran on, added millennial movies to their cultural roster, Terminator 2: Judgement Day (1991), Independence Day (1996),<sup>3</sup> Titanic, Armageddon (1998), End of Days (1999) and many others. It had all happened before, in the '70s; a cycle of disaster movies and supernatural horrors promulgated in the box-office aftermath of 2001: A Space Odyssey; The Poseidon Adventure (1972), The Exorcist (1973), Earthquake (1974), The Towering Inferno (1974), The Omen (1976), The Sentinel (1977), this latter not being based on the Arthur C. Clarke story which provided one of the inspirations for 2001: A Space Odyssey, but an apocalyptic/satanic horror movie based on a novel of the same title by Jeffrey Konvitz. Rather than a 'stargate' to enigmatic vistas, Konvitz's sentinel guarded the

The Sentinel was not just an inversion of 2001: A Space Odyssey, but a notable (for being so heavily promoted) box-office failure in the very year the sf dam finally burst. Before 1968, which also saw the release of The Planet of the Apes (oddly, a remake of which will come out in the real, calendrical 2001), there were very few big science fiction films. After 1968 the wave gradually built until Star Wars and Close Encounters of the Third Kind (both 1977). Since then there was been an ever increasing flow of sf movies, but few if any to be taken seriously on the level of the best written sf.

There are good sf films, but primarily they are good cinema first, usually routine sf a long way second. Among them the work of George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, James Cameron, Ridley Scott. Master craftsmen all, wonderful showmen who have made in the Star Wars saga, Close Encounters of the Third Kind, ET (1982), Jurassic Park (1993), Alien (1979), Blade Runner (1982), The Terminator (1984), Aliens (1986), The Abyss (1989), some of the most entertaining, visually breathtaking cinema ever. Films in which the science fictional content is negligible; at best a solid working-out of a standard genre idea in the service of gripping drama;, but with no truly new ideas, nothing to challenge the imagination of anyone who ever read a book.

And the millennial anxiety returned with *Deep Impact* (1998), *The Matrix* (1999), *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), *The Sixth Sense* (1999), *The 6th Day* (2000). But behind them all, in one way or another, stood *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the ultimate millennial movie, the father of them all. The world changed in 1968.

#### The Outward Urge

Real space is

a lost

adventure...

#### Proceed from the dream outward.

Carl Jung, quoted in The Making of Kubrick's 2001

The world changed, but if there was a promise of better science fiction films to come, it is one that film-makers have been generally unable to meet. There was a sequel, 2010: Odyssey Two, based on Clarke's own follow-up novel, and Clarke wrote two further sequels, 2061: Odyssey Three and 3001: The Final

Odyssey, but finally they add nothing to the original and in some ways detract by postulating explanations for what was enigmatically intriguing in the original, ultimate cinematic Rorschach test. Stanley Kubrick did ask Clarke to write an outline for a second collaborative sf film, for which Clarke used the short story 'The Songs of Distant Earth' (originally published in *If* in 1958). The film was

never made, but keeping the title, Clarke did expand the story and outline into one of his best novels. The legacy of this work continues with a concept album by Mike Oldfield, and in a soon-to-be-premiered oratorio by Oldfield's one-time collaborator David Bedford; a composer who, in the very titles of his works, reveals a lifelong fascination with the stars.

In the 1990s Kubrick again planned a new sf film, *AI*, originally an expansion of Brian Aldiss's story 'Supertoys Last All Summer Long'. Numerous writers, including lan Watson and Aldiss himself, worked on the screenplay, but the film was not made. At one point Kubrick called on Clarke for a new story treatment, but according to Clarke, Kubrick hated the result. However, Steven Spielberg is now preparing to bring the project to the screen, and with Clarke's treatment available to the director, elements of his story may yet become part of the final vision.

Clarke followed 2001: A Space Odyssey with Rendezvous with Rama (1973), currently planned as a film starring Morgan Freeman, who also starred in Deep Impact (1998), a film loosely based upon Clarke's The Hammer of God (1993). David Fincher of Alien<sup>3</sup> (1992) and Fight Club (1999) fame – is in the frame to direct. As for other filmmakers, Tarkovsky's Solaris, Spielberg's Close Encounters of The Third Kind, Cameron's The Abyss and Zemeckis's Contact (1997) all contain echoes of the visionary sensibility of 2001: A Space Odyssey. Beyond these, there have been rare attempts at serious sf cinema, with startling moments of conceptual breakthrough thrilling the small audiences of Cube (1997) and Dark City (1997), while John Boorman's much maligned and under-rated Zardoz (1972) at least attempted to be a truly intellectual sf film, undermined by the decision to costume Sean Connery in the most bizarre pair of underpants in film history.

But if cinema has failed to fulfil the promise of 2001: A Space Odyssey, written sf has far more than done so. Such writers as Greg Bear, lain M. Banks, Stephen Baxter, Greg Egan, Kathleen Ann Goonan, Neil Stephenson, David Zindell and many more have taken the genre to much higher levels of imaginative, literary and thematic development than before. Yet even as this happened the popularity of the written genre was eclipsed by fantasy; doubly ironic given it was the huge success of The Lord of the Rings, as republished in a single volume in the year of 2001: A Space Odyssey's initial release, that really launched modern fantasy as a commercial genre.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Dean Devlin and Roland Emerich's previous film, *Stargate* (1994) referenced *2001: A Space Odyssey* in its very title, the giant starships which hover over the cities of the world at the beginning of *Independence Day* are in homage to Clarke's *Childhood's End* (1954), while the climax of the film is, by pure coincidence, functionally identical to that of Clarke's contemporaneous novel *3001: The Final Odyssey* (1997)

#### 5 Minutes to Midnight

And back in the real world, we sit in the dawn of the real year 2001, entering the new millennium. It is both stranger than anyone imagined in 1968 and stranger than anyone could have imagined. In 1945 Arthur C. Clarke postulated a global network of communication satellites in his famous article in Wireless World, but even he could have had little idea in 1968 how in the 1990s a revolution in communications would not only truly realise the idea of the Global Village, but widen further than ever the gap between First and Third Worlds, those with and without access to the technology that makes the modern world go round. In 2001 we live in a wired world sprung, let's not say Zeus-like from the head of one man (for it took untold minds to create our modern communications system), but still seeded in Clarke's original idea - though presumably if not he then someone else would have thought of it sooner or later – yet not in the lost world of 2001: A Space Odyssey. For in our brave new world we realise now what we may not have then, that the outward urge, the pioneering spirit

to conquer the final frontier, was inspired not by the highest of human ideals, but the most base. Dressed in garb of manifest destiny, it was a combination of primal fear and the urge to get one better on the neighbours, to out-do the Russkies, to beat the damned Yankies, that put satellites into space and men on the moon. And once the Cold War began to

thaw, the astronomical cost of space exploration, though even at the height of the Apollo programme never more than 1% of American's annual military spending, began to come home. America, perhaps could afford it, but as we now know, all this spending eventually bankrupted the Soviet Union; and at a stroke recast such tales as 2010: Odyssey Two, The Abyss and Greg Bear's Clarkean Eon (1985) as alternative future histories or parallel world adventures.

Clarke was there in reality too, reporting with Walter Cronkite on the Apollo Missions for US network TV. But space became boring, and soon Apollo had to go wrong, as it did with Apollo 13, before it could get back on screen. The prospect of space did not hold the public imagination for long, but briefly intersected with our science fictional dreams through the 1960s to the early 1970s. The space that entrances in Star Trek and Star Wars is another place entirely, a mythical backdrop for the adventures of archetypal heroes and heroines. It is not space located anywhere in this universe other than in our pulp dreams. Real space is a lost adventure, lamented in the haunted Cape stories of J.G. Ballard, but kept alive still at NASA as even now the Shuttle, the Hubble Space Telescope, the International Space Station and the robot Mars landings still make the news. But there was talk in the early 1970s of humans on Mars by 1994. Stephen Baxter keeps the spirit of this lost world of 1968 alive in his alt. Space stories, in his novels of a parallel space programme such as Voyage (1996), and Titan (1997). He is the true heir to Arthur C. Clarke and Kubrick's vision, and so it is fitting and right and perhaps inevitable that he has collaborated with Clarke on the recently published novel, The Light of Other Days (2000), a backward looking volume with a deeply evocative title.

#### **Back to the Future**

And in the real world. Well, impatient as ever the sheep looked up and celebrated the Millennium a year early. The film was not called 2001: A Space Odyssey without reason. The film will be rereleased, in some countries, on 31 December 2000. I dread to think what modern, multiplex raised audiences will make of it. I suspect they will be bored. Even thirty-two years ago, when the world spun more slowly, the film was slow. Today, in an era of hyperkinetic editing, and relentless pace accompanied by sonic overkill, it may render audiences catatonic. 2001: A Space

Odyssey is slow, deliberately so. It is calculated to take the audience into a place it has never been, and to make that convincingly by establishing an absolute sense of reality of place, costume, design, setting. 2001: A Space Odyssey is a journey beyond the stars, to quote the original production title, or as the publicity had it, The Ultimate Trip! It is an experience unlike any other commercial feature film, at least as much about experience as narrative, of making the previously unknown and unimagined actual. It is as close to being in space as 99.99999% of us will ever get (barring now, the IMAX space documentary films). And to create this sense of verity, the film is necessarily slow. It reflects the slow movement of low and zero gravity.

Unfolded in real-time, with only breathing on the soundtrack, the pivotal EVA sequence in which one of the two crew of the Discovery makes a repair to the spaceship, seems to go on for ever, and seen out of context, or on television, is merely dull. But in context, shots of a man carefully extracting a screw from a control panel become the most nerve-wracking and tense drama imaginable. Never has DIY been so magnificent. But will a

teenage audience today give the film the time

And there is another problem. Though billed as in Cinerama, 2001: A Space Odyssey was not shot in the famous three camera original 1950s Cinerama which caused such problems in synchronising the cameras and projectors, but in Ultra-Panavision 70, a very high quality, and very wide format film which very few cinemas

and space it needs? I very much doubt it.

today are equipped to show. Not only are there very few cinemas with 70mm projectors left, but there are very few cinemas with screens both big and very importantly, wide enough, to show the film in anything like the way it was intended seen. For there has been another change since that lost world of 1968. The big cinemas of that time have largely been split into multiplexes. The 70mm projectors were disposed of when film companies stopped using large film format at the end of the 1960s. The new screens are much smaller, far too small to do justice to Kubrick's epic vistas. And all too often they are not even wide enough to fit on today's Panavision movies without parts of the image being lost at either side. In the multiplex today, 2001: A Space Odyssey in 35mm will be a shadow of its true self, and this will not help a new generation appreciate the scale, feel the impact, of the film. See it, but on the biggest screen possible, and remember, the past is another country, they do things differently there.

#### **JUMPCUT:**

**Never has DIY** 

been so

magnificent.

#### 2001: Rendezvous In Space

...he was not guite sure what he would do next. But he would think of something.

Arthur C. Clarke, 2001: A Space Odyssey

In the acknowledgements at the end of 2010: Odyssey Two Clarke listed, 'Jean-Michel Jarre, Vangelis, and the incomparable John Williams, for inspiration whenever it was needed."

Jean-Michel Jarre is the son of Maurice Jarre, himself one of the most successful film composers in the world, the man who wrote the music for some of the 1960s other great 70mm epics, Lawrence of Arabia (1962), Dr. Zhivago (1965) and Ryan's Daughter (1969). Perhaps inspired by Walter Carlos's electronic music experiments such as Switched On Bach (1968) and his music for Stanley Kubrick's follow-up to 2001: A Space Odyssey, A Clockwork Orange (1971), Jean-Michel Jarre released a series of extremely popular science-fictional electronic music LPs beginning with Oxygene (1976). His 1986 album Rendezvous was intended to form the basis of a massive multimedia concert including a link with the space shuttle Challenger, from where one of the astronauts would have played in the saxophone part to be mixed live with the music Jarre and his band of electromusicians played on Earth. The tragedy of the Challenger shuttle disaster put an end to these plans, and since that time Jarre has gone on to become internationally famed for gigantic musical events which light up entire cities with lasers, fireworks, and extravagantly costumed stilt-walking dancers.

On 31 December 2000 Arthur C. Clarke and Jean-Michel Jarre launched the new Millennium with an event known as 2001: Rendezvous In Space. It was hoped that it would have the largest television audience ever. It seems cosmically ironic that as sf and reality become one Stanley Kubrick, who was preparing 2001: A Space Odyssey for re-release shortly before he died, was not there. The future is about to begin, stranger than we ever could where sufficiently advanced technology indistinguishable from magic, becoming stranger and more wondrous everyday.

Also sprach Zarathustra

#### **Recommended Reading:**

2001: A Space Odyssey - Special Edition with a new foreword by the author and a new introduction by Stephen Baxter (London: Orbit, 2000)

Arthur C. Clarke, The Lost Worlds of 2001: The Ultimate Book of the Ultimate Trip, - Sidgwick & Jackson - 1972 - Clarke's own account of the making of the film, including 'The Sentinel' and much discussion of the development of the story and ideas which did not make it to the screen.

The Making of Kubrick's 2001, edited by Jerome Agel - Signet - 1970 - a superb compendium on every aspect of the film, including many complete reviews from the time.

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EDITORS' NOTE: WITH THE NATURE OF DEADLINES, IT SHOULD BE MADE CLEAR THAT OUR ESTEEMED FORMER CO-EDITOR WROTE THIS PIECE AT THE END OF 2000. THIS HAS MEANT A LITTLE JUGGLING OF TENSES WHEN LOOKING FORWARD TO EVENTS IN EARLY 2001 WHICH WILL HAVE PASSED BY THE TIME YOU READ THIS.

## The Music of 2001

We see sunrise in

space again, but

here it's an

inhabited space.

## by Tanya Brown

he opening titles of 2001: A Space Odyssey forge an iconic bond between the simple, dignified fanfare that introduces Richard Strauss's tone poem Also Sprach Zarathustra (1896) and the astounding beauty of sunrise in space. In 1968, real life, with its mundane soundtrack of control-room procedures, hadn't yet produced live footage of a moon landing. But the realism of that sunrise, combined with Strauss's dramatic music, evokes a powerful response that has nothing to do with flashy graphics or pulse-stirring marches.

Two years after the release of 2001, on the ill-fated Apollo 13 mission, astronaut Jack Swigert played Also Sprach Zarathustra to his listeners from the aptly-named command module, Odyssey. "This little tape recorder has been a big benefit to us in passing

the time away on our transit out to the Moon, and it's rather odd to see it floating like this in Odyssey, while it's playing the theme from 2001,"4 said Swigert during the second of the crew's telecasts. Minutes later, the world heard Lovell say, "Houston, we've had a problem". Hollywood, always trying to improve on reality, substituted Norman Greenbaum's hit 'Spirit in the Sky'

in the film Apollo 13 (1995) - the 'wrong tape' being just another glitch on the doomed mission.

Familiar though the awe-inspiring combination of Strauss and sunrise is, it's atypical. The soundtrack of 2001, in common with other 'arthouse' films of the period, doesn't feature much music at all. On the whole, when something's happening, the soundtrack consists simply of the sound - or, during the space scenes, the absence of sound - of what's on screen. There are three audio layers of sound in the film – dialogue (a mere 40 minutes in a film that's 139 minutes long), music, and environmental sound. These layers hardly ever overlap. Music and dialogue are contrasted, rather than conflated. This is not background music, in any sense of the word, but another element of the whole.

2001 may have only narrowly escaped the typical expansive, space-age soundtrack. Kubrick originally commissioned a score from film composer Alex North: they'd worked together before,

on Spartacus (1960), for which North had produced a suitably epic score. By 1967, when Kubrick approached North with the first hour of 2001 and his ideas for the atmosphere he wanted to convey, North had composed soundtracks for a clutch of successful films, including Cleopatra (1963), The Agony and the Ecstasy (1965), and Shoes of the Fisherman (1968).

Even before North began working on a score fitted to the script, however, Kubrick had been editing key scenes in the film using classical music as a temporary track. Arthur C. Clarke writes of seeing some initial edits: "Mendelssohn's Midsummer Night's Dream (1826) for the weightless scenes, and Vaughan Williams' Antarctic Symphony (1953) for the lunar sequence and the Star Gate special effects, with stunning results."5 Neither of these

pieces made it through to the final cut. Perhaps Kubrick felt that, as existing 'soundtracks' - the Mendelssohn piece was written as incidental music to Shakespeare's play, and Vaughan Williams based his Seventh, 'Antarctic' Symphony on the film score he produced for Scott of the Antarctic (1948) - they were too directly evocative of other scenes. Instead,

he turned to lesser-known works by contemporary composers, though he never relinquished Zarathustra or The Blue Danube.

Kubrick initially suggested to North that the soundtrack he'd composed could be combined with some of these 'temporary' tracks. Eventually, though, both composer and director felt that the classical pieces - divorced from whatever context or meaning they'd originally had - worked best without the distraction of a score more dutifully attentive to each minute of the action. According to Clarke, the composer never really got over the disappointment. "I had the hunch," North noted wryly, "that whatever I wrote to supplant Strauss's Zarathustra would not satisfy Kubrick, even though I used the same structure but brought it up to date in idiom and dramatic punch."6

North's unfinished soundtrack, forty minutes long, is now

http://www.visual-memory.co.uk/amk/doc/0080.html

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Transcript at http://pubpages.unh.edu/~mff/apolloxiii.html

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> The Lost Worlds of 2001 (1972): p. 45

<sup>6</sup> From an interview at the Kubrick Site:

available on CD, and has received favourable reviews. In contrast to some of his other work, it has a harsh, contemporary sound, not dissimilar to Ligeti's dissonant soundscapes. Some of the music does surface in the cinema, though: North reused his 'Space Station Docking' theme as the main theme for *Dragonslayer* (1981)!

Eschewing the exotic effects favoured by much SF film music of the period, Kubrick used Ligeti's atonal, disquieting pieces to convey menace and alienation, from prehistoric Africa to Jupiter and beyond. The brooding strings of *Atmospheres* (1961) heighten the insecurity of the apes awakening at the dawn of history out on the veldt. As they discover the monolith, the eerie voices of Ligeti's *Requiem for Soprano, Mezzo-soprano, Two Mixed Choirs and Orchestra* (1963-5) illustrate their fear and excitement. Kubrick uses the opening 'double whammy' of music and image – *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, sunrise – as Moonwatcher, almost in the shadow of the monolith, gazes at the bone in his hand and realises that it can be used. The music alone would indicate a conceptual breakthrough.

We've become used to frame-by-frame edits and sharp snappy cuts. As befits a film that Kubrick and Clarke both described as 'contemplative', some of the edits in 2001 have a calm imprecision, a lack of forced accuracy. It's particularly evident

when the scene changes: the music, or lack of it, may not match that change for several beats, subtly increasing the viewer's sense of anticipation. One such moment is when the hurled bone becomes the spaceship. Three beats elapse, as though the music is being 'counted in', before, ever so softly, this new world – and new century – of mechanical perfection is reflected by Johann Strauss's *Blue Danube* (1867).

We see sunrise in space again, but here it's an *inhabited* space. The incomplete space station revolves to the strains of the waltz, evoking fairground rides with the faint echo of the oompah

band in Strauss's glorious, predictable crescendi and rhythmic emphasis.

Those mechanical music-box harmonies, and the measured pace they force upon the viewer – the ineluctable slowness and precision of the docking procedure – are lost once the astronauts reach the interior of the station. Only in space, where there's no environmental sound, can the music be foregrounded. Music is the privilege of the distanced, godlike observer, watching as the shuttle leaves the station to land gently on the surface of the moon, with pizzicato strings.

The lunar landscape, with a crescent Earth hanging in the black sky (and the camera always facing Earth), is vast and empty. Ligeti's Lux Aeterna (1966) accompanies the moon bus over the dust towards the crater: then the Requiem's layered voices, first heard as the apes approached the monolith, herald the appearance of an identical slab. With a texture like insects humming, the Requiem builds to a climax that is never quite reached: as the men stagger at the sound of the monolith's signal in their helmets, the music fades away.

The Jupiter mission, out in the unimaginable emptiness between planets, is presented to the accompaniment of the 'Adagio' from *Gayane* (1942), a ballet by contemporary Russian composer Khachaturian. The simple, almost funereal melody is like a lament for lost Earth and for this frail venture of humanity. The *Discovery's* crew, though they don't know it, are already doomed, and they are very far from home, in a limitless night.

There's no music, and thankfully no muzak, in the future. The space station, the shuttle and the *Discovery* are calm, quiet workplaces, rather than leisure areas. Two songs survive: Frank's parents sing 'Happy Birthday' to him over a time-lagged radio link, with Khachaturian's melancholy music in the background as

counterpoint to their cheerfulness. And HAL, dying, sings 'Daisy, Daisy', slurred and slowing, as Bowman disconnects the elements that comprise HAL's self. Whatever music Bowman treasures from his own youth – presumably during the Sixties, given his age – he leaves it behind, unheard, when he transcends. If anything, this emphasises his alienation and his insignificance: a favourite tune, like HAL's swan song, might add an element of warmth to his personality.

The interval on board *Discovery* is, paradoxically, one of the calmest and most cheerful episodes of the film. Once HAL announces that an antennae is failing, the routine is broken. *Atmospheres* is heard again as Poole goes out to check the antennae: when Poole's EVA begins, the music dies away and we are left with the claustrophobic sound of his breathing. Kubrick uses breathing rate throughout as a deceptively straightforward indicator of physical and psychological state. With none of the emotional response that music evokes, it's the simplest accompaniment available, and comprises a surprisingly large percentage of the film's audio track.

With HAL dead, the film, symphonic in structure, shifts into its third and final movement: 'Jupiter and Beyond'. The ghostly chorus of the *Requiem* is heard once more as the monolith guides *Discovery* into position. Europa looms as the bass rumbles like

As the Star Gate

opens, male voices

in the Requiem seem

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distant thunder. As the Star Gate opens, male voices in the Requiem seem to cry out in anguish, like a legion of the damned falling into Hell. And Bowman and the viewer - are off on the 'ultimate trip', Ligeti's Atmospheres accompanying a lightshow more reminiscent of The Pink Floyd than of serious atonal composition. The unfocussed blur of the experience is reflected by the music's disorienting turbulence. Gradually the music slows and gentles, though it's still punctuated by sudden bursts of feedback-like dissonance, as Bowman's surroundings become recognisably a landscape. And finally the music resolves

into plaintive dying falls of brass, and Bowman's pod alights in an impossibly 18th-century salon.

The trip isn't over yet. Wordless, distorted vocals, muffled as though heard through a diver's or a spaceman's helmet, contrast with the clean white lines of the room. The music is Ligeti's *Adventures* (1962): an original recording conducted by Ligeti himself was altered, without permission, for the soundtrack, and the composer took legal action against Kubrick. The original piece features much clearer, oddly sexual vocalisations: though compelling and disturbing in its own right, it's too recognisably human for the definitively alien setting. This Bedlam chorus emphasises Bowman's confusion, especially as he encounters himself and the music fades.

True to form, Kubrick doesn't lessen the impact of Bowman's encounter with the monolith by introducing music, mystical or otherwise. *The Blue Danube* might suit the room, but it's been used exclusively for space shots, and has more to do with mechanical precision than with the quasi-mystic revelations impressed upon Bowman by his experience. Music at this point, as the elder Bowman witnesses the appearance of his neonatal self, would be a cliché. The silence is deafening.

But at the moment before transcendence, the distant rumbling of the kettledrums – almost below the threshold of hearing – signals that another shift has occurred, as it did with Moonwatcher out on the veldt. And this time there's a sense of resolution, of something both evolving and coming full circle, as Bowman's mystical rebirth sends him back towards the blue Earth. Something new has begun: and on that note, Kubrick leaves his audience with the familiar strains of *The Blue Danube*, a reassurance after revelation. The film itself lasts, blank-screened, for a good five minutes after the final credits – just Strauss's waltz

playing, soothingly, in the dark.

The big-budget space epics of later decades may have commissioned stirring soundtracks from seasoned names, or upto-the-minute (and thus swiftly outdated) songs from that year's popular stars. Kubrick's use of Ligeti might as well have been bespoke: the chances of his audience being familiar with it were low. But the sweetly familiar waltz is an elegant distancing device: Richard Strauss's version of a momentous dawn as dramatic as any visual cue

Working with existing recordings, Kubrick edited scenes to fit his 'temporary' soundtrack rather than demanding music to fit a completed scene. Well before the first pop video, this is film shaped by music rather than vice versa. Perhaps that's why the music assumes such importance in 2001: not an afterthought, not wallpaper, but an integral part of the cultural artefact that is 2001.

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TANYA BROWN IS THE BSFA'S WEBMISTRESS - EDS.

## Return to Shannara: an interview with Terry Brooks by Ellen Cheshire

OCTOBER 2000 SAW THE PUBLICATION OF TERRY BROOKS'S LATEST NOVEL, *THE VOYAGE OF THE JERLE SHANNARA*. ELLEN CHESHIRE INTERVIEWED HIM FOR THE BSFA.

I set out to write a

**European adventure** 

story set in a fantasy

world

## Ellen Cheshire: Starting way back, why did you start writing Fantasy Fiction?

Terry Brooks: Well, that's fairly complex question!

I actually began writing when I was about 10, doing all kinds of little experimentations with short story forms and then later graduated to doing longer fiction during my teen years, or trying to do longer fiction, most of which I never finished. During that time period I was doing what I think a lot of young writers do which is experimenting. I would read science fiction for example for two years straight and I'd be all enthused about science fiction so I'd go out and try and write a science fiction story and then, I read *Moby Dick* so I'd write a great white whale story, and so on and so forth.

I wrote a fairly comprehensive science fiction book about three hundred hand-written pages when I was in my late teens. But none of it was very good, then I went to college and I wrote a lot of crappy love stories, and that wasn't going anywhere either.

During that time period, I was reading – particularly during my teen years – European adventure stories and I was very influenced by them from the start and I thought 'this is what I would like to write', but I didn't really have a format for it. Then I read William Faulkner for my senior thesis in college and liked a great deal what he was writing about: the inbred character of certain communities and the ways in which secrets destroy

various members of a family and how you can undo everything just by denying what the truth was. I liked those concepts and I wanted to do something with that. Well then about that same time, when I finishing up on Faulkner I read *Lord of the Rings* for the first time and I thought 'You know if I lost all this other stuff, this English professor stuff with the appendices and so on, I maybe use this

format to tell straight forward adventure story, but interjected with things that I wanted to write about and that was the impetus to go down this road.

So I didn't actually set out to write a Fantasy, I set out to write a European adventure story set in a fantasy world, and I never even thought of it as fantasy in those days, because I wasn't reading a lot of fantasy. Everything else that I had read that could be called fantasy or had those trappings, would have come from Homer, the mythologies and from the Arthur legends, things like that. So it was a fairly varied background and it was more traditional and not contemporary at all, except Lord of the Rings.

#### EC: What did you think you could contribute to the genre?

**TB:** I hardly had those kind of aspirations! My plan was to write the damn book and see if I could do it. And then once I wrote it, it sat for a year on the shelf and then I thought 'Jeez you should do something with this, what are you going to do?' and then I

thought 'well let's see if I can get it published'.

#### EC: This was when you were practising attorney?

**TB:** It took seven years to get through the first book, as I was doing it part time. I started out when I was in law school and then continued it when I got into a practising law firm, but I knew that this was what I wanted to do – to write.

## EC: Did you keep your 'moonlighting' a secret from your colleagues?

**TB:** No, everybody knew I was doing this. But I don't think anyone had any particular expectations, nor did I at that point that it was going to lead to anything. Certainly not to what it did lead to. It was just something I really enjoyed and had always done, since as far back as I could remember.

I think if you are a real writer you will write – period. It doesn't matter whether you're published, it doesn't matter what is going to happen, you will write because it is part of who you are and what you are – that is always true for me.

#### EC: So you write for your own pleasure?

**TB:** I do now, I'd do it now if the publisher called up and said 'that's it, your career's over' I would still write because I can't imagine life without writing. There's too much enjoyment, there's too much satisfaction it's too important to me as an individual to think of a life that didn't involve books. It's much broader, one

thing buttresses another, if you grew up a reader, books become your favourite pastime, your favourite form of entertainment – that's still true for me. I would never not read, I can't imagine life without reading, the same that I can't imagine now, life without writing.

## EC: Have you continued your broad-based approach to reading?

**TB:** Yes, I read a lot of contemporary fiction, some of literary, some of it popular. I read outside my field extensively. I read books that intrigue me from reading out them in the trades, Judine [my wife] frequently recommends books that she reads in women's fiction, Southern fiction, Black fiction – things that I don't necessarily go into on my own but that she feels are important. I belong to a book club, we read something new every month, usually something that isn't on the beaten path, so you know it informs and teaches you always to read things that are not the things you would directly go to. Our tendency is just to read the same stuff over and over, not necessarily a good thing.

## EC: You referred to reading outside your own field. Do you think of yourself as fantasy writer now?

**TB:** Well, I think of myself as an adventure story writer, essentially. I get marketed as a fantasy writer because that is the nature of the market. But you know it's an interesting thing, I've

met a tremendous number of writers who don't work in my field, but work in other fields altogether, some of them much more successful than I am, and everyone basically thinks of themselves as a writer. They write a particular kind of thing because that's what sells for them and because that's what they can do – most writers can only do one thing well. They can't do more than that and it's not like you set out 'I think I'll write the next Harry Potter series' because most people can't do it. Even good writers, established writers cannot do it, you know, it's not what speaks to them, it's not what interests them and if you don't have that interest and the enthusiasm, you can't do the job right and it'll come off as a pale imitation, it's not going to work for you. You have to write what means something to you.

### EC: It's been 23 years since the first Shannara novel, what has prompted you to return there once again?

**TB:** When I wrote *The Talismans of Shannara* in 1992, I knew then that I was coming back into the story. I didn't know how long it would take, but I knew what the story was basically going to be, but I wasn't thinking about the particulars because at that point I had just finished four books in that series and I was sick of it. I just wanted to write something else, so I put it all aside wrote two Magic Kingdoms, and then I wrote the three books in the Running with Demon series and then in-between that I did the

prequel [The First King of Shannara (1996)], so I was six books down the road and Star Wars, before I came back into Shannara and actually sat down and said 'Now, enough time has passed, I'm enthused about it again, I'm excited about it again, what's the story going to be?' And that led me to decide what the story was, how many books it was going to be, that kind of thing.

There are going to be five books in all, three are 'Voyage' books, and the last two books are standalones, that play off of what's happened in the first three.

#### EC: Do you know now what is going to be happening in the five books? Are we going to be left with equally compelling cliff hangers at the end of each?

**TB:** Well, less so. It's kind of like the 'Heritage' series, most of the cliff hangers are set up in this one [Book One – *Ilse Witch*]. The second one has a couple, and some unresolved storylines and then the third one wraps up that first three book set fairly comprehensively – but not entirely.

The last two books will develop again with some of the characters from the first three and with some plot lines that will run through all five books.

## EC: So the last two will be independent, but will you have to read the previous three?

**TB:** It's kind of hard to say at this point. I would say no, you will not have had to read the previous three to read the last two, but it always helps. My feeling is that when you read a book at any point, you should want to go back and read the rest of them to find out what went on before.

## EC: Do you ever worry that readers will feel cheated that they have to buy the next book to finish the story?

**TB:** It hasn't proven to be the case. I worried about it when I went back in to 'Heritage', when I wrote *The Scions of Shannara* (1990) which was similar to this book in its cliff hanger story and it was a four-book set. I thought 'I don't know, there may be a lot of people who will be unhappy', and people did come out and say 'How could you do this?', but basically they stuck with me, so there is reason to believe that readers will be tolerant if you're prompt!

#### EC: So when is the next book out, how long do we have to wait?

**TB:** Well, just a year. Everything is set a year apart, so in Great Britain it will be every October for the next five years – I guess. That's when the books will be ready to go, so hopefully that's the

publication date they'll use.

## EC: You are over here promoting your new book, do you enjoy getting out to 'sell' your books and meet your readers?

**TB:** I'd be in big trouble if I didn't because I've been doing it for five weeks now (laughs) in the States and then I'm here for almost two weeks. So yeah, I do. I do it because I enjoy making the personal connection that you don't get when you are a writer writing. People don't come and visit you in your writing den, you're pretty much shut away with your work.

I like that connection, and I like talking to readers and visiting bookstores and talking with booksellers about what they do, because it is so integral to what I do as well and I feed off that energy. When people tell you they really love what you've done or that it has changed their life in some way, or its really meant something special you take that energy back with you when you're sitting all by yourself there for months at a time working on this story. I think it helps you remember why it is you're doing this. You're not just doing it to make money, you're also doing it because people get something from this and that is important to them – that's what's so wonderful about writing.

## EC: You spend your time between the Pacific North West and Hawaii. How does that work?

TB: Well, I have homes in both the Pacific North West and

Hawaii, when I moved to Seattle, after living for 42 years in a small town, I was determined that I was never going to live in just one place ever again. So I live Hawaii part of the year, I live in Seattle most of the year and we travel a lot. Judine and I travel quite a bit, we do it on tours and we do it on vacations. We go and see other parts of the world, because it's both inspirational and useful for a writer to do that.

#### EC: Are there any places in particular that your enjoy visiting?

**TB:** We enjoy everywhere (laughs) we come over here fairly regularly, we always enjoy coming to England for lots of reasons. We like graveyards for example, old graveyards where we can poke around at the gravestones, go the ruins, the gardens. It's a different way of life and we find the people and places interesting.

#### EC: So what's your idea of Utopia?

TB: That's it.

I think if you

are a real

writer you will

write - period.

#### EC: Your life as it is now?

**TB:** I think my life is great. I love what I do, I'm excited by it all the time. I can't imagine doing anything else, you couldn't offer me anything else that I would want to do more than what I do right now. So you know I'd say that this is pretty much perfect.

## EC: Going back, Shannara is a world within itself, you created that world, does that give pleasure?

**TB:** Yeah, it's like you get to play God a little bit, that's one way of looking at, but its more like, the metaphor I like to use, its sort of like putting a puzzle together. You've got all these pieces of this puzzle and you get to fit them altogether to make the picture, but you get to make it the way you want it to be, not the way the box is. You get to envision what the box is going to be, and then you get to put all the pieces together and make them come together and there's a tremendous amount of satisfaction in that.

## EC: In a fantasy, do you have this complete freedom, can you give your characters ultimate magic powers?

**TB:** I don't think it works that way, that's not the way I've been trained as a writer. My editor was very emphatic about the fact that fantasy was extremely hard to write because you needed consistency and couldn't simply throw in magic willy nilly to resolve the issues and the problems you created, because readers would not accept that as the way in which we know the world works.

Fantasy must mirror the way in which the world works, so that the behaviour of the characters and the resolution of the problems has to be consistent with the truths that we know, and that's not an easy thing to do all the time.

Sometimes you have to step back from the obvious easy answer and think about the truth and what's real, you can't simply resolve difficult situations by saying 'I know, let's have some magic work here', because readers are quick to sniff out when you've created a problem you can't solve and so you've thrown in a quick solution.

## EC: Raymond Chandler said that if he didn't know what he'd do in a situation he'd send someone in with a gun...

**TB:** Well, that may work in detective stories, but I think it doesn't work well in fantasy because there is so much of it that's unreal and other worldly to begin with, that there's a fine line between writing something that has aspects of that and that which is totally unbelievable – then you're into Terry Pratchett land where it is all just funny and strange and you're reading it for pleasure but you don't believe it could really happen.

## EC: On the back of that, the Demon series is fantasy but set in a world that we know. How different was it for you to write the trilogy?

**TB:** Well it was different and it was interesting. I loved it and I badly wanted to do it - I spent a lot of time thinking about that

storyline. Obviously the challenge was to take what's true about this world, what's real and accepted about this world, and figure out a way to integrate a fabric of magic, of mythos, that would seem compatible and didn't require complete suspension of disbelief. For example, I didn't want to have dragons flying overhead, or unicorns prancing through fields because nobody's ever seen this – it is not true. But what everybody's seen, is that small movement just at

the corner of their eyes and when they look it's not there. That's true because we've all had that experience and that's the kind of thing that I wanted to write about. Where I could say that it's real after all, you just haven't seen it, you've only ever seen a glimpse. That was the challenge of that particularly book, that plus writing about social issues like dysfunctional families, drug addiction and homelessness and integrating these into the storyline that in some way I thought would be relevant.

## EC: You mentioned earlier the Star Wars novelisation. In that case you had a set of characters and situations from which you had to work. Was that restricting to you as an author?

**TB:** No it wasn't, it was actually easier because you don't have to recreate everything from the ground up, you've already got a lot of the work done. So I had a storyline, I had characters, we know what they look like, but in George Lucas's view, there was room to play around. He said that I was free to invent, develop and change things within his storyline, that there was nothing sacred about it. I could change his dialogue, his scene settings, I could talk about his characters in ways the movie wouldn't talk about them. There would be interior monologue, we would get to see inside their heads, which you can never do in a movie. He wanted some new material particularly in regard to Anakin Skywalker who at one point he thought to make principal character for his story. He decided that that wouldn't film well but he wanted to know if it would work well in a book. I said 'Yeah I thought it would, we could do that'. So that was the impetus to go write the original material about Anakin, his background, his story, get to know him a little better as he's the central character in the series.

That was an interesting challenge as this is the first time we see him, he's still a boy. What is it about him that is going to lead him to become Darth Vader down the road, that was interesting to me. So I got to play around with that quite a bit, to look at his character outside the framework of the movie, and write the original material about this riding in the space race and losing, meeting the sand people – those kinds of things. It was a lot of fun

and not at all constricting.

**Fantasy must** 

mirror the way

in which the

world works

## EC: Was it daunting becoming involved in such a phenomenally successful film series?

**TB:** Oh yeah, I'd seen the movies. In fact that's all that I knew about them, I asked him about that, if that was going to be a problem. I'd only read one or two of the books, he said he didn't care, he hadn't read them either. He said 'All you have to know is what's in the movies and what the storyline is for this one and you can go from there, you can ask me whatever you need to know'. I asked him Jedi and Sith history, and he gave me a whole bunch of information on that. So that is kind of the way it went.

## EC: Hook was your first foray into films, which was already reworking of a novel which in itself was based on play by J M Barrie. How was that experience considering the film wasn't terribly well received?

**TB:** No, that project was in trouble from the minute I came on board. Had I known then what I know now I wouldn't have taken the project. But I didn't and at moment of supreme hubris I decided that I was the perfect person to write this story, there was nobody better suited and I had to do this. I actually asked to do it! My editor told me 'don't do this' but I didn't listen to him so I paid the price.

It was not a good experience because there was so much trouble with the making of the movie, there was a lot of conflicting difficulty on the set and people were not very cooperative which made the job very hard for me, although I was fairly happy with the way the book turned out. The original script was much better than the movie. I saw the original script, which is why I campaigned for it, then right after I took the project on they decided to

re-write it. But it just didn't work out, and that was why I said afterwards that I never do another film novelisation – of course I had to eat those words!

## EC: Did you have a particularly feeling for the Peter Pan story, do you see yourself as the little boy who has never grown up?

**TB:** Absolutely I do. I've got a good part of me that's still about 10 or 12 and still believes in all the possibilities that we believe in when we're that age. Certainly writers of my sort, writers who are writing adventure stories of the fantastic nature better have some of that in them or they can't do their job very well. Most of the writers I know certainly have, as a major part of them, that little boy or girl in them.

## EC: Do you have plans to translate any of your own novels into screenplays/films?

**TB:** Oh, I live in hope. Realistically I don't know. I've been down this road a couple of times, sold options and nothing's happened – I just sold an option for *Magic Kingdom* this past winter. There was lots of excitement, the usual stuff of what's going to happen and so on, and so far nothing's happened – as far as I know. Maybe it'll all come back again, there's been a lot of interest lately in *Running with the Demons*, so I think I live in hope that some day somebody might do the job and do it well, but I know realistically that the odds are against it and I think you have to accept that and not worry about it.

## EC: There has been a lot of advance publicity about the Lord of the Rings films. On the whole it's been pretty positive...

**TB:** It's always positive until the movie comes out. And then they'll say 'I knew this wasn't going to be any good'. I've seen a lot of the stills and so forth and it looks very very dramatic, very dark and I think if it's geared towards an older audience it's going to do well. If it's geared towards children it is going to tank in about five minutes. *Lord of the Rings* is really not for kids.

## EC: Do you have any words of wisdom for budding writers of the genre?

**TB:** Well I spend a lot of time talking to writers. I have a website

actually (www.terrybrooks.net) which anyone who wants to know what I'm doing should go to, as it keeps my schedule of appearances for book tours, lectures, conferences or whatever, and that it something people can make use of.

My story is that if I can get there you can get there and that what it takes is a tremendous amount of perseverance and belief in yourself. You must have that never give-up kind of attitude and what people who want to be writers have to do is write every day.

#### EC: Are you quite disciplined in terms of writing?

**TB:** Well I am still quite driven, but I'm wearing down! In the old days I was driven to write all the time, everyday, it was I had to do. The way to break into the business is to be always ready, always looking and then eventually you get lucky. That's the other component and when you get lucky you need to be ready, and then if you've got something it will help. But it requires a tremendous amount of patience and intuitiveness and that's where we lose most people who would like to be writers because they don't have that kind of drive and this kind of feel to break into it. To stay successful requires that sort of drive in order to succeed, otherwise you might as well enjoy what your doing and not worry about the publication part of it, which for many people is just fine.

EC: Just to end I'm going to borrow some questions from the Radio 4's Desert Island Discs. You're stranded on a desert island with the Complete Works of Shakespeare and the Bible. What one record, one book and luxury item would you take? [Note: He thought these the toughest questions asked. He also commented on the English obsession with list making!]

**TB:** I don't want the Bible or the Complete Works of Shakespeare (laughs) Horrors indeed. One record that I would take with me? – Dire Straits' On Every Street because I love it.

EC: And your one book? [His wife Judine who had been quietly reading in the corner of the room interjected with "a blank one".]

**TB:** Yeah, I'd take a book with nothing on it and a pen so I could write my own story.

#### EC: Your pen would have to be luxury item then.

**TB:** OK, that would be fine I'd take a pen that would never run out, that would be my luxury item, or I'd have to have one with many refills, and my blank book, which depending on how long I'm stranded there would have to be a big book, and then I'd take Dire Straits and then I think I'd be fine.

#### EC: Thank you very much

**TB:** You're very welcome.

Terry Brooks was in the UK promoting the publication of *The Voyage of the Jerle Shannara – Book One: Ilse Witch*. Published by Simon and Schuster. Priced £16.99 HB.

ELLEN CHESHIRE IS THE AUTHOR OF THE POCKET ESSENTIAL: JANE CAMPION, CO-AUTHOR OF THE POCKET ESSENTIAL: THE COEN BROTHERS AND CONTRIBUTOR TO THE SFW BOOK, FANTASY FILMS.

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## The Man who Invented the Mekon... and Other Mysteries

Further Explorations into 'The Hidden SF' – The Juvenile Science Fiction of Mainstream SF Writers by Andrew Darlington

ARTHUR C CLARKE, KEN BULMER, AND MANY OTHERS WERE REGULAR CONTRIBUTORS TO A NEGLECTED LITERARY SUB-GENRE OF FICTION WHICH APPEARED – FREQUENTLY UNCREDITED AND SUBSEQUENTLY UNACKNOWLEDGED, IN A LOST GALAXY OF LONG-EXTINCT PUBLICATIONS. YET ITS INFLUENCE HAS SHAPED THE MATURE WORK OF BRIAN ALDISS, BOB SHAW, DOUGLAS ADAMS, New Worlds editor John Carnell – and even Patrick Moore. Now, decades later, piecing together its history is a fascinating enterprise riddled with contradictions, false leads... and sometimes, undiscovered classics too!

#### THE STORY SO FAR...

'The Headquarters of the Interplanet Space Fleet some years in the future... in the Launching Control Room...' "'Kingfishers' ready to go, Sir Hubert" informs Dan Dare. "Hello Kingfisher, Fleet Controller Here. We're going to give you the gun now. Goodbye and best of luck." The Auxiliary Rocket Boost switch to Ramp Two goes down. And as early as frame five on the front page of the first issue, the Kingfisher is blasting into space towards Venus, and the unknown...

"Boys magazines and comics have for long been a medium for good juvenile Science Fiction stories." Says who? Says John Carnell in an early editorial to New Worlds (# 6, Summer 1950). With impressive credentials as the editor of Britain's best and longest-running adult sf magazine, Carnell is a figure whose opinions are to be respected. So you indulge his nostalgia when he goes on to enthuse that "many an older reader can hark back to his boyhood days and remember the exciting adventures in the Boy's Magazine, Nelson Lee Library, Union Jack and others of twenty years or more ago. In fact, he'll probably agree that it was those juvenile 'horrors' that first set him along the road to regularly reading futuristic stories". Carnell's excuse for such an orgy of dewy-eyed sentiment is to salute this - the launch of Eagle, "another 'good companion' on the road to the stars". And while welcoming its arrival he makes a particular point of drawing the attention of his audience (which he seems to assume is exclusively male) to the fact that this new "National Strip-Cartoon Weekly... carries regular science fiction stories with a strong juvenile appeal... [and] a strip-cartoon adventure set on Venus",

thus introducing New Worlds readers to Dan Dare.

Eagle was born in 1950, at the exact centre of the century, and as such it stands at the pivotal point of the long transition from the totally text-based juvenile publications produced during the five decades that preceded it, and the virtually textless visuals predominating at the twentieth century's end. So Eagle's literate mix of pictures and prose make it the perfect embodiment of that transition, a crucial balance giving it a trend-significance which Carnell accurately identifies as "this generation's focal point for stimulating thought". It is a litmus paper of the times.

While according to a much more recent issue of Eagle Times (Autumn 1992), Arthur C Clarke also launched his own first Space Odysseys around basic scenarios featured in Eagle, giving Carnell's assertions even greater gravity. The story of his involvement is complex, often confused, but well worth teasing out. Artist Frank Hampson and the Rev Marcus Morris had originally conceived the Dan Dare character torturously between the months of May and September 1949 as a project intended for inclusion in a religiously-based juvenile publication. From their blueprint 'Space Missionary' concept of 'Lex Christian', it then mutated into 'Chaplain Daniel Dare'. At the same time Clarke was already known as a leading propagandist for Space Travel through his chairmanship of the British Interplanetary Society, and his agitprop books such as The Challenge Of The Spaceship (1946) and so on. So – needing logistical guidance to legitimise their project, Marcus contacted Clarke, inviting his participation in the already troublesome strip. Eagle historian Adrian Perkins reports that 'Clarke responded immediately and enthusiastically'. Morris arranged and paid for Hampson to travel down to London during June 1949 to meet Clarke at his Savoy Place office, taking dummy pages to gauge Clarke's reaction, to initiate discussion, and to seek technical advice.

Some of the results of this momentous meeting are immediate, and easily verifiable. Six months later, with *Eagle* taken up by Hulton Press, and Dare secularised at their insistence, the connection is formalised. And Clarke is appointed part-time 'Scientific Adviser' for *Eagle*. This materialises most obviously in the inclusion of his short story 'The Fires Within' in *Eagle* # 17 – 4 Aug 1950. An adaptation of an earlier story, in which the discovery of a vast subterranean civilisation beneath the Earth has accidentally disastrous consequences, it appears as by 'Charles Willis' with some judicious Chad Varah sub-editing. But soon Clarke is also there under his own name, contributing an article 'Is Space Travel Possible? It Certainly Is!' for the 1953 *Dan Dare's* 

Space Book, while he continues anonymously as a guiding force behind the illustrated 'Professor Brittain Explains...' column, submitting its educational texts on radar, telescopes, X-Rays, and Deep-Sea Diving. But more specifically, it was Clarke who introduced Hampson to the beautifully photographic-realist art of American astronomer-

illustrator Chesley Bonestell (as featured in the groundbreaking 1949 *Conquest of Space*), the influence of which were to add accuracy and authenticity to Dare's solar system. Clarke then helped Hampson to design Dare's aerodynamic spacecraft along the lines of those featured in pulp sf magazines, and the futuristic cities to be featured in the *Eagle* panels, the very scenarios that fellow sf artist Sydney Jordan would describe as "Dan Dare moving through the carefully tailored worlds of pseudo-violence and sexless relationships".

Hampson had already sketched out his ideas for the basic plot. Clarke helped to flesh it out with details drawn from his own more specialised knowledge of the genre. It was he who suggested the planet Venus as the initial location for Dare's first adventure, a world then still widely believed to have Earth-like properties from which life-forms and alien habitats could be extrapolated. He was also responsible for the idea of two Venusian hemispheres occupied by conflicting races, which Hampson was able to evolve into 'Treens' and 'Therons'. As Hampson recalls in a letter reproduced in Eagle Times - "I can confirm that he [Clarke] was instrumental in launching the Treens by suggesting an outline of their behaviour". Perkins goes on to explain that "Clarke provided a draft outline of the plot and sample dialogue. Moreover he devised much of the background detail - and, as we all know today, Frank much preferred to have prose to alter than to have to originate it". However, Clarke "very much disliked having so much of his finely-tuned text altered even if it was uncredited". There were monthly meetings between Arthur C Clarke and Frank Hampson during their eighteen-month association, with Thursday-night trips down to the Fleet Street pub where John Wyndham, Walter Gillings, William F Temple, John Russell Fearns, Edmund Crispin, John Christopher - and Clarke, used to meet to trade sf-secrets. But as with all fluid collaborations the exact ratio of ingredients vis-à-vis Clarke to Hampson in those early Dan Dares can now never be precisely known, and accounts from both participants subsequently differ wildly. Clarke claiming a greater degree of hands-on involvement than Hampson cared to admit, an issue even more difficult to resolve now that Frank Hampson is no longer around to contribute. "Over the years I have spoken to both ACC [Clarke] and Frank Hampson on the subject" Perkins confides to me, and "the two principals related slightly different stories. Arthur even claimed to have written the first Dan Dare story in its entirety, which he could not have done." In balance, the account that Adrian outlined in Eagle Times - "other than a bit of 'best fit' fine tuning, I believe most of it to be correct."

Yet the result of this quarrelsome alliance ensured a strip which – unlike the Costumed Avengers and Caped Superheroics of American comicbooks, is firmly grounded in the British literary sf tradition, and underlined by a genuine sf premise. One which established new benchmarks in authenticity to which rivals must now aspire. For example, in issue #3, Dan Dare - en route by Helicar to Space Fleet HQ, patiently explains to Digby that "the number of people in the world has doubled since 1950 - and food supplies are growing less because vast areas of the Earth have been exhausted by bad farming in the past! Try as we may, we simply can't grow enough food to go round, and the Scientists can't find any good substitutes! But if they're right and we could grow crops on Venus, compress them, and ship them back here, it'll mean life itself to millions of people". It's tempting to hear Arthur C Clarke's voice ventriloquising the script. While even in later Dare tales - when Clarke was presumably no longer around, themes surface which seem to indicate a greater familiarity with sf history than Hampson would be expected to know. For example,

doesn't Edmond Hamilton's 'The Sargasso of Space' (from *Astounding Stories* – September 1931) seem just a little like Dare's encounter with the 'Spaceship Graveyard' in 'Prisoners of Space'? While Hamilton's 'The Reign of the Robots' (in *Wonder Stories* – December 1931) even shares its title with a Dare epic. Perhaps Clarke had

provided a list of recommended reading? Perhaps not. Nevertheless, it's an intriguing tale, and one with results that significantly influenced the reading taste of a generation, myself included.

It is a litmus

paper of the

times.

One of Britain's finest novelists, Brian Aldiss, admits that "many of us began reading sf 'because of the pictures', and a grounding in Buck Rogers or Dan Dare was often the foundation of a life-long affection for sf" (in his SF Art). And for the kids of the 1950s - what are the alternatives? SF academic Kenneth S Slater was even then busy lamenting the fact that "there are a large number of youngsters 'reading' science-fiction comics" [his quotes]. While reluctantly going on to concede that they have little else in the way of 'speculative fiction' available to choose from - "I would honestly like to see some good juvenile sf published in this country, [but] there is very little to attract them to a higher standard of reading matter" (in Nebula # 34 - September 1958). The motivating intention behind this stern rebuke is to denigrate the then-current hardback fiction of EC Eliot's KEMLO stories, or Capt W E Johns's Kings of Space series that were then to be found in the School Library, both of which are far lower on the scale of scientific credibility than Dan Dare. As a random example, in his Quest For the Perfect Planet the highly-regarded creator of Biggles writes of "the stars which, after burning as our sun is burning, for billions of years, burnt themselves out, and after cooling down become planets like the one on which we happened to be born" - a very basic misconception of astrophysics that Dan Dare, Rick Random or Jet-Ace Logan would never have been allowed to get away with.

But that's another discussion entirely. In the meantime, working for a medium that was parentally disapproved-of and frequently Teacher-derided, denied even the serious critical consideration given to those often inferior hardback 'children's' novels, the unacknowledged scripters of comic-strip sf were making their lasting mark on the soft grey underbelly of children's imaginations. John Carnell recalls with affection the "boyhood days" he shares with "many an older reader" who share his similarly retro taste for the "juvenile horrors" of the 1920s. And sure, during its lifetime Boys Magazine ran tales as outlandishly Space-Operatic as The War in Space by Raymond Quiex (in 1926). But even as the title folded in 1934 there were new titles waiting to snare the newer imaginations of later generations of boys...

Brian Aldiss for example. "Science Fiction entered into and began warping my life from an early age... in the year 1933, when I was eight, I gave up *The Gem*, and took *The Modern Boy* instead. The emphasis in this weekly was, as the title suggests, on modernity and (for my preference) on the future. One of the

contributing authors epitomised all that I loved about that splendid fruit of the Amalgamated Press: Murray Roberts. I know nothing about Murray Roberts. Yet I owe him as big a debt as I do Aldous Huxley or Thomas Hardy, greater writers whose influence touched me later. For Murray Roberts was the inventor of Captain Justice [...] Justice was an elegant adventurer, much given to wearing white ducks and a naval cap and smoking a cigar. He had various bases around the world, chief of which was Titanic Tower, significantly in mid-Atlantic. From Titanic Tower, Justice sorted out the troubles of the Anglo-American world in story after story

[...] Modern Boy serialised Murray Roberts's Justice adventures for years. His stories also appeared in The Modern Boy Annual and in The Boys' Friend Library which Amalgamated published every month, the Library comprised short novels price fourpence each".

The precision of such recall only serves emphasise the depth of the impression these made on the intellectual development of Britain's most remorselessly innovative and literate sf writer. An impression confirmed by no less a source than Britain's no.1 pop-Astronomer **Patrick** Moore<sup>7</sup>. "Even in the Mesozoic '30s some good boy's stories were published in magazines and annuals" he recalls (in his book Science and Fiction [1957]). "I well remember a series by Murray Roberts, which ran through a now-defunct and lamented paper called The Modern Boy. Here we had

all the ingredients to be expected - the white-haired absentminded old Professor Flaznagel, the dauntless Captain Justice, the jovial Irish Doctor, and the inevitable red-haired scamp, Midge. Several of Roberts stories were interplanetary, and most of the rest had a strong scientific basis." The image of a short-trousered schoolboy Patrick Moore enthralled by such exploits is particularly endearing. While in his fascinating essay-collection The Shape of Further Things (1970 - and then in his 'Magic and Bare Boards' contribution to Hell's Cartographers [1975]), Moore's fellow-enthusiast, Brian Aldiss, not only manages to uncover Murray Roberts's true identity as the pen-name of an equally obscure Robert Murray Graydon, but finds time to elaborate on the curious charm of this Doc Savage variant whose forays take him to such exotic locations as 'The Land Of Monsters' - a story with a dramatic cover illustration of Midge being pursued by a two-legged dinosaur, while the rest of the crew prepare to intervene in the background. It came complete as Boy's Friend Library #697 in December 1939 - priced, as Aldiss correctly recalls, at only 4d. Elsewhere, "Justice and Co ventured into Africa to find an empire ruled by strange forces, confronted giant insects, battled with enormous robots, overcame alarming flying machines, survived a world plunged into darkness (the most enthralling of all his adventures!) and also paid regular visits to

any runaway planets which happened to be passing through the solar system at the time". The red world Nuvius was a "runaway tramp planet" wandering through the solar system, on which the daring Captain becomes marooned, only to be rescued by Professor Flaznagel's timely invention of a "triple-power magnetic ray". While the other story alluded to earlier – titled *The World in Darkness*, has the Earth "plunged into a cloud of impenetrable interstellar gas through which no light could shine..." "I was an avid reader of *The Modern Boy*" concurs Patrick Moore wistfully, "and I regret its demise, mainly because it was thoroughly

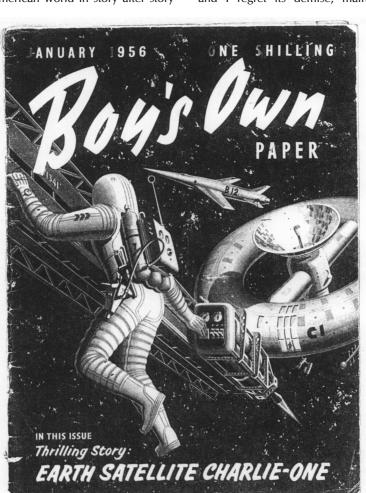
wholesome."

Such magazines were superseded - first by the short-lived all-sf Scoops, and then by Modern Wonder in the late 1930s which carried early fiction by John Russell Fearns and John Beynon Wyndham, and by DC Thompson's Wizard, Hotspur, Rover - which, in their turn, were also crammed with daunting columns of novel-length prose in solid blocks that would intimidate today's reader. Yet they too included stories with fantastic and sf elements which would set their readers, in turn, "along the road to regularly reading futuristic stories." Belfast writer Bob Shaw renowned as the inventor of the 'slow glass' concept, admits (to Foundation #10) that his enthusiasm for sf was "a taste which had been nurtured by the fantastic serials which usually ran in the boys weekly papers like Wizard and Hotspur"

The interface between

adult and juvenile fiction is one fraught with possibilities and strewn with false clues. To determine to what extent they merge and overlap is one impossibly trip-wired with speculation. For example, Douglas Adams – author of The Hitch-Hikers' Guide To The Galaxy recalls how "I read the Eagle from the age of seven and absolutely loved it. I was always very hard up as a kid and one day I noticed you were paid ten shillings (50p) for submissions. I thought I may as well try to get a letter into it. My first piece, at 12, was a blatant plug for the Eagle, which, to my amazement, was accepted. A few weeks later I wrote a 100-word short story which was published too" (quoted in Daily Mail/Weekend 1 October 1994). Adams's subsequent televisual contribution to the Fantasy image-bank amply bears out John Carnell's rationale for juvenile sf, "just as the boys of two generations ago - many of them now technicians on atomics, aeronautics, astronomy, rocket propulsion - looked up to the moon and stars and wondered when men would bridge the gap, so will the boys of today look and wonder – and perhaps be able to do a little more about it when they are older." Probably the motives for the comic-strip hacks of the 1950s and '60s - and sometimes beyond too, were a little less noble, but nevertheless they managed to score a respectable run of acceptable stories that still stand up to close examination.

In most cases the juvenilia was published anonymously, hence I, for example, obsessively devoured the fiction of Ken



 $^{\rm 7}$  Now Sir Patrick Moore, knighted in the 2001 New Year Honours List

Bulmer and Michael Moorcock as an adolescent without knowing it to be their work. A few years later I would become equally addicted to their adult novels and magazine fiction – still without being entirely aware of the continuity. It's possible that a degree of imaginative scene-setting took place in the picture-strips, which made the fuller development of the themes in adult fiction more readily acceptable? Certainly the enthusiastic and intelligent treatment of fantastic and Science Fictional-elements in strip-form made deep and lasting impressions that led irresistibly to their more adult counterparts. Surely there *must* be a subliminal connection there that is more than just coincidence? And after all – NASA designers read sf comic-books too, didn't they?

When I first read Arthur C Clarke's novels The City and the Stars and Childhood's End as a teenager, I little realised that I was continuing an association I'd begun a decade earlier in the pages of Eagle. Yet the same subliminal process was occurring with the work of Ken Bulmer, one of the most incandescent stars of the adult sf magazines Authentic Science Fiction, Nebula and New Worlds. Some of his strongest fiction comes infused with a powerful weirdness quotient, most frequently represented by his contributions to the quirkily distinctive Science Fantasy, and it's also in this area that his strip fiction excels. Buster was a weekly Fleetway comic largely remembered for its comedy content, but it also featured Bulmer's Mike Kane: Gladiator (later reprinted as The Secret Champion) through the final months of 1963, and The Drowned World disaster-strip in autumn 1964. He also scripted the one-off non-sf story 'The Worst Boy in the School' for Hurricane (29 February - 19 September 1964). But at the same time, Bulmer's more genre-related Brett Million stories were appearing in the colour centre-spread of Boy's World (with art by Eidle Stein & Langford), which he then continued into The Ghost World illustrated by no less a luminary than some-time Dan Dare artist Frank Bellamy (7 December 1963-25

Ken Bulmer also scripted a single Jet-Ace Logan story for *Tiger*: 'While on a severe discipline-training course, Jet-Ace and his chubby pal Plum-Duff Charteris break nearly every rule in the book of RAF Space Regulations to investigate the appearance of gigantic fire-breathing dragons in certain mountainous districts of the world' runs the breathless introduction. 'The worst afflicted quarter of the globe was Central Asia and China where rolling banks of poisonous mist swirled out of valleys bringing sudden death and destruction. The armies of the world fought back courageously, but hopelessly. An old-

April 1964).

time legend had reappeared upon the Earth, living monsters seemingly taken straight from Ancient Chinese paintings, and with their reappearance came death and destruction, horror and disaster...!' The fusion of science with mythic elements is typical of Bulmer's technique. Although that was perhaps not fully appreciated by the editorial regime of the comic, for the story – at the time untitled, was subsequently reprinted as *Dragons From Saturn* – giving away the shock of ending in the process. Now 'Logan and Charteris had set out at great risk to themselves to prove that such nightmare creatures existed in the ringed planet Saturn. But soon after plunging into the giant planet's vaporous atmosphere their ship hit trouble... and hit it *hard*!'.

Needless to say, the heroic spacemen survive to face further monstrous threats in ensuing issues, while Bulmer's scripting for comics went on to reach its finest expression in *Lion* with his creation Karl The Viking – illustrated by that most quintessential exponent of heroic fantasy, Don Lawrence. Naturalistic and with a well-observed degree of historical accuracy, Karl was perfect of physique, with luxuriously flowing blonde hair – but was thankfully free of gimmicky supernatural powers. Denis Gifford's well-researched *Encyclopaedia Of Comic Characters* records that

"'The Sword Of Eingar' was the title of the original serial saga of noble Karl, Son of Eingar the Manslayer, who led the Vikings in their longboats to Saxon Britain in search of his father's sacred sword. Commanding the army was his rival for the throne, the sneering devious Skurl, doing his best to dispense with the young heir. The stolen sword was in the possession of Earl Gyrth of Eastumbria, from whom it was duly regained. Then Karl was off in his serpent-ship to explore and plunder North Africa." As this brief overview indicates, all the mythic elements of Henry Treece and Rosemary Sutcliffe's critically acclaimed and highly regarded historical fiction combine with the supernatural lure of Sword & Sorcery at its best in these stories. And with an escalating fantasy quotient, as Karl's epic voyage to the South American domain of Oxaca - via a stop-over at Atlantis, finally draws to a close "ahead, thousands of miles across the sea, another adventure was even now being born. A peril, fiercer than he had ever known, descending from the craggy snow-capped mountains and making ready to strike with blood-lusting cruelty at Karl's domain." This trailer gives some slight taste of "THE START OF KARL'S MIGHTY COMBAT WITH SELGOR THE WOLFMAN!" While beyond that, Karl's later voyages lead him to lands as evocatively strange as any visited by Dan Dare, encountering demonic hallucinogenic fungi, giant frogs, and a quest for the Kraken. And these tales of Nordic adventure rightly continue to be regarded as imaginative fiction of a high order.

Today's issues of 2000AD seem to have very little to do with what John Carnell would recognise of his rationale of "good juvenile Science Fiction stories." And indeed – its sophisticated 'Graphic Novel' approach has little to do with juvenile audiences per se. But even when Fleetway launched 2000AD as a self-consciously hyped-up successor to Eagle (complete with a newly redesigned Dan Dare as cover star), its adolescent late-70s target

audience was one which already considered the 'Space Race' to be history. Instead, 2000AD grew from sf's iconoclastic New Wave, and as a mutated off-shoot of Movie Special-FX. Instead, it remains as one competing element in a predominantly textless electronics leisure industry, and one now virtually aimed exclusively at mature 'readers'. Where today's kids go for their fix of the sf that will set them off "along the road to regularly reading futuristic stories" is up for grabs – Star Wars or Star Trek perhaps, just as where new generations of willing hacks will go to develop their visual and narrative skills is equally uncertain, the virile independent imprints, or just possibly the movie spin-off mags?

But perhaps the medium is less important than the ideas? These things seem to have an irresistible

continuity capable of mutating in tune to the dreams and aspirations of each new generation. It's my guess that the process will go on, in some form or another, for some time yet to come.

© Andrew Darlington 2001.

Captain Justice was an elegant adventurer, much given to wearing white ducks and a naval cap and smoking a cigar

I gratefully acknowledge the kind and generous assistance of:

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Adrian Perkins

Denis Gifford, Encyclopaedia Of Comic Characters (London: Longman, 1987)

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

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

Andrew Darlington earlier explored comic books and SF in the previous issue of Vector — Eds.



## First Impressions

## Book Reviews edited by Steve Jeffery

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

All collections marked: 

contain stories that are eligible for the 2000 BSFA Award for Best Short Fiction.

#### Steve Aylett − *Atom*

Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2000, 137pp, £9.99, ISBN 1 861591 24 1

#### **Reviewed by Tanya Brown**

"The city sprawled like roadkill, spreading more with each new pressure. A grey rain slicked Campag Street – cars slewed through smoke and collided with pieces of the Brain Facility. Little flames dotted the rubble like Zippos in a darkened stadium..."

Welcome to Beerlight, Steve Aylett's cyber-noir vision of a near-future metropolis with a comic-book aesthetic and a cartoon morality. Down these mean streets a man must walk: meet Taffy Atom, whose card reads 'Private Defective' – and that may not be a typo. Atom is the naked detective, with mysterious origins and ambiguous motives: occasionally he dons a huge black coat and plays shamanistic clarinet at the Creosote Club. His business partner, Madison Drowner, upholds the tradition of the smart, mouthy babe who can look after herself and take care of any trouble-makers, whilst mixing a mean cocktail and creating psychoactive weaponry (rather like Gibson's Chrome). Atom's security consists of Jed Helms, whose human head has apparently been grafted onto the body of a bulldog-sized fish:

"What kind of goldfish is that? It's a monster!"
... the fish snarled, "Define your terms, meathead."
Joanna's bulk wired with shock. "It's talkin' semantics!"

Add a selection of stock characters from the golden age of cinema – criminal masterminds, dumb bodyguards, blandly perfect blondes – and mix in a generous measure of post-modern irony and a few sfnal devices, and you'll have *Atom*.

In fact, there's something very cinematic about *Atom*. At 137 pages – more of a novella than a novel – there's little space for much in the way of plot development. Elaborate metaphors and slick, accomplished prose adorn (or obscure?) a fragmentary plot, the main strand of which concerns the theft, pursuit and recovery of Kafka's brain, stolen from the City Brain Facility by the scheming Candyman. Lightning-fast cuts from scene to scene, and from tableau to action, heighten the *noir* effect. *Blade Runner* set standards for the look and feel of futuristic urban noir: it's a setting into which *Atom* fits neatly, albeit with a satirical Western flavour.

Slaughtermatic, Aylett's previous excursion into Beerlight (he also writes contemporary crime) succeeded because of a serendipitous match of plot and style. It was a stylish take on the old time-travel paradox about travelling back in time and meeting yourself: what if you shoot that self? Atom, less narrative-driven, elevates style over substance to a degree that will confound the traditional reader. That said, this novel has the charm of a superbly-crafted animé film, though perhaps one without subtitles.

#### Chris Bunch and Allan Cole - Sten 2: The Wolf Worlds

Orbit, 2000, 298pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-84149-008-3

#### **Reviewed by Stuart Carter**

How very depressing the prospect of "One million Sten books sold worldwide" seems now. Having also reviewed the first in the

Sten series [see V213] I shamefacedly recall saying that I had quite enjoyed that book in spite of myself, and was vaguely hoping to

be able to say the same of The Wolf Worlds. I enjoyed the first Sten book in the same way that I still enjoy Harry Harrison's The Stainless Steel Rat series or Douglas Hill's Galactic Warlord sequence. Sadly Sten 2: The Wolf Worlds emphasises all that was bad about the first book.

Having risen into the giddy ranks of Mantis Section, the Empire's espionage and dirty tricks department, Sten and his crack team of mayhem-makers (including Alex the 40<sup>th</sup> century Scotsman whose accent herein makes all of Irvine Welsh's characters sound positively plummy!) have to stop a group of religious fanatics from standing in the way of efforts to mine a new mineral. The fanatics are divided, have two corrupt leaders, little personal honour and a surprisingly uninspiring religion.

Sten 2 is unforgivingly violent and brutal, skimming sf conventions simply to provide excuses for gratuitous death, dismemberment, horror and (not quite as bad) appalling characterisation.

Does this make me a lily-livered liberal PC freak? Well, if it does then there are worse things to be. I usually have no problems with gore, death, war and all the other less pleasant aspects of human nature, but the casual nature of the above, all in the name of an authoritarian Empire, began to turn my stomach. Perhaps I've been spoilt by Banks' Culture, but glamorising wholesale murder and those who routinely engage in it just... sucks.

I would refer the authors to a superlative episode of Grant Morrison's sublime 'comic' The Invisibles, in which an anonymous guard previously shot and killed by one of the main characters becomes the focus of a later issue: his life, loves, letdowns - his existence as a human being - and challenge them to see anyone simply as 'deserving' cannon fodder ever again.

Don't read Sten - you don't need to. Nobody does.

#### Pat Cadigan – Dervish is Digital 🕮 Pat Cadigan - Mindplayers

Reviewed by Penny Hill

If you haven't yet tried Cadigan then her 1987 debut novel Mindplayers is a good place to start. Dervish is Digital follows on from Tea from an Empty Cup (1998, see V203) but does not resolve the outstanding issues, instead it moves forward with a

were looking for resolution through a direct seguel but we do get hints of a cessation of previous activity.

Both novels contain Cadigan's wonderful internal scenery, devised to be individual yet believable, in the mental landscapes Allie explores in Mindplayers and the central image of Virtual lowdown Hong Kong in Dervish is Digital.

It is good to see Konstantin again; she has become more au fait with the VR world but she is still an outsider. She introduces us to Cadigan's creation in the same way Allie, the newcomer to mindplaying, does in Mindplayers.

Both are sympathetic women of unknown age, adult enough to take responsibility for their and young enough to make convincingly bad mistakes that keep the plot

flowing. They have few outside ties - the narrative stops around Allie's marriage and divorce. However, Mindplayers is about Allie's attempt to reconcile her absorption of McFloy, not about her sexual relationships. In the same way, I found I was looking for a romantic link between Konstantin and Goku in Dervish is Digital, because I'm used to the television clichés where people who start off antagonistic automatically end up in bed together. Cadigan is more interesting and original than that.

Some of the other relationships are less well-drawn. I found

myself questioning whether Allie's links with Jerry Wirerammer were entirely believable, as they seemed to exist only to forward the action, but when did people behave entirely rationally? Both our heroines' bosses are uncomprehending Managers who have

> threat device, reminding Konstantin of outside pressures; Nelson Nelson is more sympathetic to Allie and offers a few insights that prove to be useful.

Macmillan, 2000, 230pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-333-77953-3

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

The use and abuse of drugs form a major part of both worlds, from the worryingly amusing portrayal of narcs perpetuating the crime they are attempting to solve in Dervish is Digital, to the random drug-taking in Allie's past.

Although Mindplayers is a very episodic novel, it is more than just a fix-up, as all Allie's experiences illuminate aspects of her own problems.

While reading Dervish is Digital I found I enjoyed the ride but found it hard to keep up. I couldn't see how all the ends would be tied together in time for the ending. There was a

sense that Cadigan had written herself into a corner from which it was easier to reach a no-win ending, rather than one in which Konstantin wins through.

My central problem with Dervish is Digital is the underlying question: is Dervish digital or not? Because this world is full of futuristic elements, there is enough to make it possible that, like other sf worlds, someone has been downloaded into digital form, but we have only Konstantin's insistence that such things are myths to persuade us otherwise.



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#### Mike Chinn (ed) – Swords Against the Millennium **Reviewed by Lesley Hatch**

Alchemy Press, 2000, 180pp, £9.95 ISBN 0-9532260-3-4

In his introduction to this anthology, the editor, Mike Chinn, freely admits that he has always loved "tales of sword-wielding barbarians taking on all comers", and it shows in this collection of eleven short stories set in various sword and sorcery universes, some of which owe something to the great masters of the genre, such as Lovecraft and Clark Ashton Smith.

The stories range from old-fashioned to futuristic to humorous, and I have to say that it is the humorous tales I prefer to the more serious ones. A prime example of the humour is the very first story in the anthology, 'An Embarrassment of Champions', in which we visit Atlantis and find ourselves spectators at the competition to find a new royal champion, following the demise of the previous incumbent. From the moment we meet the long-suffering court wizard, you know it's going to be an unusual and interesting story, and so it is, with an unexpected ending.

The funniest story (and my favourite of the collection) is Stan Nicholls' 'The Taking', in which we make the acquaintance of a rather unorthodox troop of soldiers - orcs and a dwarf - who get themselves caught up in a rather unique rescue operation, when one of their rulers gets stolen by the local humans, and they have to get him back. Trouble is, how do you manage to retrieve said ruler when your arch-enemies the humans want to make a bonfire

of him, the ruler in question being a mummy? Stan has done a fine job in depicting the life of this platoon of oddball soldiers, and again there's an unexpected twist at the end.

There were a couple of stories that did not quite work for me, but this is due to my personal preferences – I have never been able to read Lovecraft, for example – and so 'Manslayer' and 'Dark Destroyer' are not my cup of tea, but this is not meant as a

criticism of the stories themselves. All the tales in this volume are exceptionally well-crafted, and they are all readable. In his introduction, Mike Chin says that it is extremely difficult to write a good short story set in this type of universe, I would concur and say that the eleven authors featured here have done a great job, and they are to be admired. I would therefore definitely recommend this anthology to fantasy and horror fans alike.

#### Arthur C. Clarke - Greetings, Carbon-Based Bipeds!

Voyager, 2000, 558pp, £7.99 ISBN 0-00-648369-0

#### **Reviewed by Paul Kincaid**

There are times, when a major writer comes towards the end of a long career, when the most interesting work they produce is retrospective. Certainly there is a sense that Arthur C. Clarke is in the process of closing off his career. By the time this review appears his collected short stories will be in the shops, and here, in the book before us now, is his selected non-fiction. Many of the 110 articles gathered here have been collected before, in books like Profiles of the Future and Voices from the Sky which have played as big a part in building his reputation as any of his novels. Others have not seen print since they first appeared in obscure publications such as Futurian War Digest, Journal of the British Interplanetary Society and The Aeroplane; while still others have never been published before. They range in date from an appreciation of Lord Dunsany that appeared in the Futurian War Digest of December 1944, to 'The Twenty-First Century: A (Very) Brief History' which was published by the Sunday Telegraph in February 1999. They range in subject from scuba diving ('Undersea Holiday') to sex in zero gee ('NASA Sutra: Eros in Orbit'), from matters of faith ('Credo') to the problem of sewage in space ('Toilets of the Gods') and the issue of gays in the army ('The Gay Warlords'). It is, perhaps, not a collection to be devoured at one sitting, certain issues recur too frequently, some anecdotes become overly familiar; but taken individually there is more than enough evidence here to suggest that Clarke should be far better remembered for his non-fiction than for his science

For one thing: his prose is better. There is, particularly in the earlier pieces, a measured, rather old-worldly gentility in the writing that is a world away from the crisp matter-of-factness of his fiction, and it makes these essays a delight to read. And this improvement in the prose seems to be a reflection of his engagement with what he is writing. He has an enthusiasm for ideas that, without the necessities of plot and character, can come shining through. Few writers of popular science seem to have this genuine talent to make ideas sing, to carry the reader along with the excitement of the author. In a piece first published in *Holiday* in 1954, for example, he considers the astronomical candidates for the Star of Bethlehem in a way that is at least as involving and as fresh as the story ('The Star', probably his best) that grew out of

it. And if his innate optimism about our future in space that is there as strongly at the end of this collection as it is at the beginning can grow a little wearysome at times, there is no denying the enthusiasm that convinces you that yes, we will build facilities on the Moon, on Mars, that yes, we will master the technological problems and head out into space.

If, despite landmarks (Childhood's End, The City and the Stars, 'The Star', 'The Nine Billion Names of God', 2001, A Space Odyssey, Rendezvous With Rama), I'm coming to the conclusion that he has done more and better in these popular science articles than in his science fiction, Clarke himself has not wavered for a moment in his devotion to the genre. He talks about it in ways that make it inextricable from his non-fiction, and includes a number of perceptive and thoughtful essays on the subject, especially about the ways writers have got their protagonists to other worlds. (At the same time, it must be said that he should never have tried his hand at shorter reviews, either of books or of films.)

In such a densely packed collection there are bound to be duds. I was not especially enthused by the articles about diving, perhaps because I am not enthused by the activity. As the book progresses, you find articles bulked out by long quotations from other things he has written, often of only tangential relationship to the rest of the article, you find the same memories cropping up again and again, you find short articles trailing away to bitty inconclusion. And there are problems with the way the book has been put together: at times it is difficult to tell where Clarke's prefatory remarks end and the article begins; at times the editor's introduction seems to be part of the text; and Clarke's famous 1945 paper for Wireless World which everyone knows introduced the notion of geo-synchronous communications satellites (it didn't: the paper is actually about communications using manned space stations in geo-synchronous orbit) is called here 'Extraterrestrial Relays' though Clarke refers to it in his introduction as 'Can Rocket Stations Give Worldwide Radio Coverage?' Despite such grumbles and gripes, however, this remains an essential collection that represents the very best of one of the most important writers in the history of our genre.

#### Sara Douglass - Sinner: Book One Of The Wayfarer Redemption 🕮

Voyager, 2000, 638pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-00-648617-7

#### **Reviewed by Lynne Bispham**

It is forty years since Axis SunSoar, the StarMan of ancient prophecy, brought peace to the land of Tencendor, defeating his half-brother Gorgrael the Destroyer, and forging one nation out of the human Acharites, the Icarii birdmen and the forest-dwelling Avar, events related in 'The Axis Trilogy'. Now Axis has become the Star God of Song, and his son Caelum rules Tencendor. Unfortunately, Caelum does not appear to be as able a ruler or general as his father: when his uncle Zared, Prince of the North, not unreasonably asks that the Acharites should have their own throne, as do the other races of Tencendor, Caelum provokes Zared into war, losing thousands of his own troops through incompetent leadership.

Meanwhile, Caelum's brother, Drago, reviled by other members of the SunSoar family for once allying himself with

Gorgrael and plotting Caelum's death, is accused of the murder of their sister RiverStar. Protesting his innocence, Drago flees through the portal to the universe known as the Star Gate, where he becomes the pawn of the Questors: demons who threaten to destroy the Star Dance from which every Icarii Enchanter, including the SunSoars, draws their power.

A consequence of this book being the sequel to a trilogy is that the reader is immediately confronted with a cast of hundreds; inevitably, sorting out the various relationships and enmities makes for a rather slow beginning. The characters themselves are not a particularly likeable bunch; the SunSoar family alone fielding a number of candidates for the eponymous sinner. Caelum is certainly a flawed hero, whining that everyone owes him their loyalty, and yet treating both Zared and Drago

abominably. After a slow start, the novel begins to pick up pace, although it does consist of a lot of talk and introspection interspersed with sudden images of horror or violence. It is as though this first volume is really just setting the scene for later volumes in the trilogy, and it may be unfair to judge it until it can

be read in conjunction with volumes two and three. It will be interesting to see if in the next volume – presuming they will be forced to confront the demons from beyond the Star Gate – the characters are subsequently shown in a light which elicits rather more sympathy from the reader.

#### David Drake - Servant of the Dragon 🕮

#### Millennium, 2000, 612pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-950-3

#### **Reviewed by Kathy Taylor**

Servant of the Dragon is the third book in the 'Lord of the Isles' saga. Like the others in the series it is a heroic epic fantasy, with a similarity in style and overall structure to Robert Jordan's 'Wheel of Time' series, albeit faster paced.

All the main characters from the previous two novels are present, and after the prologue the novel proper picks up where *Queen of Demons* left off in the capital with Garric coming to grips with his new government and responsibilities. While he and his friends are investigating the irregular appearance of a mysterious bridge, a giant bird captures his sister Sharina. The book then splits into several plotlines: Sharina's adventures; Cashel hunting for Sharina; Ilna off on a diplomatic mission ship, and Garric, Tenoctris and Liane trying to deal with the magic forming the bridge. By the end of the novel all the threads tie together in a satisfying if unsurprising resolution.

After Queen of Demons this novel is a little disappointing although it's still a good fantasy adventure. The characterisation is generally strong, the plot moves quickly enough to keep the pages turning but for the most part the authority of authorship is lacking.

There is no real depth to Garric's development into kingship on either a spiritual or mundane level. The practical issues presented by his rule in all but name and his aim to unite the isles seem to be resolved in a superficial manner, almost as passing background. The previous two novels in the series were notable in their discussion of the moral consequences of magical and non-magical actions. Although the practical consequences of magic provide much of the underlying plot material it lacks the feeling of any complexity of issue: X was foolish; Y resulted; Z saved the day. Although there are places where the novel seems to spark this never seems to take off for long.

Overall, Servant of the Dragon suffers a little from being a 'mid-series' book where David Drake has nothing particular to say. It's well written and enjoyable to read. If you have read and enjoyed the first two in the series you'll probably enjoy this. It is sufficiently self-contained to read as a stand-alone book but as such it doesn't really stand out as anything special. I hope the next in the series sees David Drake returning to his previous better form.

## Christopher Evans – *Ice Tower* Colin Greenland – *Spiritfeather*

#### Dolphin, 2000, 119pp, £3.99 ISBN 1-85881-709-9 Dolphin, 2000, 119pp, £3.99 ISBN 1-85881-710-2

#### **Reviewed by Penny Hill**

These two new volumes in the *Dreamtime* series have more in common with each other than the previous two stories had (see V211). In each case the child protagonist becomes responsible for the safety of a vulnerable companion while journeying through a shifting reality between dreams and ordinary life. They are both accompanied by a trickster spirit guide who may be imaginary – a jackdaw in *Icetower* and a hyena in *Spiritfeather*. In the background, an enigmatic Shadowman threatens their survival and return to normal life.

Both stories were enjoyable but worked on rather different levels. In *Icetower*, Rhys has to fathom out the rules to a survival game. This will enable him to escape from the eponymous dreamworld Icetower and rescue his friend Jack. Although the rules are somewhat banal when explained at the climax of the story, I found myself struggling to guess them as the narrative progressed. I quickly worked out the underlying pattern but failed to spot the rationale behind it. Apart from this challenge, the story was straightforward and competent enough but did not have enough depth to inspire re-reading.

Spiritfeather on the other hand, uses the adventure plot to explore some complex ideas on emotions and family relationships. Roshana, who is used to protecting her mother and caring for her baby brother Jino, has to adjust to her mother's new relationship with Rajah. Whether Rajah poses a threat to the family or whether the real threat lies elsewhere is hard for Roshana and us to decide.

The Indian setting is rich and vivid and contributes successfully to the depth and atmosphere of the story. With its more challenging themes, I feel this book is more involving than *Icetower*, as it doesn't patronise the reader or minimise some of the difficulties of growing up.

It may be gender stereotyping, but the two books seem to be deliberately designed to appeal to readers of the same gender as the protagonists. The more direct emotions and action of *Icetower* seem aimed at a typical pre-pubescent boy, whereas the more sophisticated emotions and ambiguity of *Spiritfeather* seem aimed at a slightly older female reader. I am not convinced whether either reader would then enjoy the other's book.

#### **Eve Forward** – **Animist**

#### TOR Books, 2000, 336pp, \$23.95 ISBN 0-312-86891-X

#### **Reviewed by Alan Fraser**

My first glance at the cover of this book told me it was a new Modesitt. This impression was intentional, it's described as "a rational fantasy in the tradition of L. E. Modesitt's *Recluce* books". Whatever a "rational fantasy" is...

However, it's from Eve Forward, a writer from Washington State, USA, author of one previous book from Tor, *Villains By Necessity*, not related to this. *Animist* introduces an Earthsea-like world of thousands of islands, inhabited by humans and intelligent (uplifted?) animal races – simians, rodents, dolphins and avians all pay a part. Alex graduates from the College of Animists and sets out on a quest to find his 'Anim', the animal with which he will form a lifetime bond. Animists are essentially

anti-magicians, in that they use their powers to detect and resist magic, rather than wield it. When Anims die, their Animist partner dies too, unless they can perform the rite of Separation. The bad joke here is that, unlike most students, Alex is a bond slave of the College – just in case he decides not to return and complete his servitude after finding his Anim, they haven't taught him the Separation part!

Having escaped from serious peril right at the start of his quest, Alex arrives in the city of Belthas on the island of Mariposa, where only the rival city of Deridal stands against the ambition of King Belthar of taking over the whole island. After performing a rather legendary service for Belthar, Alex offends the king and

heads for refuge in Deridal. Here he enters the service of the mad King Carawan and his beautiful daughter Celine. Having fallen for Celine, Alex soon finds himself trying to defend Deridal against a siege by Belthar, aided by a powerful magician whom the young inexperienced Animist must overcome. Belthar is also a keen implementer of 'ethnic cleansing' of non-human races on Mariposa, so defeat for Deridal will mean death for the many who

have taken refuge there.

I enjoyed the book, but my impression is that it will be appreciated more by younger readers – it's a bit twee for the adult fantasy reader. There is, however, a nice twist on the usual fairytale ending that all will appreciate. As Alex's future is left unresolved at the end, I'm sure *Animist* is intended to be the first of a series.

#### Michael Jan Friedman - X-Men: Shadows of the Past 🕮

BP Books, 2000, 328pp, £14.99 ISBN 0-7434-0018-6

#### Reviewed by Gary Wilkinson

I was recently struck down with a tooth abscess and had to endure several rather long and interesting visits to the dentist. But I would go through it all again, several times over, rather than read *X-Men: Shadows of the Past* another time. If this isn't the worst 'novel' I have ever read it is pretty damn close.

There has been a lot of talk in the comic industry lately about the collapse of sales and what can be done about it. Well I would suggest that it might be in the industry's best interest to try and produce an interesting and challenging quality product, not put their name to half-baked, sub-literate gibberish like this – obviously designed to cash in on the *X-Men* film. If anyone unaware of what the best comics and graphic novels can offer were to read this they would run away screaming not be drawn into the genre.

Although supposedly set in the present the book is determinedly retro. The plot is a continuation of an old story and it uses the original *X-Men* line up of Cyclops, Beast, Archangel, Iceman and Marvel Girl. Many years ago the *X-Men* foiled a Quistillian invasion of the earth. The leader Lucifer was banished to the Nameless Dimension but not before crippling Professor X – the *X-Men*'s leader. Now Lucifer is out for revenge. The alien drags Professor X into the Nameless Dimension with him (I'm still not sure how) and substitutes a replica to direct the *X-Men* in a

hunt among the old Quistillian bases in the Andes, Africa and Antarctica for the parts needed to free him.

Now that is not too bad a set up – How will Professor X get free? Will the *X-Men* spot the duplicate? Unfortunately any inherent drama in the situation dissolves in anticlimax after anticlimax. The plot is boring, repetitive and paper-thin. The action scenes are lack-lustre and poorly described. Character development, usually a strong-point of *X-Men* is non-existent. Why use just the original *X-Men*? The book never explains.

One potentially interesting point – a key secondary character who is a learning disabled (or as the book puts it 'retarded') teenager is amazingly badly handled. What could have been a fantastic opportunity for an insight into the whole superhero genre is just throw away.

Admittedly the book has an interesting cover by Steranko, but José Ladronn's interior illustrations at the beginning of each chapter are not only appalling, they manage to spoiler the plot.

Do we really have to put up with this gibberish? I wouldn't normally advocate burning books but in this case... Or how about shipping out all available copies to use as ballast to help shore up our crumbling flood defences? For hard-core fans and masochists only.

Gollancz, 2000, 1112pp, £14.99 ISBN 0-575-06901-5

#### Mary Gentle - Ash: A Secret History III

#### **Reviewed by Cherith Baldry**

I have a great respect and admiration for Mary Gentle's earlier work, so I was eager to read *Ash*, but even so, I expected that a book of this length would be a long haul. I was wrong. The momentum of the story carries the reader along.

Ash purports to be a new translation of a group of mediaeval manuscripts which have already been translated by earlier scholars, so that the material is familiar; the editor of the work refers to 'doing Ash at school'. However, the current translator, Dr Pierce Ratcliff, has discovered a new manuscript, which has provided the occasion for his work. He sends sections of his translation to his publisher's editor, along with all the apparatus criticus of a scholarly work, and references to earlier translations of the different manuscripts of the Ash canon.

So far, you might think there's nothing particularly original; fantasy novels have been presented as translations of newly discovered manuscripts at least since *The Castle of Otranto*. However, the first piece of information that we're given in *Ash* is that Ratcliff's finished book was withdrawn almost immediately after publication. For the time being, we're left to wonder why, and the first reason that presented itself to

my mind, that Ratcliff was somehow dishonest or incompetent, proves to be spectacularly wrong.

The bulk of the novel, Ratcliff's translation, is the story of Ash,

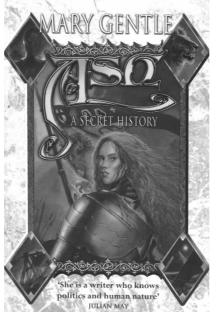
a female mercenary captain of the fifteenth century. The parallels with Joan of Arc are obvious, and are drawn by Ash herself and other characters in her story, for Ash also hears voices. In her case, however, the nature of who is speaking to her is something that is only gradually revealed as the story progresses.

Ash's story is drawn on a huge canvas. The settings in mediaeval Europe and North

Ash's story is drawn on a huge canvas. The settings in mediaeval Europe and North Africa come across vividly, and the everyday detail of food, clothes, armour and so on is so authentic that the story leaps off the page with the sights, sounds and smells of the Middle Ages. This is the real historical setting, and not the idealised mediaeval world that so often appears in fantasy novels. There's no attempt to prettify either the background or the events; at one point in his commentary Ratcliff speaks of the brutality and joyfulness of the mediaeval period, and the book provides both. I found it completely engrossing.

The novel has a large cast of strong, interesting and well-developed characters, who grow and change during the course of the novel as real people do. Ash herself, naturally, takes centre stage, and Gentle makes it completely believable that a very young woman could assert herself and

acquire honour and respect in the predominantly masculine world of the mediaeval soldier. At the same time, she's not glorified or sentimentalised; she has to take tough, damaging decisions, and



she doesn't always get it right. She is, as Ratcliff comments, someone who kills people for a living. Among the other characters – the members of her company, the aristocrats she works for, and the enemies she fights against – I was particularly impressed by Floria, a woman disguised as a man who is Ash's camp surgeon, and Fernando, the man Ash is forced to marry.

Interwoven with the story of Ash's life is the correspondence between Ratcliff and his editor, Anna Longman, and other documents relevant to the editorial process. Longman's initial enthusiasm for the project is shaken as fantasy elements – at first relatively minor – intrude into what is supposed to be a historical account, and her inquiries about what Ratcliff thinks he's up to become increasingly shrill. It soon becomes clear, however, that these documents aren't just an apparatus for convincing the reader of the authenticity of the 'manuscripts', but embody a story in their own right. The scholarly notes and references to earlier translations also develop into another major thread, and all the stories, in the Middle Ages and the present day, are ultimately one. Without giving away the details, the way that the past influences the present and how discoveries in the present authenticate the past creates a truly satisfying whole.

Mary Gentle's style is strong and fluid, and throughout the book never threatens to become monotonous. In events of towering significance and tragedy, she includes humour and a solid grounding in the everyday and the importance of little things. She displays a stunning facility with her subject matter, from details of mediaeval armour and weapons to current theories of quantum physics. The audacity of the ideas and the writing is breath-taking.

I'll end with a nit-pick about the production rather than the writing. A novel of this size would be more comfortable to read as a hardback, and surely a work of such high quality deserves the implied status of hardback publication. I found the cover messy and confusing, and the actual title almost impossible to make out. (Not to mention the colour of the protagonist's hair!)

It happened that I was given this book to review at the beginning of my holiday. Just as well. My work would have suffered terribly if I'd tried to combine it with reading *Ash*; as it was, I could steam through happily from one revelation to the next. How the US audience, who are getting the work in chunks, can bear to wait, is a mystery to me. It's a long time since I've read anything as good as this, and I was pleased to have the opportunity to concentrate on it. If you haven't already read *Ash*, then go out and buy it now. This is a novel that no one can afford to miss.

## Katherine Ann Goonan – Crescent City Rhapsody Reviewed by Chris Hill

Millennium, 2000, 563pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-888-4

In 2012 two events happen. Firstly the *ipso facto* ruler of New Orleans, Marie Laveau (a descendent of the famous voodoo queen) is murdered, but has arranged to be resurrected by experimental nanotechnology-based techniques.

At the same time a series of crippling electromagnetic pulses from space lead to increased distrust of current technology. As scientists start to investigate alternative technologies which will work in the presence of the EMP effects, an astronomer discovers that the signal from space also seems to contain some sort of message.

Crescent City Rhapsody is a prequel to Goonan's earlier novels Queen City Jazz and Mississippi Blues. In it Goonan attempts to show how the world of today grows into the world of the other books. This sort of 'prehistory' can be pretty dismal (for example David Eddings' Belgarath the Sorcerer which tells the reader nothing that they do not already know) but Goonan pulls it off pretty well. For a start she follows events for nearly 30 years, showing an evolving world situation, rather than positing a crisis which changes everything overnight. She also has a healthier attitude to nanotechnology than some. There have been too many sf novels in recent years where nanotechnology is used like a

magic wand. That is not to say that Goonan does not come up with some pretty ingenious uses for the technology, but that it is balanced with the disadvantages.

The structure of *Crescent City Rhapsody* is reminiscent of the disaster novel, with many viewpoint characters involved in different aspects of the crisis. However, while the traditional disaster novel frequently uses a third of the book to set up the characters, Goonan plunges you straight into the action and devotes long sections to each narrative viewpoint. This approach strengthens the characterisation, but unfortunately also contributes to the novel's main weakness – a tendency to switch points of view when things get interesting and let two or three years pass before returning. This tends to diffuse narrative tension somewhat, to the point that the climax, when Laveau's plans for New Orleans are under threat from a terrorist nano-plague, falls a little flat. Also, certain key questions raised remain unanswered – although a final volume is apparently planned which hopefully will tie up these loose ends.

These reservations aside, *Crescent City Rhapsody* is a well-written and intriguing novel and manages to bring a welcome breath of realism to implications of nanotechnology.

#### Robert Holdstock – Celtika 🕮

#### **Reviewed by Steve Jeffery**

Unusually for Holdstock, at least under his own name, Celtika

signals the start of a formal series, 'The Merlin Codex', and a departure from the mythago-haunted woods of Ryhope and Broceliande.

We are sometime in the middle of the first millennium, and Merlin, once, in a much younger age, called Antiokus, is drawn to the frozen land at the north edge of the world to free his former companion, who he believed died 700 years ago, trapped in a rotting ship at the bottom of the Screaming Lake. The man who gives the lake its name is Jason, and the ship is the Argo. Merlin has seen something in a dream or vision, and believes he has made a terrible mistake: that Jason's two sons were not slain, their heads severed by Jason's wife Medea, but that their apparent murder was an enchantment by Medea



Earthlight, 2001, 349pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-684-86036-8

while she spirited them away to hide them in a place between worlds and outside the passing of time. Merlin knows of such a place; it is the Isle of Ghosts, Alba, that will someday become Britain.

Celtika tells the start of Merlin's quest, the raising of the Argo and the gathering of another band of Argonauts from the shores of the frozen, now silent, lake.

As with many of Holdstock's mythago stories, several tales and quests are interwoven throughout the book: some have begun before the start of the book, others will be resolved later or offstage, or are tangential to the action, and each of the characters bring tales of their own; it gives all of Holdstock's creations a feeling of continuity, of remembrance, without ever quite being sequels. As an unnamed narrator says at the start of the

Prologue, "Although I wasn't there to see it at the time, this is what I heard:"

Jason seeks his sons, one of whom is now a *keltoi* warrior under the name Orgetorix, 'King of Killers', a commander in vast army gathered by the warlord Brennos to storm the Oracle of Delphi and reclaim the treasures plundered by the Greeks.

Urtha, another *keltoi* warrior and chieftain, who has joined the argonauts for passage home to Alba will soon have his own quest, one of vengeance against the man who betrayed his household, which will lead him to follow the trail of Brennos' marauding army. And there is Niiv, guardian priestess of the spirit tree which now forms the living heart of the new Argo, young, impetuous, delighting in her newly awakened powers, but to Merlin, carefully hoarding his own power and years like a miser, Niiv's impetuosity is dangerous. He avoids her, even threatens to

have her killed. However, she is under the protection of the Argo's new keel-sprit, Mielikki, but there is something else in the Argo that is an even greater danger to the quest, which Merlin can only half-sense and give the name 'Fierce Eyes'.

The first volume ends on a wistful note, an understanding between Merlin and Niiv, but one that has cost them both dear (Merlin's sudden realisation of Niiv's own fear and homesickness it is a heartbreaking and poignantly written episode), while both Urtha and Jason find that their separate quests carry an equally high price. In the next, Merlin will return to Alba, to fulfil Niiv's vision of his future and there to await Jason, still searching for his younger son, Kinos, Little Dreamer. Formally published in January, *Celtika* is already on my list for the BSFA Award nominations for 2001.

#### Elizabeth Haydon – Rhapsody

Millennium, 2000, 609pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-86798-990-2

#### **Reviewed by Avril Brown**

I've had fun before – reading this book was definitely not it.

All the fantasy clichés are here – the obligatory world map, the blindingly obvious prophecy, the announcement that it's Book One of a Trilogy (oh shoot me now, please), elves, ogres, swords and a touch of the old black magic.

It's a shame, actually. The author has obviously tried very hard to out-Eddings Eddings, but somehow it falls flat. Her prose is competent, the story has form and substance, but it lacks the requisite nuance of originality or subtlety that would make it stand out from the morass of similar works.

The plot, such as it is, concerns three ill-matched companions on a quest (fancy that), during which each is irrevocably changed by their experiences. The trip through the World Tree to the opposite side of the world was, I have to confess, an original touch; Haydon has clearly spent a lot of time considering just how difficult, uncomfortable and utterly unpleasant such a journey would be. Much is made of the magic of true names; the Rhapsody of the title is a former prostitute and whose power as a Namer provides the catalyst for much of the change.

I enjoyed Grunthor, a monstrous Firbolg bristling with weaponry. Naturally, he turns out to have a heart of gold. I did wish he would give in to the ogre-ish side of his nature, and just eat the leading lady to spare me from the rest of the book.

An excellent cure for insomnia – I was comatose before page 100.

#### Cecilia Holland – Pillar of the Sky

Forge, 2000 (originally published 1985), 560pp, \$14.95 ISBN 0-312-86887-1

#### Reviewed by Carol Ann Kerry-Green

In this book, Cecilia Holland sets out to tell the story of how Stonehenge was built. It is the brainchild and obsession of Moloquin, who's name means literally 'the unwanted one'. Abandoned when his mother dies, he is shunned by the People who live near the Pillar of the Sky (the place where they take their dead), his mother's people, his people, but they drive him away and he lives on the outskirts of their village, scavenging for himself, a child alone.

The novel follows Moloquin through his childhood to adolescence when he is adopted by Karella the headwoman and storyteller of the village – it is from her that he discovers his mother Ael is the chief Ladon's sister and it is Karella's intention to use Moloquin against Ladon, who thinks he can take the power of the women to name the new chief into his own hands, and name his own son as chief. Ladon has Moloquin and another boy, Grub, sold into slavery, where he grows to manhood and learns the art of bronze casting, an art totally unknown to his people. His thoughts are full of vengeance against Ladon and Ladon's son, and his feelings are all for the Pillar of the Sky and the visions he sees of what it could become.

There is a lot of detail in the novel about the way of life of the People; it is well written and presented and you certainly get the feeling of how they live and work. But is it really the world of the time of Stonehenge? This is a difficult question to answer as it is a period of our history that we don't know much about. I admit I didn't get the feeling that this was about the building of Stonehenge, though the building scenes are very well told, and taut with tension. The People could be the inhabitants of any non-technological Fantasy society, there is nothing to single them out as being early inhabitants of the land around Stonehenge. When Moloquin is sold in to slavery, his master Haurus Kum comes from across the sea where it is civilised, he refers to Ladon as a Savage, but there are no details, no names of any lands as there are in fantasy novels, so it is hard to determine who Harus Kum's people are and their relationship to the People of Moloquin.

The second half of the book deals with how Moloquin becomes the chief of his People and how he sets about building a stone circle at the Pillars of the Sky. He goes from being a dedicated leader to a man with an obsession that must be fulfilled no matter what. The novel is richly detailed and thoroughly enjoyable, it shows how one man's obsession can fuel him and drive his people to their utmost efforts. Was the building of Stonehenge like this? We'll never know, but this novel examines how it might have been.

#### Ben Jeapes – The Ark

Scholastic, November 2000, pp459, \$4.99 ISBN 0-430-21917-5

#### **Reviewed by Penny Hill**

The nations of the Earth have received an invitation to tender for a joint development project. This invitation comes from the Rusties, the first alien race to make contact, whose rules must be followed but whose motives are obscure. Martin Gilmore, a moderately successful spaceship captain, is authorised to command the vessel

from UK1, the United Kingdom's bid in this race.

Ben Jeapes' first novel (first published in the UK under the title *His Majesty's Starship*) appears to tread familiar ground but closer examination shows a refreshingly different approach to humanity's reaction to first contact. Something that Jeapes does

extremely well is to chart the varied reactions different nations and individuals have to the possibilities on offer from the Rusties. This is a near future where nations still regard each other suspiciously, where conflict is endemic and different cultures misunderstand each other even within the same nation. Plausible, in other words. The complex politics felt genuine, together with the shifting alliances of self-interest.

The aliens themselves felt familiar, although I couldn't pin this feeling down. It wasn't a physical resemblance but possibly their culture and mindset. The difficulties and possibilities of communication and translation were well-handled.

The novel was tightly plotted: Prince Richard's unconvincing actions early in the novel proved to be as a result of his hidden agenda; some of the mysteries of the Rusties were explained by later developments, and the historical process which led to the development of a character like Krishnamurthy, though perhaps exaggerated for dramatic effect, was easily within believable

bounds.

One slight weakness was perhaps the crucial confusion between 'Highness' and 'Majesty' that Nichols exhibits enough times for us to believe it when it matters. Did we really need quite this much sign-posting to avoid a "pulled out of the hat" feeling to the climax?

It was refreshing to find a hero lacking in self-confidence, a leader who is not convinced he can lead, who does not become a superman by the end of the book. It was reassuring to have the death of a crew member handled sensitively – it was not the climax of the book but neither was it a 'red jumper' death with no repercussions after the initial shock.

The solution to the mystery of the Rusties' invitation and its underlying purpose is well done, although it is one of those endings that ties everything up so well that it is in danger of undermining some of the earlier confusion and mystery.

## Diana Wynne Jones – *Year of the Griffin* Reviewed by Sue Thomason

Gollancz, 2000, 218pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-07047-1

This is the sequel to *The Dark Lord Of Derkholm* (which I haven't read), but it's perfectly enjoyable in its own right. If I had to sum up this book in one phrase, it would be "Diana Wynne Jones' answer to Harry Potter". That is, it's a school story (safe and humorous), set in a School of Wizardry, following the adventures and mishaps of a bunch of first-year students, and it's designed to appeal to both adults and children. However, being perfused with the inimitable Wynne Jones vision, the resemblance stops there—this story isn't just off the wall, it's hanging from the ceiling. From the student who's a griffin (and the excuse for some tart remarks

on genetic engineering, not to mention teddy bears), to the

assassin-prone student who (nearly) drowns one of his assailants in orange juice (actually it wasn't his fault, it was one of his friends wot did it), to the student who is haunted by a hatstand (okay, a cloak-rack, this is Fantasyland, remember, where cloaks are What One Wears), this is all good fun. And of course, every pompous authority figure within range of the students' ingeniously and brilliantly miscast spells is deflated in short order, and cooperative anarchy and good humour win the day (and the space race as well). Recommended as the perfect antidote to a wet winter Saturday afternoon...

## Stephen King, George R.R. Martin & Dan Simmons – *Dark Visions* Indigo, 2000, 381pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-575-40290-3 Reviewed by Jon Wallace

This one takes me back. I first reviewed it in 1990, when I probably said something like, "King, you pig! A haunted toilet!"

I probably also mentioned that these stories are representative of three writers at the peak of their power. King and Simmons contribute three stories each.

From King we have an sf tale with a nod towards Philip K. Dick's *Flow My Tears...*, the aforementioned haunted toilet, and a weird story touching on where inspiration comes from.

Simmons gives us a Civil War ghost story/rite of passage, a comedy (almost divine...) and a "so that's why..." horror tale. Martin is represented by 'The Skin Trade', a novella which is a twist on the werewolf genre as innovative as Fevre Dream was about vampires.

Is this worth a reissue? Yes. But of course. Books should always be in print...

#### Shariann Lewitt - Rebel Sutra

#### Reviewed by Colin Bird

My Encyclopedia Of Science Fiction handily informs me that Ms Lewitt is primarily identified as an author of military Space Opera, although I'm sure she would object to being placed in such a limiting pigeonhole. Rebel Sutra is more of a Planetary Romance (in the Edgar Rice Burroughs rather than Mills & Boon sense) and military tactics are subsumed by dynastic and messianic machinations reminiscent of the Dune series.

The story is set on the fiery world of Maya, colonised inadvertently by a ship that was forced to bring its settlers to the wrong destination. Many years later the colony is run by a genetically engineered branch of humanity called the Changed, who occupy there comfy hillside dome, Xanadu, where they look down upon the swarms of inferior humans. Every year a select band of hand-picked young commoners are taken from their slum homes in Babelion and allowed up onto the mountain to undergo the same tests as Changed children to determine if they are fit to enter Xanadu. The tests are controlled by an artificial intelligence, called The Exchange, which was damaged when the ship crashed on Maya and now needs to mesh with the minds of the Changed

TOR Books, 2000, 351pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0-312-86451-5

to give it the necessary processing power to control the colony.

This year's crop of low-landers features Arsen, a cocky kid who fails to hold the Changed in the high regard they expect. He soon meets Della, an equally rebellious member of the Changed graduating class, and the two fall into an illicit relationship.

If I tell you the above summary just covers the first third of *Rebel Sutra*, which is narrated from Della's point of view, you might get the impression Lewitt is fond of complicated plots. And you would be right. The rest of the novel is told by Anselm, Arsen and Della's son, and it follows a fairly standard revolutionary arc. The messianic leader initially shies away from his destiny, eventually leading his people against their oppressors and to his place at the head of a galactic empire.

It's all very competently told and readable enough but I found it difficult to shake off the parallels with *Dune*. Especially the Bene Gesserit-like figure of Aunti Suu-Suu, who engineers, literally, the fate of Anselm from behind the scenes. Maybe I've just read so much science fiction that nothing seems original anymore.

#### Valerie Laws (ed) – *Star Trek: the Poems* Reviewed by K. V. Bailey

Iron Press, 2000, 92pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-906228-77-8

At a time when academics have discovered the mythological, sociological and theological potentials of *Star Trek*, certain of its adherents (that word inclusive of those less obsessed than Trekkies) revel in an expressiveness more emotionally than intellectually activated: pastiche, slash, and sometimes verse. This collection of work from some forty authors was heralded in colourfully intemperate publicity with the words "Yes, it's poetry, but not as we know it!" This seems to distance the content from the poetic mainstream, although the forms used – quatrains, free verse, haiku, sestina, the sonnet – are all perfectly familiar. A predictable result of such ghettoising is a spate of allusions to split infinitives, warp factors and Uhura's thighs, which should not be allowed to mask the existence of much good verse between the imaginatively designed covers of this 3-dimensionally slender volume. Space here to mention only a few.

Valerie Laws (editor) has a witty quasi-feminist piece, advising

against putting your daughter into space. Max. Scratchmann, fusing fantasies, has Data as "Next Generation's/Tin Man". Ian Duhig's sardonic Quark monologue is in sonnet form, while Steve Sneyd, in Iaconic 'telegraphese' mode, contrives a 'cargo cult ' take on *Enterprise*. Most haikus lack the perceptual 'hinge', though Jack Holt, in the blunt bathos of the last line, achieves his disruptive shock: "Precious green liquid / pooling upon alien soil / Bones says: 'He's dead, Jim.'" I liked Ruth Berman's romantic portrayal of the young Kirk in a spatially oceanic version of *The Boyhood of Raleigh*. Yet there is also a counter-Trek strain, as where Sheenagh Pugh, in 'Never a Trekker', says of any Brit-style Federation: "It'd be firmly in the hands of bastards./The good guys would be outlaws on the run."

[POST PAID AT £6.74 FROM IRON PRESS, 5 MARDEN TERRACE, CULLERCOATS, NORTH SHIELDS, NL30 4PD]

Gollancz, 2000, 421pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-575-06894-9

#### James Lovegrove – The Foreigners 🕮

#### Reviewed by L. J. Hurst

The classics are back – Stephen Fry's new novel is said to be a reworking of *The Count Of Monte Cristo*, while James Lovegrove has based his latest on Ibsen's *An Enemy Of The People*. This may simply indicate how certain ideas can only take certain styles. *The Count...*, of course, also became Alfred Bester's science fictional *Tiger! Tiger!*, while Ibsen found himself re-worked into Peter Benchley's shark-finned thriller *Jaws. The Foreigners* is a nearfuture police procedural in which James Lovegrove has extended global warming, international policing, and predicated the arrival of God-like aliens.

The Foreigners appear one day – fortuitously after all the rioting that would mean the end of the civilised world had broken out, but not so late that civilization itself has been destroyed – bringing with them crystech technology. Not every problem is solved by their arrival but it helps. In return the authorities try to please them – holding back on microwave devices, and allowing minstrels of all types to sing for The Foreigners. This prompts the delightful thought that if The Foreigners arrived today there would be no more mobile telephones, but has the disadvantage we could only repay this kindness with Solid Gold Sixties Weekends at Butlins.

Our current vacation resorts, even where they have not been inundated, will be inadequate, and so new resort cities, floating in warm international waters will strive to take business from their terrestrially fixed rivals. Jack Parry, formerly of the Metropolitan Police and now of the Foreign Policy Police in New Venice, returning from a depressing visit to his sister in an England no longer bathed in the Gulf Stream, is immediately sent out to an investigation. A Foreigner has disappeared, possibly become incorporeal, and his Siren – human musician – has been

murdered.

Now the moral kicker is two-fold: there is a global anti-Foreigner campaign, run in New Venice by a Maori, who objects to The Foreigners on the basis of what human foreigners did to his people, while the craven authorities know that where Foreigners are attacked they simply leave the resort, whose business then collapses (as has already happened off Thailand). Parry is limited in a number of ways – his police force has no powers of arrest, while The Foreigners are so distant and alien that no one knows what they know, including whether they are aware of their presence or absence. And the body count mounts.

Lovegrove's previous novel *Days* was compared to J. G. Ballard's *High-Rise*, and there are comparabilities between the business world of *The Foreigners* and *Super-Cannes*, but as a police procedural where music is a running theme I can't help thinking that Ian Rankin would have melded it better. I rarely heard the sirens singing to me.

## George R.R. Martin and Lisa Tuttle – *Windhaven* Reviewed by Kathy Taylor

Millennium, 2000, 315pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-940-6

Windhaven consists of a prologue, three short stories, and an epilogue. Two of the three stories, 'Storms' and 'One Wing' were originally been printed in Analog in slightly different forms: 'Storms' in May 1975 as 'The Storms of Windhaven', and 'One-Wing' in January and February 1980. Each of the stories is sufficiently self-contained to be read separately and combined they form a novel I have no hesitation in recommending.

The stories are set on the world of Windhaven whose inhabitants are descended from a crashed starship. Windhaven consists of a number of archipelagos, each island ruled by a landsman and the islands linked together by the flyers. The novel is very much the story of the flyers; in particular the story of Maris. Maris is the daughter of a fisherman, a girl who wanted to fly in a society where the precious wings of the flyers are passed down to each oldest child. The first story 'Wings' is her struggle to gain and retain her wings, to be a flyer. The second and third stories explore the consequences for the society of Windhaven of the

change Maris has wrought. As the singer Barrion says:

"You can't change one note in the middle of a song. ... Once you make the first change, others have to follow, until you've redone the whole song. Everything relates, you see."

And the initial change in 'Wings' has a cascading result through many sections of the society.

Windhaven is well written, with a believable society and very strong characterisation. However the novel is more than just a good adventure story, the authors have something to say. There two main themes. The first, touched on above, is the inter-relation of things. The book is a good illustration of John Donnes 'no man is a island' quote as the way in which the actions large and small of people are shown to have consequences. The second theme leading on from this is on taking personal responsibility for ones actions. Although this is present in all three stories it is the third,

'The Fall' that it is more fully explored. Maris again is a major protagonist and discovers that she cannot opt out of her responsibilities towards the flyers even though she no longer has

wings. The end of 'The Fall' is particularly satisfying as it turns on whether an individual has to take responsibility for their actions or are they 'just following orders'.

#### Anne McCaffrey – Pegasus in Space

#### **Reviewed by Lesley Hatch**

This novel is the third in the Talents sequence and provides a clever link to The Tower and the Hive sequence, in that it sees the setting up of the organisation that eventually has trained Talents living and working all over the known galaxy. The organisation is the brainchild of Peter Reidinger, who uses his own considerable psychic powers to overcome his disabilities. But it begins with a flood in Bangladesh, which in turn results in the discovery of a Talented child with a gift for gardening, and her being taken to a place of safety where her Talent can be left to develop. About the same time, a space station is officially opened as a jumping off point for interstellar travel, and Peter and his fellow Talents manage to thwart a take-over of the station. It's on this first visit that Peter starts thinking about how to build his organisation. How he manages to overcome his disabilities and realise his dream,

Corgi, 2000, 519 pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-552-14630-7

makes an enthralling read, and is a considerable improvement on Anne's recent work.

But it is not just Peter's story: the young girl from Bangladesh turns out to have a unique Talent which indirectly is of help to Peter in living a normal life. That does not mean to say that all is sweetness and light: during the course of the novel, there are various incidents borne out of ill-feeling. However, running through the novel is an air of optimism, fuelled by Peter's determination to build a team of Talents who can transport (via telekinesis) anything and anybody.

The novel culminates in the ultimate triumph for Peter and his team, when they succeed in transporting a colony ship to a particular star system, and provide proof of it.

#### Wil McCarthy – The Collapsium 🕮

#### **Reviewed by Andrew Seaman**

Due largely to the fundamentally alien nature of its far-future setting and background The Collapsium is the kind of sf novel that poses the casual genre reader major problems of accessibility and comprehension. Portraying a solar system-wide civilisation of almost unimaginably high technology governed by rules of

exquisite etiquette owing something to Moorcock's 'Dancers at the End of Time' sequence and Walter Jon Williams' Aristoi, McCarthy makes few concessions to the lay reader. The technology that makes this future possible represents the hardest of hard sf allied to the most speculative of physics (although appendices are provided for the bewildered). To the hardened sf fan, however, there's a heady thrill to be had in the author's deployment of such marvels as wellstone -'programmable' matter - and the collapsium of the title, a magical material formed from particle-sized black holes, all worked through with (at least to these non-technical eyes) scrupulous logic and impeccable scientific references.

Of course, in a utopia where almost anything can be achieved by the Clarkean magic of technology, including virtual immortality, the potential for genuine conflict

and drama - the lifeblood of any good fiction - can be severely constrained. Like many authors before him, McCarthy's solution is to invoke the universal constant of the vagaries of human nature. The characters of The Collapsium may have attained godlike powers over space-time and reality, but they are still prey to ancient emotions of hatred, grief and love, and therefore not immune to the possibility of tragedy.

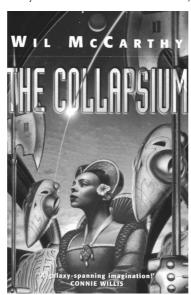
It's clear that McCarthy, at least partially, intends the novel to be read as a far-future fairy tale of manners and morality (the three sections of the book are rather archly subtitled 'Once Upon a Matter Crushed', 'Twice Upon a Star Imperiled' and 'Thrice Upon

a Schemer's Plotting'). The Collapsium's chief protagonist, self-exiled scientist Bruno de Towaji, is called upon to come to the aid of his own future's Faerie Queen, Her Majesty Tamra-Tamatra Lutui, and the whole Queendom of Sol, when the major engineering project of the age - a ring of collapsium around the sun - is sabotaged by a murderously ambitious rival. In the course of his subsequent adventures the curmudgeonly, but socially naïve de Towaji, like any fairytale hero worthy of their salt, learns the value of companionship, cooperation and trust, emerging at the end a wiser and 'better' man. Along the way the reader is treated to an extended tour of a solar system of unmitigated wonders, giving McCarthy the chance to shamelessly showboat some of his dazzling array of ideas, spun off from the wilder fringes of today's science journals.

Gollancz, 2000, 325pp, £10.99 ISBN 0-575-06893-0

Handled badly this could all have been

tediously self-indulgent, but, fortunately, The Collapsium is a book that's as fun to read as it must have been to write, mixing a convincingly exotic future with a leavening of social comedy and a healthy dose of moral seriousness. Though not necessarily for the sf neophyte, for the practiced reader this novel is ultimately a veritable box of delights.



#### Juliet E. McKenna – The Gambler's Fortune 🕮

#### Reviewed by Andrew A. Adams

This is the 'Third Tale of Einarinn', though not the last. Two more are planned and I look forward to them. It is possible to read each of them solo, but they do improve if read in order. The Gambler of the title is Livak (also the titular thief of *The Thief's Gamble*). As with the first book, Livak's viewpoint is leavened by chapters with different primaries.

Livak's tale of a search for knowledge about the new/old

Orbit, 2000, 517pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85723-989-X

'aetheric magic', or artifice, is as engaging as ever. Livak is fun, somewhat amoral but not completely so, and her jumps from frying pan to fire keep the pace going.

We see the rest of the tale from a number of points of view, but principally through the eyes of Jeirran, of the mountain folk. The mountain folk are the original source of the Elietimm (originally known as Alyatimm). The Alyatimm were driven from the mountains and practitioners of Artifice remain in positions of authority there, as Livak eventually finds. We learn this much earlier, through the adventures of Jeirran, who persuades his sister Aritane to call in the Alyatimm. They arrive in the form of Eresken, whom we have previously met. Jeirran's tale is a dark one, full of anger and greed, which is something of a problem. McKenna is trying something new here, focussing our attention on a highly unlikeable character, and I'm not sure she entirely pulls it off. It doesn't ruin the book by any means, but I found myself waiting for the end of some chapters featuring Jeirran, impatient for a return to Livak's irreverent fun. Her abilities are improving with each book, but I think here she has slightly over-reached herself.

More is revealed about the history and politics of McKenna's world, and of particular interest are the revelations about magic. Different approaches to elemental magic are revealed as well as the strengths and weaknesses of Artifice. Aspects of the magical edifice McKenna has created as the cornerstone of her world are gradually being revealed and each glimpse whets the appetite for further explorations.

A reasonable addition to the series but not the best so far. I expect a return to Ryshad and an account of his adventures for book four, in which I fully expect her talent to catch up with her reach.

#### Haydn Middleton – Grimm's Last Fairytale

#### Abacus, 2000, 249pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-340-11121-9

#### **Reviewed by Steve Jeffery**

If you missed this when it came out last year just go out and get yourself a copy now. Buy three, and wave one in the face of anyone who tells you that modern fantasy is just "all about dragons and wizards and delivered in three 700-page volumes". Give the other to your best friend.

Ever since I read Wilbur Smith's *The Sunbird* at an impressionable age (no, I'm not telling), I have had a fascination with novels in which a similar story repeats itself, transformed, at several different levels across interweaving plot and time lines, each carrying echoes and resonances of the other. A perfect example is A.S. Byatt's *Possession*, or the novels of both Peter Ackroyd or Christopher Priest. And equally, I'm fascinated by stories that are *about* stories, such as Gaiman's *The Sandman* and John Crowley's *Little, Big* and *Engine Summer*.

And here we have Haydn Middleton's *Grimm's Last Fairytale*, an extraordinary, immaculately controlled and beautifully told tale that is part biography, part fairytale and a psychological drama that operates equally at both levels. One part

tells of the last month in the life of Jacob Grimm, accompanied on a trip to his childhood home by his niece Auguste and their new manservant Kummel. A second part tells of Jacob's early life and career in a divided and fractured Germany between the imperial designs of, at the one end, Napoleon, and at the other, Bismark, and in which Jacob and his younger brother Wilhem begin to collect the stories that will make their name famous. More so, even, than Jacob's other lifelong project, the dozen volumes (completed and published in 33 volumes in the 1960s) of the Deutsches Wörterbuch. The third strand is a version of one of the Grimm's most famous stories, Sleeping Beauty, but one that turns into a much darker one than the Disneyfied version that ends with the prince's chaste kiss. Crossing and linking all three are themes of love and loss, tangled family relationships, and of honour, duty and responsibility.

This deserves to rank alongside works like Peter Beagle's *The Innkeeper's Song* as a near-perfect example of storytelling. Beautiful, wise and compelling.

#### Elizabeth Moon – Surrender None 🕮

#### Orbit, 2000, 505pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-84149-015-6

#### Reviewed by Vikki Lee

Elizabeth Moon is the author of the bestselling 'Deed of Paksenarrion' trilogy which was first published in America around the end of the eighties (more recently over here) – which was when I read it and first discovered her writing. *Surrender None* is a prequel to that trilogy and although first published in America in 1990, I didn't read it at that time. It was then, with fond memories that I embarked upon this one.

Surrender None is the story of a peasant named Gird. Born to follow in his father's footsteps and work the land, Gird attempts to break with tradition and make more of his life. He enlists in the local militia in order to earn a copper or two to help his family whilst being one less mouth to feed at home. Times are getting harder, and their landowner Lord is not only demanding more and more in taxes and land-fee, but is getting crueller in his dealings with his peasants. Though Gird's training in the militia is relatively brief, its abrupt and unexpected ending has two unavoidable consequences: firstly it brings him to the attention of his Lord when such attention would never have been willingly sought, and secondly, he learns some of the basic facts of life to do with organisation and leadership.

Though life gets tougher and tougher for Gird and his family, he eventually marries and has children of his own. Having lost his wife early to a fever, he works hard to provide for his children, and is relatively successful until one day Gird just happens to be in the wrong place at the wrong time and life as he knows it will never be the same again.

As an ex-U.S.Marine herself, one of strengths of Moon's writing in the 'Paksenarrion' trilogy was her knowledge of military matters, and her ability to paint a picture without glamorising or embellishing the lifestyle. Here again, she uses that knowledge to great effect giving the story a good, solid, believable base to build on. We follow the gentle giant Gird from childhood, through adolescence and adulthood, to the later years of his life – and you feel you really get to know him and care about what happens to him.

This is a thoroughly enjoyable read from an author who has an eye for detail and a story to tell. If anything, that eye for detail can create slightly overlong chunks when little seems to be happening – but stick with it: the result is a wonderful tapestry instead of just an embroidered cushion-cover.

As this is the first of two prequels to the 'Paksenarrion' trilogy, it can be read as a stand-alone novel and as such, is an excellent introduction to Moon's writing for those who've not read her work previously. Highly recommended!

## Michael Moorcock & Storm Constantine – Silverheart Reviewed by K. V. Bailey

#### Earthlight, 2000, 408pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-684-86670-6

Described as "A Novel of the Multiverse", Silverheart avails itself of many of the ploys that this open-ended Moorcockian concept allows. There is the eponymous hero engaged in picaresque pursuits; there is a secondary hero/anti-hero (named Cornelius

Coffin); there is a world which may be surrogate for many; and this unique world is itself twofold, its twin aspects locked together in a mutually fallen condition and declining towards either passivity or chaos.

Karadur is central to the Multiverse, a splendid but ailing cityworld, ruled by the elite of Metal, a polity of clans, the chiefest of which is Iron, the significant others being Silver, Copper and Gold. Lesser, but powerful, families include those of Brass and Bronze. Characters named Lady Copper (whose stronghold is Verdigris House), Lord Tin and Sir Clovis Pewter, put one in mind of Happy Families, but they are not so much happy as feuding and conspiring for power and position as they chug around in their steam cars. The dominant and rigidly empirical Lord Iron, lodged in his Old Forge, keeps a wretched proletariat in stagnant order, and the city fenced against any disruptive cults of barishi (or elemental magic). His agents are Captain Coffin's brutal Irregulars, and squads of clanking mechanical guards. Into this milieu comes Maximilian Silverheart, rogue, master-thief and Clan Silver outsider, witch-stamped from birth with a painful but magically potent silver brand upon and within his breast. A secret romantic and ideological liaison develops between him and Rose, Lord Iron's daughter and heir. We are now, I sense, entering Storm Constantine territory – literally so when we follow Max, by

way of the sewers, into the subterranean sylvan and magical world of Shriltasi. He is hard-pursued by Coffin, for Max has caused turmoil in Karadur by wrenching its emblematic Shren Diamond from the top of the Guild Tower.

Shrilasti, once at one with Karadur, is now the realm of proscribed *barishi*, and the source of cults springing up in Karadur. For all its beauty, it, too, is in a regressive state, its green-blooded people petrifying or reverting to savagery. Its resistant rulers, having attained a hostage hold on Silverheart, compel him to embark on finding, taking and restoring the four legendary icons of Kadur-Shrilasti. Max's fulfilling of that task, through a sequence of *barishi*-aided exploits, leads to a spectacular climax in which the Old Forge (as alembic), the icons and the Shren Diamond all assume alchemical roles. This is a fantasy in which lost balance is corrected and harmony regained. Using comedy in its wider Shakespearian (even Dantesque) sense, and with a nod towards John Clute, *Silverheart* is an example of what I would term an Instauration Comedy.

## Larry Niven and Steven Barnes – *Saturn's Race* Reviewed by Robert W. Hayler

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TOR Books, 2000, 317pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0-312-86726-3

Lenore Myles, a promising grad student visiting the artificial island of Xanadu, is romanced by Chaz Kato, leading bio-technician and man-with-past. During these proceedings she finds out a terrible secret and in so doing alerts the mysterious and powerful Saturn to her presence. Saturn wants her dead for fear the conspiracy be revealed before time, Chaz wants her alive and realises he is being set up to take the fall. Everyone tries to find out what is happening, all comes to light, everything explodes. There are sharks with hands too.

I didn't care much about any of these characters, nor about what they got up to. The romance between Lenore and Chaz is teeth-grinding stuff and it grates when she is ditched for Chaz's more accessible ex-wife. No-one is rounded off and properly believable. Back-stories have all of Stan Lee's flimsiness with none of the melodrama that makes them amusing.

The best bits involve the modified sea life. Niven has, in the past, created possibly the finest alien menagerie in sf. Many of his creatures – puppeteers, outsiders – are truly unforgettable and the prospect of a man-made but alien hybrid shark/computer consciousness in his hands is mouth-watering. Unfortunately, the glimpses we get of the fledgling society of augmented sea-life are left tantalisingly scant. Still, sharks with hands make for the odd interesting set-piece and my minor thesis that dolphins in SF are

always boring gathers more corroborating evidence.

The tiresome, elitist, ultra-scientism one expects from Niven is here too, tempered only when plucky token 'primitives' are roped in to provide obvious contrast towards the end of the book. Otherwise, the 'poor' or the 'masses' exist only to be grateful to the scientists in their Swiftian floating islands or to rise up in violent revolution and burn Frankenstein's castle down. Not that offensive really, just... unimaginative.

One aspect of this book, however, really does jar. I suppose we are all used to reading half-books and wearily resigned to inevitable sequels yet, in the case of this book the treatment of the reader does seem especially cynical. Hardly anything is tied up satisfactorily in this volume. I feel that, rather than being compelled to find out what happens next, I'm being bullied into it. If all Niven and Barnes can manage is to push out stuff so resolutely commercial and geared towards sequels then why don't they just write Wookie books? Or *Dune* prequels?

This book is truly average. Not awful, yet not distinguished in any way either. One follows the adequate plot via occasionally engaging incident through to a not very satisfactory ending. Putting the book down, your world remains unchanged. A real Sunday afternoon of a book.

## Jan Siegel – *The Dragon Charmer* Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

Voyager, 2000, 346pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-00-225837-4

When I reviewed Jan Siegel's debut, *Prospero's Children*, in V210 I had something of a mixed reaction to it. I was really impressed by the first half, a contemporary 'Young Adult' dark fantasy that had overtones of Garner and of Barker's *Weaveworld*, but felt it suffered by an odd dislocation in the middle, where the story shifts to that of the Last Days of Atlantis, far more of an 'epic' adventure fantasy, full of kidnappings, close escapes, romance and some grand set pieces – almost as if two different (but very accomplished) books had been joined down the middle. I was very interested to see what Siegel would do next.

Siegel's sequel, *The Dragon Charmer*, suffers none of the disconcerting shift of focus of its predecessor and if anything is a far more assured and accomplished book. Gone too is the impression from the teenage protagonists of *Prospero's Children* that this is a 'Young Adult' fantasy. Fern(anda) is now in her late twenties, living in London and a successful city executive. Will, her younger brother, still lives in the house in Yorkshire, spending his time creating strange unsettling paintings for his final year of Arts PhD. Fern (in Will's words) is "in denial" about the traumatic

events of twelve years ago, and in particular about her 'Gift'. It's this that propels her into agreeing to marry Marcus Greig, an academic and minor TV celebrity twenty years her elder, a match that everyone (even the bemused and grateful Marcus) finds puzzling, although even Fern can't explain why she has arranged the wedding back at the house in Yorkshire, as she travels there with her friend, Gaynor.

Will, very much a peripheral character in the first book, has become a far more assured, rather self-contained, young man, accepting the house and its strange guardians (including a new house-goblin, Bradachin, found by the enigmatic 'Watcher', Ragginbone).

But it's Gaynor, in one of the top rooms of the house, who becomes the first target of unwelcome attention. Idly watching an interview with an academic historian, she experiences a 'Poltergeist' moment when Dr Layne's hand and arm appear to project from the TV screen to beckon her in.

Fern, on the eve of marriage, is also he subject on supernatural interest. The bloated Morgus and her witch-sister Sysselore want to add the power of Fern's Gift to complete the third of their coven. When Fern gets drunk on her pre-wedding night out, and Gaynor, spooked, crashes the car on the way back, Morgus strikes. Fern (or at least her body) ends up in hospital, in a deep coma while her spirit is abducted.

The Dragon Charmer is not without problems. There are several viewpoint glitches, places where it's hard to identify just who is speaking, or the focus switches unexpectedly. There's one overt and rather clumsy info dump from Ragginbone to Will and Gaynor that could have handled more unobtrusively, and a rather jarring simile ("rising into the sky like a contrail") that dumps the magical (Will is dreaming of dragons) into the mundane. But worse is the name Siegel chooses for the malformed revenants

who guard Jerrold Layne's house and grounds: morlochs. It's a terrible, unnecessary pun, and if Siegel meant it as more, to invite comparisons with Wells's degenerate cannibal race, then I think it's seriously misplaced.

Despite which (and this is, as far as I know, only Siegel's second book), the other 99% is seriously impressive. The whole section of Fern's imprisonment in, and escape from, the underworld of the Tree (it deserves its capitalisation) and the grisly fruit it bears is worthy of Holdstock. And *The Dragon Charmer* ends on an epilogue that promises (or, for Fern, perhaps threatens) the story has not quite ended here.

#### Joan Slonczewski – Brain Plague

#### Reviewed by John D. Owen

Brain Plague is one of those curiously infuriating books which operate from a basic premise that has you constantly saying "I don't believe this" right the way through, and yet still manages to amuse and even impress with some quality storytelling. Joan Slonczewski seems to have a talent for writing good characters, and of spinning a good yarn around them.

However, with *Brain Plague*, I was put off by the central premise of the book, that a race of intelligent microbes could be introduced into the human brain and happily co-exist there. Nothing terribly original or surprising there, of course, as anyone remembering Greg Bear's early work *Blood Music* will recall. But Bear's microbial intelligence came from the collective, not the individual. Where Slonczewski differs is in giving each microbe its own little personality, in endowing the bugs

with individual personhood, if you like. Makes for a different kind



of storyline, for sure, as though the main protagonist has a million voices in her head, all giving her advice. When the microbes not only behave as tiny, fast-living humans (even

TOR Books, 2000, 384pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0-312-86718-2

down to setting up schools and nightclubs in the heroine's brain), but positively demand to have the same rights as humans, then the faintest suspicion is raised that Slonczewski may have pushed her idea just beyond the outrageous and well into the unbelievable range.

Where Bear managed to raise an awful possibility from irresponsible tampering in microbial biology, Slonczewski tries to convince us that it could all be jolly good fun really. Sorry, I'm not buying it. Personally, I have enough trouble with just the one voice in my head, let alone a whole host of others. The story is well enough told, but falls at the

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

first fence in the credibility stakes.

#### **Bruce Sterling – Distraction**

#### **Reviewed by Stuart Carter**

*Distraction* won the Arthur C. Clarke Award this year so a review seems a little academic besides the patronage of the great man himself, but here goes...

I was looking forward to *Distraction*. Sterling's books are always challenging and are not novels to be dipped into haphazardly; they usually repay fairly detailed study and a little background knowledge with some fascinating insights into where our present society might be heading. He's a good writer too.

Set in the classic Sterling milieu of the mid-21st century, *Distraction* follows the political machinations of one Oscar Valparaiso, a young spin doctor with high ambitions and the drive and skills to possibly achieve them. Fresh from winning a stunning senate campaign in Massachusetts, Oscar finds himself and his team at something of a loose end in a Louisiana barely recovered from global warming and catastrophic government budget cuts, and being held together by the megalomania of its governor, "Green Huey". For that matter the United States itself is crippled after losing a trade war with China, by a government going fractal and by the escalating drop-out rates of those at the bottom end of society into radical nomad groups (forget cyberpunk, this is cyber-New Age Travellers!)

Visiting the Collaboratory, an enormous federal white elephant of a science facility, Oscar finds himself at once an unwilling participant in, and the chief architect of, a political earthquake when Green Huey seizes an under-funded US Air Force base for himself, the Cold War between the USA and the

Netherlands goes hot, and the scientists in the Collaboratory declare independence.

Despite this, *Distraction* isn't *that* good, disappointingly and surprisingly, something that still doesn't quite explain this perplexingly tardy paperback release (it's copyright 1998).

There's a *lot* of US politics here, which unfortunately aren't interesting enough (to non-Americans) to carry the whole novel. Sterling's observations on the course our former colony is taking/has taken are sometimes astute, sometimes funny but eventually a little dull. Perhaps it's the US-centricity and isolationism that are so wearing, and the fact that the rest of the world is so thoroughly dismissed as uninteresting: Europe is very civilised but boring, China is repeatedly referred to as winning the trade war that broke America but only lurks in the wings as a stage villain. This is particularly surprising from Sterling, whose globalism has always been one of his great strengths before now.

*Distraction* does have some satirical strong-points: the roving gangs of nomads who have simply and unavoidably dropped out of a consumerist society which doesn't want them are inspired, sympathetic and all too likely, and 'Anglos', now a minority group, are hilariously (and seriously) stereotyped along with their/our 20<sup>th</sup> century legacies.

I didn't dislike *Distraction*, though it could have been shorter, punchier and funnier, it is sporadically gripping and usually interesting, but Sterling can do better than this.

#### Link Yaco & Karen Haber - The Science of the X-Men

BP Books (Simon & Schuster), 2000, 274pp, £15.99 ISBN 0-7434-0020-8

#### Reviewed by Jon Wallace

"Through a combination of informed speculation and science fact *The Science of the X-Men* provides a scientific investigation of the most popular mutant Super-Hero team in the history of comics."

So what else do you *need* to know? Nothing really, but you might *want* to know a few things.

Starting at the back then. This book has an impressive bibliography. Anyone wanting to get into quantum physics would get a good leg-up reading these books by such luminaries as Feynman, Penrose, Hawking and Gribbin. Maybe not such a leg-up for biologists, though. We do have Colin Tudge here, but not really a lot more. But that's OK. There's more physics than biology in this book anyway.

The main body of the book is in sections focusing on a field (such as Psionics) and zeroing in on a Super-Hero or -Villain to illustrate a point. There are sub-headings such as "Hilbert Space and Ectoplasm" to further sub-divide the text.

I suppose the main thing that you'll want to know then is: is it any good?

That depends on your approach. If you are of a scientific bent, then such statements as "He most likely has some automatic mechanism that compensates for his momentum..." will leave you frustrated and wondering well, does he or doesn't he?

But wait, this is Comic Space! Statements like "...he has some automatic mechanism that compensates for his momentum..." might be contradicted the next time an author needs something else to be the case...

An X-Men fan would approach this a different way. They will be looking for the explanation of the attributes of their favourites. They'll be checking the potted biographies against the real thing, looking for mistakes (don't deny it, we all do it!) but there just isn't enough detail given here. There are few drawings of the characters and no stills from the film. Nope, fans will be disappointed.

So, where are we? Explanations that are almost (but not quite) scientifically plausible, but that are spun around with so many mights and maybes that we still don't know how Cyclops' vision thing (sorry, optic blasts) works, minimal biology and genetics and not enough action pictures to satisfy any fans hunger. Hit or Miss? Miss.

#### Janine Ellen Young – The Bridge 🕮

#### **Reviewed** by Chris Amies

Comets and other astral phenomena have long been linked with catastrophes on earth. Previously thought of as harbingers of defeat (the Comet over the battlefield presaging doom to Harold at Hastings), more recently attempts have been made to link them directly with disease, for example the 1908 Halley's pass with the flu pandemic and Kohoutek in the 1970s with HIV. These connections seem unlikely, but what if it were true? This underlies the premise of Janine Ellen Young's novel *The Bridge*.

In *The Bridge*, deep-space-faring aliens have been travelling for aeons attempting to make contact with other intelligent races. They are weary of the quest and start to believe that they really may be all alone in the cosmos. Their method of communication involves encoding messages into viruses. However being essentially viral dragons themselves, they do not understand the effect their communications method will have on the human race. From Varanasi (oldest of the world's inhabited cities) to New York, people are stricken with the plague and driven by the visions, which Young links to the heroic efforts to build the Brooklyn Bridge a hundred years ago. Her world is suitably apocalyptic and inhabited by hardened survivors, but far from being despairing, is suffused with a sense of having to build the future. They, like the bridge-builders of the previous century, have

Earthlight, 2000, 348pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-7434-0415-7

a hard job to do and get on with it. They also have to persuade people, especially the 10% of humans who weren't affected in any way by the virus, that this communication is essentially benign, despite what could very easily look like an invasion, alien intelligences taking advantage of the Pandemic to make their move against Earth.

People start dying out, often prey to strange dreams and driven to paint ring structures on bridges: a motif which may echo the mound-building in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, but here it makes more sense as the Pans (people who survived the Pandemic) are saying with their messages: build a bridge like this. They also reflect the aliens' propensity to bond in threes, which reflects in the story of Jude Tarkenton, one of the several protagonists, who is on the losing side of a love triangle. His daughter Piper, born during the Pandemic, has a destiny to fulfil which will take her on a strange and long journey.

As a novel of first contact this has intriguing aliens and also deals at length with the effects of the knowledge that We Are Not Alone, and has plausibility because of often unsympathetic characters. The level of strangeness increases steadily until the conceptual breakthrough implied at the start can happen.



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.

Andrew M. Butler – Cyberpunk

Pocket Essentials, 2000, 96pp, £3.99 ISBN 1-903047-28-5

Andrew M. Butler - Philip K Dick

Pocket Essentials, 2000, 96pp, £3.99 ISBN 1-903047-29-3 Two handy little reference guides from *Vector's* Features Editor (wearing his 'filthy pro' hat), the first giving an overview of "Almost everything you

need to know" about cyberpunk from Gibson and Sterling, through the post-c/p writers (Noon, Egan, Womack, Stephenson and Sullivan), nonfiction works on cyberpunk, posthumanism and the post-modern, to *The Matrix* (and, of course, *Blade Runner*). The volume on Dick concentrates primarily on the novels (the short stories, as Andrew admits, are a bibliographer's nightmare), including notes on a number of early titles still

unpublished (and in some cases possibly not completed), tracing recurring themes, character types and obsessions throughout the body of Dick's work, and concluding with a useful reference section on non-fiction biographical and critical studies.

Also of note in the Pocket Essentials series are three (so far) volumes from former *Matrix* editors Michelle Le Blanc and Colin Odell: *Jackie Chan, David Lynch* and *Vampire Films* (£2.99 each).

Octavia Butler - Wild Seed

Gollancz, 2000, 248pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-07145-1

John Crowley - Beasts

Gollancz, 2000, 184pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-07143-5

Henry Kuttner - Fury

Gollancz, 2000, 208pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-07141-9

James H. Schmitz - The Witches of Karres

Gollancz, 2000, 344pp, £10.99 ISBN 0-575-07144-3

Bob Shaw - A Wreath of Stars

Gollancz, 2000, 189pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-07147-8

Robert Silverberg - Thorns

Gollancz, 2000, 222pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-07145-X Six more volumes in Gollancz's 'yellowback' Collectors' Editions, bring the current total to 36 (and incidentally matching the number of

the current total to 36 (and incidentally matching the number of Millennium SF Masterworks seen so far). It still strikes me as odd to have two 'SF classics' series running side by side like this, one numbered, the other not, with such a substantial price difference between the two, and with no clear distinction as to why certain titles have been selected for one rather than the other. Whatever the reason, it's good to see a number of these titles back in print.

#### Chris Bunch & Allan Cole - Sten 3: Court of a Thousand Suns

Orbit, 2000, 275pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-84149-009-1

#### Chris Bunch & Allan Cole - Sten 4: Fleet of the Damned

Orbit, 2000, 340pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-84149-010-5

"[A] disarmingly simple and entertaining read" noted Stuart Carter of the first of this series of Orbit reissues, reviewed in V213, but on the minus side that "Sten hasn't an original idea in its 310 pages, is only just adequately written, and at times sickeningly and gratuitously violent". Unfortunately, any vestige of illicit pleasure of 'lowest common denominator, under-the-bedclothes sf' seemed to rapidly evaporate with the second volume, *The Wolf Worlds* (reviewed this issue). Here, then, are volumes 3 and 4 (of apparently 6) in this million-selling Galactic Empire series.

#### Arthur C. Clarke - The Collected Stories

TOR Books, 2000, 912pp, \$29.95 ISBN 0-312-87821-4 Due February and seen in proof, this is a massive (912pp) collection of Clarke's short fiction, from 'Travel by Wire' (Amateur Science Fiction Stories, Dec. 1937) to 'Improving the Neighbourhood (Nature, Nov. 1999). 112 stories, including 'The Sentinel', 'The Nine Billion Names of God', 'A Meeting with Medusa', 'The Star', 'Summertime on Icarus'. It does exactly what it says on the cover.

(Paul Kincaid reviews Clarke's non-fiction collection, *Greetings, Carbon Baased Bipeds!* in 'First Impressions' this issue.)

#### Arthur C. Clarke - The Sentinel

ibooks, 2000, 302pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-7434-0721-0 "2001 Anniverary Edition" proclaims the cover of this smaller (ten story) collection of Clake's short stories, more than slightly bending the definition of 'anniversary'. This actually a reprint (including the 1982 Introduction) of an illustrated collection originally published 1983 by Bryon Preiss Visual Publications Inc. Included here in addition to the title story are 'Rescue Party', 'Breaking Strain', 'The Wind From the Sun', 'A Meeting with Medusa' and 'The Songs of Distant Earth'.

#### Arthur C. Clarke - The Fountains of Paradise

Millennium, 2000, 257pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-721-7 The 34<sup>th</sup> of Millennium's 'SF Masterworks series' is Clarke's classic story about the construction, in the 22<sup>nd</sup> century, of a Space Elevator, rising some 36,000 km from an island in the Indian Ocean (a thinly disguised version of Clarke's beloved Sri Lanka). Contrary to popular belief, Clarke didn't invent the concept of the Space Elevator; that honour goes to oceanographers John Issacs, Hugh Bradner, George Backus and Allen Vine in 1966 and, even more ambitiously, by Leningrad engineer Y.N. Artsutanov six years previously. It was such a good idea that, as Clarke notes, it was reinvented again three times between 1966 and 1976. This edition appends a brief 1989 Addition to the Afterword in which Clarke discusses the technical and political issues that such a construction might face.

#### Andrew Darlington - Euroshima Mon Armour

Hilltop Press, 2000, 48pp, £3.99 ISBN 0-905262-27-1

"Poems from the Inner Mind to the Outer Limits" is an apt subtitle for this collection that brings together, not so much in opposition as in sustained double vision, the personal and the imagery of science fiction, from the pulps to the New Wave and beyond. The duality is underscored by Darlington's frequent use of double titles, and exemplified, perhaps, by poems such as 'The Lichen Manuscript/Mars is a District of Sheffield':

as I scratch paths through lichen circles on this Yorkshire wall, a rain of memory washes segments of Martian landscape

A quite wonderful production from the indefatigable Hilltop Press, with a Foreword by K.V. Bailey, short Introduction by Darlington and biographical note by Steve Sneyd.

[Available from 4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield, W. Yorks HD5 8PB]

Laurell K. Hamilton - Bloody Bones 📖

Orbit, 2000, 370pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-84149-050-4

Laurell K. Hamilton - The Killing Dance

Orbit, 2000, 387pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-84149-051-2

Laurell K. Hamilton – Burnt Offerings 🔲

Orbit, 2000, 392pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-84149-052-0

Laurell K. Hamilton - Blue Moon

Orbit, 2000, 418pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-84149-053-9 Volumes 5 to 8 (and first British publication here) of Hamilton's entertaining 'Anita Blake' vampire-hunter series, the last two volumes originally published in 1998. The first four volumes, *Guilty Pleasures*(1993), *The Laughing Corpse* (1994), *Circus of the Damned* (1995) and *The Lunatic Café* (1996), have all been re-issued in UK edition by Orbit earlier this year. According to the publisher's note, she has written one more volume in the series (title not given).

#### Anne Harris - Accidental Creatures

Tor, 2000, 285pp \$14.95 ISBN 0-312-87560-6 Paperback reissue of Harris's 1998 second novel which won the first Spectrum Award for sf featuring gay characters, themes or issues, and which was initially reviewed in hardback by Farah Mendlesohn in V202. The gay themes in Accidental Creatures are relatively understated (unless I'm missing a subtle metaphor), although this is a book about being different. The most obvious difference of main protagonist, Helix, being that she has four arms and appears immune (indeed thrives on) the toxic growth medium of GeneSys's biopolymer vats, normally responsible for the short lives of the company's vatdivers. Unfortunately, having set up a promising scenario and intriguing relationships (with echoes of Nicola Griffith's Slow River) in the first half of the book, Harris then drops the ball and the second half of the book degenerates into a clichéd chase thriller with a number of stereotyped secondary characters (notably the ruthless corporate villain) and several moments of misplaced farce. More a disappointing and frustrating book than a bad one.

#### K. W. Jeter – Blade Runner 4: Eye and Talon

Gollancz, 2000, 236pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-575-06865-5

Riddled with ™ marks (for the film/series title, now officially licensed and tradmarked), this continues Jeter's authorised sharecropping of Ridley Scott's stunning visual interpretation of Philip K Dick's original novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Volumes 2 and 3, *Edge of Human* and *Replicant Night*, were reviewed by Andrew M Butler, L J Hurst and Andy Mills in *Vectors* 186, 189 and 193.

#### Walter Moers − 13½ Lives of Captain Bluebear 🔲

Secker & Warburg, 2000, 703pp, £17.99 ISBN This is a strange and intriguing book, and possibly deserves a longer look in a future issue. Moers is cartoonist, illustrator and writer who lives in Hamburg, author of comic strips *The Little Asshole* and *Adolf* which, understandably, made him *persona non grata* of the German political right wing. *Bluebear* – "Being the demibiography of a seagoing bear, with numerous illustrations and excepts from the *Encyclopedia of the Marvels, Life Forms and other Phenomena of Zamonia and its Environs* by Professor Abdullah Nightingale" – is apparently something of a cult on the continent, with a quarter of a million sales in Germany. Wonderfully illustrated and quirky, it is reminiscent of Paul Stewart and Chris Riddell's 'Deepwood Chronicles' (reviewed by Penny Hill in V209) and partly Tove Jannson's 'Moomintroll' books, and tells of our blue-furred ursine hero's adventures among the Minipirates, Rickshaw Demons, the Demerara

Desert and the Valley of Discarded Ideas, of Time Snails and Venetian Midgets, the Ship with a Thousand Funnels and the Gelatine Prince from the 2364<sup>th</sup> Dimension. Not to mention Earspoonlets, The Upper Jurassic Current and the Smell of Genff? Strange, odd and delightful.

#### Robert Rankin - Waiting for Godalming

Doubleday, 2000, 264pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-385-60057-7

#### Robert Rankin - Sex and Drugs and Sausage Rolls

Corgi, 2000, 382pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-552-14741-9
Rankin continues with his penchant for atrociously punning titles (which some might feel are the best bits of the books). In Waiting for Codalming

some might feel are the best bits of the books). In *Waiting for Godalming*, Earth becomes the subject of a quick property deal between the late God's youngest son, Colin, and the Jehovah family's arch rivals The Lucifer Consortium.

Sex and Drugs... returns to the irrepressible (though many have tried) John O'Malley, full-time layabout and part-time fixture of the bar of The Flying Swan, in another ill-fated bid for fame and fortune (or at least free drink) as manager of the band Ghandi's Hairdryer. But there's something distinctly odd – almost unworldly – about the band, and their lead singer. Who is it they say has all the best tunes...?

#### Tad Williams - Mountain of Black Glass

Orbit, 2000, 924pp, £7.99 ISBN 1-85723-990-3

The third volume in Williams' Otherland VR fantasy series now in paperback, originally reviewed in hardback by lain Emsley in V209.

#### Keith Roberts - Pavane

Millennium, 2000, 279pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-937-6

#### Philip K. Dick - Now Wait For Last Year

Millennium, 2000, 225pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-701-2 A brace of Millennium 'SF Masterworks' (numbers 35 and 36). Sadly, Roberts died in November 2000. His last work, *Drek Yarman*, published in three parts in *Spectrum SF*, was reviewed by Paul Kincaid in V211. *Pavane* is an acknowledged classic of alternate history in which, after the assassination of Elizabeth I and a successful Spanish Armada, England develops as a Catholic state under the Church Militant. *Now Wait*... (originally published 1966) is an almost quintessential Dick novel, a complex switchback ride of time travel, drugs, alternate realities and questions of reality and identity, humanity and responsibility.

#### Steven A. Roman - X-Men: Doctor Doom

BP Books, 2000, 369pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-7434-0019-4 'The Chaos Engine Trilogy: Book 1' from comics tie-in writer/editor Roman (*Untold Tales of Spider Man, The Ultimate Hulk* and *Heavy Metal: FAKK2* and who promises/threatens a future trilogy based on *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*) with illustrations by X-Men illustrator Mark Buckingham. See 'First Impressions' this issue for reviews of Jan Freidmans's *X-Men: Shadows of the Past* and Yaco and Harber's *Science of the X-Men*.

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