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# Vectra

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The Critical  
Journal of  
the BSFA



# Vector

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THE CRITICAL JOURNAL OF THE BSFA

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**COVER:** As a tribute to the late, lamented Mir, a NASA photo taken in 1996 from the STS-76 *Atlantis* Space Shuttle mission to the station.

## VECTOR

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## The View from the Year End

There's an unspoken rule that the BSFA Reviewers' poll should be mostly newish books and mostly sf, and sometimes you just have years when you realise that you've just read nineteenth-century crime fiction all year. Actually this was not one of those years, but since a lot of my reading was the complete novels of Philip K. Dick, from *Maze of Death* in 2000<sup>1</sup> or something in the region of fifty cyberpunk novels in six weeks<sup>2</sup> or even a dozen Shakespeare plays, or the complete novels of Terry Pratchett<sup>3</sup>, none of it really fits the bill. I did have to read the Clarke shortlist, but that seems like yesterday's news, and I suspect I nominated them last year.

You'll find the results of our Reviewers' Poll elsewhere in the issue, and it produced a rare tie between Mary Gentle's *Ash* and China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* (or at least the fact that two books tied for first place is rare, *Ash* and *Perdido Street Station* tying is unique). The number of people recommending the same book was unusually low, the number of people who couldn't decide on five remarkably high – indeed a number didn't participate because they couldn't decide.

2000 does seem to be a mediocre (meaning average) year for books. Of course, the efforts of Millennium/Gollancz to bring back the back catalogue in the SF Masterworks and yellowbacks meant that publishing has come to seem dominated by reprints – Earthlight also have Bradbury and Priest in print – which perhaps our reviewers wouldn't want to nominate or have already read. It is now easier to stock up on copies of classic sf and fantasy – by men anyway – than at any other time I can remember in the last twenty-five years. One can only hope that the exercise is a success and the books remain available, rather than leading publishers to abandon the exercise altogether.

But 2000 was also the year of the debut. I've heard good words for Roger Levy, Alastair Reynolds and Adam Roberts – although the latter's Routledge book on science fiction apparently left a bit to be desired – and raves about China Miéville, though strictly speaking he debuted a few years back with *King Rat*.

At the risk of turning this magazine into the organ of the China Miéville Appreciation Society, *Perdido Street Station* would be on my list of five best books for this year. I'm struck by a number of comments I've heard or read, about how many people enjoyed it who don't usually read fantasy. Either we're missing out on something in fantasy, *Perdido Street Station* isn't fantasy after all or Miéville has done something rather special. Perhaps even a mixture of the three. But let me say this one more time and then perhaps I'll shut up: run, don't walk, to the book emporium of your choice and buy it now. It'll be a crime if it doesn't win the Clarke Award, but knowing previous juries (and I write as a former jury member) start preparing that cell now.

<sup>1</sup> Oh, go on, since you've asked, for *Philip K. Dick* (Pocket Essentials) available at some good bookshops, and even seen draped decorously across a table at Tate Modern. Co. 'packing insane amounts of information into 93 pages. Deeply comprehensive, with breakdowns of all Dick's books, it's an essential guide for those wanting a quick tour of sci-fi's craziest mind' – *HotDog*

<sup>2</sup> For *Cyberpunk* (Pocket Essentials), described by one critic as 'witty and useful' and another as 'adequate'.

<sup>3</sup> Another plug...

Two books by Iain Sinclair would also grace my list. *Sorry Meniscus: Excursions to the Millennium Dome* (London: Profile Books, 1999) is an account, reprinted from the *London Review of Books* of Sinclair's attempts to walk to the Dome, as well as his experiences on official visits inside the construction site. It's a lively skewering of a great folly, and a portrait of the old Docklands way of life colliding with hyper-efficient, post-Thatcherite Britain.

The second is a collaboration with artist Rachel Lichtenstein, *Rodinsky's Room* (London: Granta, 2000). David Rodinsky disappeared in the late 1960s from his room above a synagogue in the East End, and was never seen again. His room lay undisturbed for twenty years or more, and when opened revealed a Marie Celeste-like abandoned state, as well as annotated maps, mystical writings and decades of dust. Lichtenstein, researching a thesis on Jewish immigration, went to the museum on the site and became artist-in-residence, incidentally dedicated to finding out who Rodinsky was, and what happened to him. Was he the life and soul, who had once played football in the streets, and who tossed coins to beggars, or was he a penniless hermit, scrabbling away with ancient languages? This is one of those stories which you don't quite believe – is it all a marvellous invention, a mythological coinage? – because of the way your hairs stand on the back of your neck as you read it.

(Incidentally, just after completing this I saw *Joe Gould's Secret* at the London Film Festival, an account of a journalist's encounters with the titular Gould, author of an ongoing oral history of America and part-time beggar. Gould is excellently played by Ian Holm, and keeps you guessing all the way through as to whether he is an undiscovered genius or just another bum. I don't suppose that Gould and Rodinsky would have anything to say to each other, but they have some things in common, as do the narratives surrounding them; the way they worm into the lives of others. It perhaps should be noted that despite a bumper crop of sf and genre movies, 2000 was a lousy year. Perhaps we are suffering from the tension of waiting for actors' and writers' strikes, and the distributors are holding materials in reserve.)

I'd got as far as buying *Carpe Jugulum* when I was reading Terry Pratchett in my two or three every eighteen months or so, but I don't appear to have read that one. So as I read through the Discworld novels in order, this was a treat, and what struck me was the dark tone of the piece. Because Pratchett writes comedies, it never usually gets too dark or real evil never quite appears, but here is the darkest tone in any Discworld novel since *Lord and Ladies*. Perhaps it's because vampires are creatures of the night, perhaps it's because Granny Weatherwax really needs to be killed off, but I really had doubts as to whether the volume would have a happy ending.

A number of books jostle for fifth place – and I think Simon Ings' *Headlong* (HarperCollinsVoyager, 1999) just clinches it. A very British post-cyberpunk novel, a touching narrative of a man who once accessed cyberspace and who has now had the hardware removed. His wife is dead – murdered or suicided – and he tries to find out what happened to her, before it can happen to him. A marvellous meditation on the nature of grief.

And so now we come to 2001, and the year 2000 BSFA and Arthur C. Clarke Award shortlists, which have an unusual degree of overlap – eight books nominated rather than the usual ten or eleven (although only having five on the BSFA shortlist is partly a factor). Time to get reading again – if only for the next BSFA Award in 2002...

by Andrew M Butler, High Wycombe, Spring 2001



#### From Doreen Norman:

Have just read Carol Ann Kerry-Green's review of Joan D. Vinge's *Tangled Up in Blue* – not yet available in the UK. I am surprised that Carol Ann has not read any other The Snow Queen books.

Although Joan D. Vinge's books are not always easy to get here, I thought most sf enthusiasts and reviewers would be aware of them. Rog Peyton of Andromeda told me how much he liked *The Snow Queen*: in my view it is a masterpiece. I am sure Andromeda could obtain a copy easily. Last time I was in Andromeda they also had *World's End* and *The Winter Queen*, as well as *Psion* and *Catspaw* from another series.

**Andrew M Butler** replies: *Not everyone has access to Andromeda or the London bookshops – but it might be worth trying out their mail order service which is on the net at [www.andromedabooks.co.uk](http://www.andromedabooks.co.uk). Or if you want to buy and aid the BSFA, order from the Amazon link on [www.bsfa.co.uk](http://www.bsfa.co.uk). End of advert...*

#### From Mike Brain:

Thanks for the great interview with China Miéville by Mark Bould, and Andrew M. Butler's review of *Perdido Street Station*. Having read PSS before V213, I whole-heartedly agree that it's one of those for your must-read categories, and is top of my list for the BSFA Award. For a second novel, it's profligate with plot ideas, and merits the well worn phrase 'mind-blowing', or more accurately in this case 'mind-sucking', but the latter does not have the same resonance. Andrew mentions the 'Tim Powers – *Anubis Gates* ancestry', to which I would add traces of Jack Vance, Gene Wolfe, Cordwainer Smith and Paul McAuley. Now I must read *King Rat* (& was that ever reviewed?), plus the forthcoming *The Scar*, but I would really like to see PSSVol2.

#### From L.J Hurst:

I may not have been the only person to place Ray Bradbury in the Los Angeles SF scene in the early 1940s [see V213, and letter in V214], although by his own account RB was still selling newspapers on street corners. I have just read another long review of Jack Carter's *Sex And Rockets: The Occult World of Jack Parsons*, in *Ghosts and Scholars* magazine, which also makes the mistake of including RB.

My article 'When, Not Where, Was Ray Bradbury?' attempted to show how Bradbury's late fiction used, not the world of Los Angeles fandom from his youth, but the more abstract world of science fiction entering the national consciousness through the publication of 'The Foghorn' in a slick magazine, as its reference across the decades. Mine was a literary analysis, though other critics might have used other methods.

Vector readers might like to know about a couple of books which take a different approach, while still looking closely at authors' work. This is an area known as psychobiography, and one book which applies it to science fiction is Alan C. Elms' *Uncovering Lives: The Uneasy Alliance of Biography and*

*Psychology* (New York: OUP 1994). In separate sections Elms provides case studies of the early psychologists such as Freud, Jung and Skinner, and later he provides comparisons of George Bush and Saddam Hussein and their upbringings. But most relevantly he has five chapters on sf and fantasy authors, including John Campbell, Isaac Asimov, Jack Williamson and L. Frank Baum.

In looking at why John Campbell never wrote any original fiction after he published 'The Thing From Another World' at the age of 27, Elms reveals some interesting biographical information. Campbell's mother was one of completely identical twins: his aunt hated him, and his mother had an extremely short temper. Elms quotes Sam Moskowitz's biography: 'Every time his aunt visited the home, this situation posed itself until it became a continuing and insoluble nightmare. Was the woman standing in front him 'friend' or 'foe'? The Thing that Campbell created in his fiction had these qualities, but worse for Campbell was that no matter how he extrapolated these qualities into his monster they did not create the catharsis that would free his powers of imagination. He became the nursemaid to many authors, he gave birth to no more original work himself.'

The chapter on Asimov deals with his combination of acrophobia (fear of heights) and agoraphobia (fear of open spaces). Elms points out that when Asimov returned to major fiction writing with *Robots of Dawn* he had abandoned the emphasis on detection which had driven *The Caves of Steel* thirty years before, and emphasised Lije Bailey's neurotic anxieties instead. In a series of letters to Asimov he attempted to identify how Asimov might have worked through his problems (successfully or not), and also shows how psychological handicaps are turned into fiction by successful authors, regardless of whether it brings the author a cure to his problems.

Elms also includes a good chapter on L. Frank Baum. As the sleeve note says, "He reveals an unintended subtext of *The Wizard of Oz* – that males are weak, females are strong (think of Scarecrow, Tin Man, the Lion and the Wizard, versus the good and bad witches and Dorothy herself) – and traces this in part to Baum's childhood heart disease, which kept him from strenuous activity, and to his relationship with his mother-in-law, Matilda Joslyn Gage, a distinguished advocate of women's rights." (By the way, what this also reveals is that Geoff Ryman's *Was...* is an outstanding work of invention, and Ryman's Baum a complete fiction).

The other book is Robert Lindner's *The Fifty-Minute Hour: A Collection of True Psychoanalytic Tales* (first published in 1954, I have the 1986 edition published by Free Association Books). What is of interest here is chapter five 'The Jet Propelled Couch: The story of Kirk'. Kirk is in psycho-analysis because of his crippling problems, despite being a government scientist. Kirk believes that the powers of telepathy and teleportation are entering his world. Like a good Freudian Lindner takes Kirk back to his childhood and his unconscious sexual stirrings, talking through until Kirk is able to see that his sf imaginings are just that – imagination. All of Lindner's patients are disguised, but there have been suggestions that 'Kirk' was actually Cordwainer Smith. Smith is also dealt with in *Uncovering Lives*, but Elms does not mention Lindner's book, but then Elms was not a psychoanalyst. (Incidentally, it was Lindner who invented the phrase 'Rebel Without A Cause').

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# Books of the Year – 2000

## compiled by Steve Jeffery

Each year we ask our editors and reviewers to recommend up to five favourite books read in the past year. The reviewers' poll is intended to have a wider scope than the BSFA Best Novel Award and the Clarke Award, both limited to sf/fantasy novels first published in the UK. The reviewers' selections do not necessarily have to be works published in the sf/fantasy genre, novels, UK publications or works that have been published in the last year.

A certain amount of editorial flexibility has also been exercised for works like Pullman's 'His Dark Materials' to count alongside nominations for its concluding volume *The Amber Spyglass*, on the same basis that Mary Gentle's *Ash* is a single long work, and published as such in the UK, but divided into four parts in the USA.

This year, the results of the poll are split again, but with four works in particular coming quickly to the fore: Mary Gentle's *Ash*, China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station*, Philip Pullman's 'His Dark Materials'/'*The Amber Spyglass*' and Alastair Reynolds' *Revelation Space*. Then, somewhere at the mid point, the first two started to pull ahead in a neck and neck break for the final fence (I started feel I should do this in a breathless excitable racing commentary style: "And at the final turn it's *Ash* and *Perdido* from *Dark Materials* with *Revelation* coming strong and *Lord of Emperors*.")

At the final post, though, it's a photo-finish between *Ash* and *Perdido Street Station*, two works which arguably blur

the boundaries between fantasy and science fiction<sup>1</sup>.<sup>4</sup> There was a strong showing from Pullman for the eagerly awaited conclusion of his 'His Dark Materials' trilogy (although some people had reservations about the series' ending) and Reynolds' impressive wide-screen space opera debut. Guy Kay's *Lord of Emperors* heads the rest of the field at two votes apiece, which includes Stableford's *Fountains of Youth*, MacLeod's *Cosmonaut Keep*, Banks's *Look to Windward*, Bujold's *A Civil Campaign* and non-genre entries from Elizabeth Knox's *The Vintner's Luck* (which picked up two votes last year), Iain Pears' *An Instance of the Fingerpost* and Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*.

Three authors might have made a stronger challenge to Kay's *Lord of Emperors* had their votes not been split across different books. Ken MacLeod and Iain Banks has two votes each for their latest works and another for *The Sky Road* and *Inversions* respectively, while Storm Constantine's three votes

were split across the first two parts of her 'Magravandias Chronicles' and another for her *Silverheart* collaboration with Michael Moorcock.

<sup>1</sup> Editorial note: there was a stewards' inquiry into this final result, with a late vote from Andrew M. Butler for *Perdido Street Station* being immediately matched with a later vote from Tony Cullen for *Ash*; the tie stands.

### THE FINAL RESULTS

8 VOTES

Mary Gentle, *Ash*  
China Miéville, *Perdido Street Station*

5 VOTES

Philip Pullman, 'His Dark Materials'/'*The Amber Spyglass*'

4 VOTES

Alastair Reynolds, *Revelation Space*

3 VOTES

Guy Gavriel Kay, *Lord of Emperors*

2 VOTES

Brian Stableford, *Fountains of Youth*  
Ken MacLeod, *Cosmonaut Keep*  
Iain M. Banks, *Look to Windward*  
Lois McMaster Bujold, *A Civil Campaign*  
Elizabeth Knox, *The Vintner's Luck*  
Iain Pears, *An Instance of the Fingerpost*  
Mark Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves*

#### Andrew Adams

Curiously, all Andrew's selections are the second volumes of ongoing series.

Guy Gavriel Kay, *Lord of Emperors* (Earthlight, 2000), Book 2 of The Sarantine Mosaic.

Juliet E. McKenna, *The Swordsman's Oath* (Orbit, 1999), Book 2 of Einarinn.

Julian May, *Orion Arm* (Voyager, 1999) Book 2 of The Rampart Worlds.

#### K.V.Bailey

Patrick O'Brian's *Blue At The Mizzen*, with delight at seeing the signal at last flown there, but infinite regret that this can't go

on happening – save, of course, in the timeless dimension of literature.

Vernor Vinge's *A Deepness In The Sky* for his management of time and scale, and for the skill with which he counterpoints humans' view of aliens and Spiderkind's view of alien Humankind.

Michael Moorcock's *King Of The City* because to achieve its postmodernish blend of romanticism and cynicism over so large a canvas, and with such spectacular set pieces, is a Moorcockian triumph.

Gene Wolfe's *On Blue's Waters*, which carries so effectively into new territory the Long Sun saga and whets so keenly the appetite for the jungles and elsewhere still

awaiting exploration.

The Andrew Butler, Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn edited collection *Terry Pratchett: Guilty Of Literature* for its varied insights and because it set me on to read a string of Discworld books all deserving of a place here.

### **Cherith Baldry**

Mary Gentle, *Ash*. If I had to choose one book only of those I read in 2000, it would be this one. I was lucky enough to read it on holiday, so the length wasn't a problem, and the impetus of the story made it imperative to read on. The depiction of Ash's mediaeval world is impressive, and Gentle continually springs surprises as the story moves from level to level of reality.

Elizabeth Knox, *The Vintner's Luck*. I'll go on remembering this for a long time, for the detailed and authentic depiction of the background, and the almost unbearably poignant characterisation of the angel.

Guy Gavriel Kay, *Lord of Emperors*. Along with *Sailing to Sarantium*, this is a compelling historical fantasy – another book which convinces through the wealth of detail in the background.

Philip Pullman, *His Dark Materials*. I can't remember when I began to read this trilogy, but I certainly finished it in 2000, with *The Amber Spyglass*. As some people who read this will know, I have reservations about some of the things Pullman is doing, but the breadth of his imagination is staggering.

Lois McMaster Bujold, *A Civil Campaign*. One to end with just for fun and sheer enjoyment.

### **Colin Bird**

Bruce Sterling, *Distraction* (Millennium, 1999). An involving political satire played out across a convincingly prescient near-future American landscape. Dazzling invention.

Vernor Vinge, *A Deepness In The Sky* (Tor, Millennium, 1999). Bold space opera with a few genuinely surprising twists and turns in the plot.

Peter Watts, *Starfish* (Tor). An impressive debut novel which examines the pressures experienced by a genetically engineered crew manning an experimental deep sea rig. Skilful hard sf with subtle characterisation.

Greg Bear, *Darwin's Radio* (HarperCollins, 2000). A genetic thriller with an impeccably researched rationale and a pacy narrative which beats Michael Crichton at his own game.

Kathleen Ann Goonan, *The Bones Of Time* (Millennium, 1999). Yes, I know it's been out for a while but I've only just got around to reading it and I was captivated by the rich storytelling. Far superior to her more recent *Crescent City Rhapsody*.

### **Claire Brialey**

I can't claim that these books had anything in particular in common other than that I'd recommend them to anyone. There are only two sf novels, and only two books first published in the UK in 2000. But I think I can still call myself a science fiction fan with this selection: not only does it still include *Revelation Space* by Alastair Reynolds, which I think presents the big picture of British sf – a Big Book in more than size alone, and one that's more than just an impressive debut – and Alfred Bester's *Tiger! Tiger!*, justifiably one of the genre classics (which, despite a slight and inevitable sense of anticlimax, I was blown away by), but the only non-fiction title, Leo Marks' *Between Silk and Cyanide* is one which I was inspired to read after hearing *Cryptonomicon* described as only the second-best book about code-breaking published in

1999.

The others at least have to count as slipstream: James Long's *Knowing Max* is a novel of many narratives whose narrators are all only partly reliable but all of whom are fascinating characters, however they want to depict themselves; it's a mystery, a study in identity and biography.

As for Magnus Mills's *The Restraint of Beasts*, I would never have expected a novel about high-tensile fencing to be interesting. I certainly wouldn't have expected it to be surreal and hilarious. If anything that deadpan can be fantastic, it's the right word in all respects.

### **Stuart Carter**

Warren Ellis, John Cassaday and Laura Depuy, *Planetary: All Over The World* (TPB). With no apologies to 'serious' readers, this is a comic, a collection of the first few issues of the stunning *Planetary*. Three undercover superheroes investigating all the stuff that Superman's always been too busy to check on: global conspiracies, New World Orders, alternative histories and universes... Beautiful art, outstanding and thoughtful writing, and more fun than *two* barrels of monkeys!

Iain M. Banks, *Look To Windward*. There's nothing (nothing readable, that is) I look forward to more than a Culture book and this was simultaneously funny, melancholy and indicative of big changes to come in the Culture universe.

Adam Roberts, *Salt*. Anarchists and capitalists lock horns on an inhospitable alien world – and only one can survive! Smart, intriguing, individual and understated.

China Miéville, *Perdido Street Station*. Let's get this straight, I don't usually choose to read fantasy, but Miéville mixes sf, urban noir and fantasy using a depth and breadth of imagination that puts a whole *convention* of more mainstream writers firmly to shame.

Alastair Reynolds, *Revelation Space*. An enormous junkyard of a ship in a gritty, sub-light, human galactic 'empire' wrecks, and has wreaked upon it, hi-tech havoc in an under-developed solar system that might just be home to a whole race of paranoid super-alien. Reynolds' first novel suggests he might just be first in this list next time.

### **Gary Dalkin**

This year I have read very little sf that wasn't a submission for the Arthur C. Clarke Award, so to avoid singling out titles from among those, the following five books notably exclude any recent science fiction. They are not in any order of preference.

Haydn Middleton, *Grimm's Last Fairytale*. Not quite a fantasy in the usual sense, though whether this is a fantasy at all, or a more conventional historical-biographical novel depends to a large degree upon the interpretation puts on the last line. However you take it, it is an elliptical, emotionally intense and very well written novel about love, time, memory and the power of storytelling. It is also very English, despite its German subject, and fans of Christopher Priest and Robert Holdstock should find much to fathom over.

Robert Holdstock, *Celtika*. In which the mythagos come centre stage. A deliberately cold and detached narrative – the following volume, *The Iron Grail*, promises to be rather more human and involving – sees Merlin involved in a complex adventure with Jason and Medea. It's far less gimmicky than that cross-over high concept idea would suggest, and as well crafted as anything Holdstock has done. Due to the alienated nature of Merlin himself though, the book only really commands the emotions as well as the intellect in the final chapters.

Arthur C. Clarke, *Greetings, Carbon Based Bipeds!*. A



massive compilation of non-fictional writings by President Clarke which throws up one fascinating speculation after another. The sheer range of Clarke's imagination of the decades is still staggering, and while the later pages do show a certain tendency to recycling this is essential reading.

Tom Shippey, *J.R.R. Tolkien. Author of the Century*. This is a splendid account of the background and writing of *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*. Shippey is an academic who has literally followed in Tolkien's footsteps, holding several of the same chairs vacated by the latter. His writing is sympathetic, penetratingly intelligent, accessible and utterly lacking in pretension. Indeed, he makes a very strong case for Tolkien's work to be taken seriously as literature whilst brilliantly destroying the pretensions and prejudices of the literary establishment. He lucidly argues that the fantastic is the dominant mode of fiction in the 20th century, and to argue otherwise is to be self-deluding.

*The Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick* volumes 1-3 (*Beyond Lies the Wub*, *Second Variety*, *The Father Thing*). Choosing three books in one may be considered cheating, but no one ever says that about trilogies. This is a body of work that should be considered together, a magnificent outpouring of stories; about seventy-five of them in three or four years, an astonishing, obsessive set of variations on Dick's core themes of identity, memory, reality and survival. Dick's novels often draw attention away from his early stories, but these volumes demonstrate that he was not only far more compelling in short form than long, but a far better writer before he became famous.

### Iain Emsley

This year has been an embarrassment of riches that have challenged expectations and elements of genre. Open to being read as either fantasy or science fiction (set in a universe ordered by Hermetic principles), Mary Gentle's *Ash* was one of the most challenging but rewarding reads of the year.

Cities in fantasy should never be the same again. In *Perdido Street Station*, China Miéville's wonderfully dark New Crobuzon rises above, but cannot ignore, the ordure that acts as its foundations. *Dark Cities Underground* by Lisa Goldstein fuses steampunk to urban fantasy, whilst reinforcing the idea of magic underlying the urbane reality. James Blaylock's *Winter Tides* was a fortunate chance discovery. This fantasy, which verges on horror, shows how dark urban writing can be.

*The Fox Woman* by Kij Johnson is a haunting beast fable, utilising the Japanese myth of the fox who becomes a woman, to illustrate the possibilities opened by satori; the sudden re-seeing of things. The subtlety and delicacy with which Johnson writes in this debut offers so much scope for development, even though the eventual outcome of the story is never in doubt.

### Alan Fraser

It's been a poor year for me as far as book reading is concerned. I knew this when I looked at the BSFA Award nominations and realised I hadn't read even one of them! Only

three books that I read last year have stood out: *Inversions* by Iain M. Banks, *The Sky Road* by Ken MacLeod and *A Storm Of Swords* by George R. R. Martin.

*Inversions* is a Culture novel in disguise (which may be a spoiler), and I suspect you wouldn't know what exactly was going on unless you've read *Use Of Weapons*. On an unnamed planet two travellers from 'distant lands' have become the trusted associates of the rulers of two very different states. Their stories are told in alternating chapters of the novel, the events in each story following the same path and with connections which we have to tease out. Fascinating, although readers new to the 'M'

persona of Banks have found it incomprehensible.

*The Sky Road* was the first I'd seen by Ken MacLeod, although now I'm motivated to read more. MacLeod is politically aware, techno-savvy, and knows how to keep you turning the page. A sequel to *The Star Fraction*, *The Sky Road* is actually set in an alternative future to *The Stone Canal* and *The Cassini Division*, a bold move in a publishing world where authors create sometimes incredibly forced links to bring all of their work into exactly the same timeline.

*A Storm Of Swords* is the third book in George R. R. Martin's series 'A Song Of Ice And Fire'. Martin has created a splendidly-realised world with a rich history and a chaotic present filled with vicious threats, both human and supernatural. The ending of almost every chapter is either a cliff-hanger or drenched in blood! I can't wait to read *A Dance With Dragons*, the next book in the series.

Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Martians* is a collection of apocrypha to his 'Mars' trilogy, stories and factual pieces – interesting if you've read the series but not essential.

### Carol Ann Kerry-Green

First I think, has to be Mary Gentle's *Ash: A Secret History*. A big book if ever there was one, but so detailed and so full of suspense and surprises that I couldn't put it down, despite its weight! To me, this is *the* book of 2000.

My next book is a non-sf novel, but related nevertheless: Margaret Atwood's new novel *The Blind Assassin*. An old woman reminisces about her life and her sister's risqué novel, which is reproduced within the book. A story within the novel within the novel is a pulp science fiction tale of heroism and love. Atwood thoroughly deserves the Booker for this novel.

Michael Moorcock and Storm Constantine have collaborated on a new fantasy, *Silverheart*, to great success. I found this one in the local library and devoured it. An unusual fantasy set in a world of metal and ice.

This last book (yes I know it's supposed to be five, but four was all I managed), Kate Wilhelm's *Welcome Chaos* is strictly speaking a re-read, but one I'd not read for a long time. It was published in 1983, and deals with immortality. What do you do when you discover immortality, but the process of giving it to people kills 50% of them, and those who survive are left infertile? A wonderful sf thriller.

### Lesley Hatch

Top of the list have to be two by Storm Constantine, starting with *Sea Dragon Heir*, which brought to life a couple of

## 2000 Awards – The Winners:

### Arthur C Clarke Award

Bruce Sterling, *Distraction*

### BSFA Awards

Novel: Ken MacLeod – *The Sky Road*

Short story: Eric Brown – 'Hunting the Slarque' (*Interzone* 141)

Artwork: Jim Burns – *Darwinia* (cover)

remarkable families and their intertwined fates, and which results in a worthy beginning to a vibrant new series of novels. The next volume in the series, *Crown of Silence*, continues the story of various protagonists from volume one, but in a totally unexpected way, and I cannot praise Storm highly enough for her inventiveness and constant ingenuity.

Next is Joanne Bertin's *Dragon and Phoenix*, sequel to *The Last Dragonlord*, in which we once again encounter the immortal Dragonlords and embark with them on a mission to rescue an imprisoned dragon, and which turns out anything but simple.

Patricia A. McKillip's *Song for the Basilisk* took the unusual theme of musicians being oppressed by an invading noble family, coupled with the search for, and safeguarding of, an heir to an ancient family, and resulted in an exciting novel.

Mary Brown's *Dragon's Egg*, in which her heroine embarks on a quest to return the Egg of the title to its home, completes my quintet. The novel combines the traditions of Verne, Wells and fairy tales, and was hugely enjoyable.

### Chris Hill

It was a difficult decision this year, with three obvious choices and a real quandary over the last two. My final choices, in no particular order are:

Lois McMaster Bujold, *A Civil Campaign*. Less sfnal than normal, this is a charming Jane Austenish comedy of manners and possibly Bujold's best *written* book.

Mary Gentle, *Ash: A Secret History*. A sprawling and compulsively readable alternative history which comes close to overstaying its welcome but is ultimately very rewarding.

Patricia McKillip, *The Tower at Stony Wood*. After her slightly disappointing previous novel, a return to form with a beautifully-told fantasy.

Iain Pears, *An Instance of the Fingerpost*. A stunningly inventive murder mystery set in the interstices of the real history of the restoration of Charles II. One of those rare books that make you want to shut people in a room and *make* them read it!

Philip Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*. Very good indeed (with some reservations). Not quite sure why it took so long to write seeing as the conclusion seem to lead logically from the early volumes, but worth the wait.

### Penny Hill

My choices are *Ash: A Secret History* by Mary Gentle. I loved the realism and the vibrancy of the internal narrative, coupled with the increasing sense of mystery as to the effect this narrative is having on Piers the narrator and his world. I felt the book was exactly the right length for the story it had to tell.

*An Instance of the Fingerpost* by Iain Pears. I was totally absorbed into this 17th century world where people believe in magic and are making the first steps towards scientific methodology. The layering of unreliable narrators was fascinating, leaving you with several choices as to whether to believe their worldview and/or their descriptions.

*The Amber Spyglass* by Philip Pullman to represent the trilogy, as it was unputdownable. The final volume completed the story perfectly.

*The Vintner's Luck* by Elizabeth Knox. This story thrilled and fascinated me. I found the emotional tensions believable and the choices plausible.

Hilda Boswell's *Treasury of Poetry* edited by Hilda Boswell. I have re-read this book several times this year. It is an excellent introduction to some of our best poets and through the illustrations, is probably also the book that first taught me to look at the beauty of the natural world and began

my fascination with the fantastic.

### L.J.Hurst

China Miéville, *Perdido Street Station*.

er... that's it.

Although they may not all have been published last year I will mention the classic material re-published in omnibus form by NESFA Press.

### Edward James

Trying to find five really memorable books from 2000 has proved rather difficult. On the one hand, all are overshadowed by China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station*, the most startlingly original and impressive novel I have read for a very long time. And on the other, in retrospect, I seem to have read relatively little new fantasy or science fiction. I discovered Patricia Cornwell, and Kathy Reichs, and Lindsey Davis, and enjoyed all that I read.

I read quite a few children's books, as usual, of which I particularly enjoyed the Philip Pullman series about Sally Lockhart, that began with *The Ruby in the Smoke*. But I also read K.A. Applegate's Everworld series (Scholastic), or at least the first five (two more sit on the 'to be read' shelf). These began with *Search for Senna*, and explored the attempts of four American high school kids to escape the mythological worlds (Greek, Aztec, Viking etc) that they suddenly find themselves in: a surprisingly witty and enjoyable romp. I read a lot of history books (that's my job, after all); though perhaps the most enjoyable was not in 'my period' at all, but was Venetia Murray's *An Elegant Madness: High Society in Regency England* (Penguin): pure fun from beginning to end, and a must for any Georgette Heyer fan.

For months I seem to have been reading and rereading Mack Reynolds's science fiction, but that's just because I have been trying to write about him. I did read most of the Clarke and BSFA shortlists, though (thus, all books from 1999), and particularly enjoyed Justina Robson's *Silver Screen* (which should have won the Clarke) and Simon Ings's *Headlong*. Of the science fiction from 2000, John Meaney's *Paradox* was the one that has stuck in my mind.

### Steve Jeffery

The first book I read in 2000, Michel Faber's *Under the Skin* (Canongate), still remains, at the end of the year, one of the most astonishing (and occasionally horrific) 'contact' novels I've read since *The Sparrow*, even though its sfnal credentials don't become explicit until about halfway through.

The next two choices are obvious, Mary Gentle's monumental 'science fiction counterfactual alternate history' *Ash* (Gollancz), and China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* (Macmillan), an extraordinarily inventive dark urban fantasy whose acknowledgement to Mervyn Peake and M. John Harrison is, for once, thoroughly deserved.

Brian Stableford's *Fountains of Youth* (Tor) is that *rara avis*, a reworking of his novella length story 'Mortimer Gray's *History of Death*' that gains immeasurably by its expansion to novel length.

For a final choice, I'm split. I really want to mention Jeff Smith's enchanting comic *Bone* (Cartoon Books), but the work that really had me in stitches is Jeff Vandemeer's *The Hoegbotton Guide to the Early History of Ambergris by Duncan Shriek* (Necropolitan Press), particularly for its crabby eponymous historian's splendidly acerbic footnotes, which almost threaten to take over the text he is supposedly writing.



## Paul Kincaid

Two books contend for the title 'Best of the Year' in 2000, and I suspect either one of them would have been at the top of the list in any other year of the last decade or so.

*House Of Leaves* by Mark Z. Danielewski (Anchor) is simply awe-inspiring, a book that leaves you gasping for breath at its daring, and at its achievement. It starts when a film maker discovers his house is a quarter-inch wider on the inside than it is on the outside, but after that it becomes a roller-coaster ride that combines elements of science fiction, fantasy, horror, academic criticism, satire, the mainstream and a dozen other genres and sub-genres.

The only other book that could stand against such a stunning work is *Daemonomania* by John Crowley (Bantam), the third part of his contemporary fantasy series and far and away the most involving, hard-hitting and shocking of the lot. The subtle way that the change of belief-systems at the end of the medieval world is echoed in contemporary America is worth the price of admission alone.

After those two, even good novels seem a little lame, but there is an outstanding collection of stories from M. John Harrison, *Travel Arrangements* (Gollancz), which leaves us hesitating between the real and the unreal in a way that is typical of his very best work.

Other than *House of Leaves*, the debut that impressed me most was *Revelation Space* by Alastair Reynolds (Gollancz), a rather old-fashioned outer space adventure that still manages to fizz with lots of new ideas. And the book that, in a sense, distressed me most was *The Fountains Of Youth* by Brian Stableford (Tor), not because it is a bad book, far from it, this expansion of his wonderful novella 'Mortimer Gray's History of Death' is one of those rare cases where the novel is at least as good as the original; but because this is one of the very finest British science fiction novels to have come out this year, and no British publisher is touching it. That is insanity.

## Vikki Lee

One new author and two which I've read for the first time make up the bulk of my best reads of the year. Jo Walton's first novel, *The King's Peace* (Tor), is an excellent debut with really engaging characters, reminiscent of Elizabeth Moon's Paksenarion trilogy for me. Not really groundbreaking stuff, just good solid storytelling at its best and well worth a look. Likewise with *The Burning City* by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle (Orbit); not best known for writing fantasy, but engrossing stuff once one gets one's head around the class system which drives the plot. I particularly liked the 'pioneering West' feel to this one once things moved out of the city – a welcome change to the run of the mill fantasy scenarios.

Stan Nicholls has been around for quite a while, though I've not read anything by him before. *Bodyguard of Lightning* (and its latter trilogic parts) (Gollancz) are let down slightly by the cover art. The impression is of intended 'Pratchett-like' humour, but this is not the case. The tale, which is told from the point of view of the traditional bad-guys, certainly has its

laughs, but it's much more serious than that and Nicholls pulls it all off well. Well worth a look.

I'll wind up with a mention of two regular best-sellers who continue to make the grade for me. David Gemmell's *Hero in the Shadows* (Bantam) is all that one would expect from a master of battles and heroic fantasy, and Guy Gavriel's Kay's long-awaited second part of 'The Sarantine Mosaic', *Lord of Emperors* (Earthlight). Most fantasy readers will have read this anyway so there's little I can say other than that I would feel remiss if I didn't include it. Both storming good reads.

## Farah Mendlesohn

Ken MacLeod's *Cosmonaut Keep* (Orbit) opens a new sequence and takes space opera in bold new directions. His perceptive political analysis has whole new planets to exploit and he continues to write descriptive prose that I find breathtaking. MacLeod is in yet another parallel future with this one, but I was pleased to see that his political wit remains keen and dry enough to reduce a US con audience to uncontrolled laughter with descriptions of union politics in the next century.

The ability to create 'place' in a reader's mind is one of the things I find most valuable. In Jon Courtenay Grimwood's latest book, *Pashazade* (Simon & Schuster), I could feel the heat off the Iskandrian pavements and smell the dark, bitter coffee. Grimwood is another very political writer who has spent the past few years developing the art of the parallel future. Yet despite the clear political imperatives behind his work, he writes to a very human scale, his politics inscribed on the bodies of his characters. The result is that *Pashazade* is a painful and complex book.

Another writer with a real gift for place is Nalo Hopkinson. Her second novel, *Midnight Robber* (Warner) has just been nominated for the Philip K. Dick Award (her first, *Brown Girl in the Ring*, won the Campbell award for best new writer in 1998). Hopkinson has created one of the most engaging and confusing aliens since Weinbaum's 'Martian Odyssey', a powerful heroine and a futuristic, non-American culture.

Parallel dimensions and parallel histories have been a theme in my reading this year, but then, I am a historian by profession. One of the books I had to read was Edward James' *Britain in the First Millennium* (Edward Arnold). It's an excellent read, genial in tone and with a pacey narrative for those of us unfamiliar with the period, and it proved enormously helpful when it came to getting to grips with Jo Walton's fascinating first novel, *The King's Peace*.

Finally, although I probably won't be the only one to mention it, China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* (Macmillan) is one of those books that one feels privileged to have read: its scope, clarity and language are astonishing.

## Andrew Seaman

Philip Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass* (Scholastic Press, 2000). Definitely 'Hotter than Potter'. The 'children's' book that everyone was *really* waiting for this year. Aside from being beautifully written, and full of compelling ideas and images,

## 2000 Awards – The Shortlists: Arthur C Clarke Award

Octavia E. Butler – *Parable of the Talents* (Women's Press)

Mary Gentle – *Ash: A Secret History* (Gollancz)

Ken MacLeod – *Cosmonaut Keep* (Orbit)

China Miéville – *Perdido Street Station* (Macmillan)

Alastair Reynolds – *Revelation Space* (Gollancz)

Adam Roberts – *Salt* (Gollancz)

for sheer reading pleasure alone this book would be hard to beat. Now it's time to re-read the entire trilogy.

Richard Powers, *Plowing the Dark* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2000). Forced to pick one book from this list as my choice of the year, this would be it. Powers' tale of virtual reality is a compelling and thoughtful meditation on art, science, progress, memory and human relationships. Probably the best sf novel of the year, even though it isn't marketed as such.

Alastair Reynolds, *Revelation Space* (Gollancz 2000). Reynolds has been publishing promising stories in magazines like *Interzone* for some years, but his debut novel is indeed a revelation; a fat, galaxy-spanning space opera set in a fascinating future that readers will want to revisit. Likely to be a strong contender for awards this year.

Ken MacLeod, *Cosmonaut Keep. Engines of Light Book One* (Orbit, 2000). While Iain (M.) Banks takes his sabbatical from writing we can enjoy his fellow Scot's increasingly excellent output. This is a thrilling mixture of MacLeod's astute near future political sf and space opera. A novel of terrific sfnal ideas and human emotion that constantly surprises and delights.

Brendan DuBois, *Resurrection Day* (Warner Books, 2000). A book that came completely out of left-field, and a pacy and atmospheric conspiracy thriller, set in a convincingly realised alternative timeline in which the Cuban Missile Crisis escalated into World War Three. Comparisons with Harris's *Fatherland* are well earned.

### Andy Sawyer

Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat* (Penguin Popular Classics, 1994: originally published 1889) is on my list after last year reading Connie Willis's *To Say Nothing of the Dog* and realising that I'd never read the immortal work she bases it on. And it's splendid. Jerome was clearly a fan *avant la lettre*: I wonder what he would have thought of fanzines?

More humour in *Molesworth* by Geoffrey Willans and Ronald Searle (Penguin Modern Classics, 2000: originally published 1953-1959). I couldn't resist the chance to have an omnibus edition. A modern classic and a searing exposé (coo err gosh) of the existential crisis of the '50s. Stick this in a bag with *The Day of the Triffids* and *Look Back in Anger* and that's that decade sewn up. And actually, I don't think I'm joking.

Is it fair to mention a book which was actually in last year's

list? Last time round, I'd only read part of Mary Gentle's *Ash*. This time, I have the benefit of it being published as a complete volume (Gollancz, 2000), and what a benefit it is! Certainly it's a strong contender for Book of the Year, and one which I'm going to have to go back to in the context of Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, in that both play games with

form and structure. Danielewski received an immense amount of publicity and was raved over, most recently (at time of writing) by Jeff Noon in *The Guardian*. I'm not, I think, wholly convinced, in that I'm not sure that all the structural games actually *work*. But it's certainly a fascinating and at times exhilarating read, even though I kind of think *Ash* does the 'playing-with-reality' thing as well as or even better than *House of Leaves*.

Finally (why are most of these *big* books?) there is China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* (Macmillan, 2000) which I remember describing as "*Metropolis* meeting *Gormenghast* in the heart of Dickensian London" and which I still remember as vividly at the end of 2000 as at the beginning of the year. A grimy, hallucinatory science-fantasy of great power and awesome promise, this is fantasy in the radical urban tradition rather than reactionary pastoralism. If this and *Ash* are not on the shortlists for 2000's awards there is

something askew somewhere.

### Sue Thomason

Okay, I'm going to start by sneaking in three books as two choices: Philip Pullman's Dark Materials trilogy (*Northern Lights*, *The Subtle Knife*, *The Amber Spyglass*). Children's fiction doesn't usually go in for plots based on metaphysical astrophysics, realistically imperfect and unpredictable characters, or killing God – I only wish most of the adult fiction I read was as thoughtful and imaginative.

Stephen Jay Gould, *Leonardo's Mountain Of Clams And The Diet Of Worms*. "He is among the great essayists of his generation", says the cover blurb, and I agree. Witty, lucid, fascinating explorations of art, science, and the interface between them, first published in the American magazine *Natural History*.

Donald Kingsbury, *The Moon Goddess And The Son*. Should be read by everyone with the slightest interest in Russia, world peace, and/or roleplay gaming. Another writer who has more good ideas on half a page than I tend to have in a month.

Colin Tudge, *The Day Before Yesterday*. Fascinating look at human prehistory, and how we came to be the people we are

## 2000 Awards – The Shortlists: BSFA Awards

### NOVELS

Mary Gentle – *Ash: A Secret History* (Gollancz)  
Jon Courtenay Grimwood – *redRobe* (Earthlight)  
John Meaney – *Paradox* (Bantam)  
China Miéville – *Perdido Street Station* (Macmillan)  
Alastair Reynolds, *Revelation Space* (Gollancz)

### Best Short Fiction

Eric Brown, 'Destiny On Tartarus'  
(*Spectrum SF* #2)  
Tanith Lee, 'La Vampiresse' (*Interzone* #154)  
Liz Williams, 'Adventures In The Ghost Trade'  
(*Interzone* #154)  
Paul di Filippo, 'Singing Each To Each'  
(*Interzone* #155)  
Peter F. Hamilton, 'The Suspect Genome' (*Interzone* #156)

### Best Artwork

China Miéville, *Physiognomies Of Flight* (Cover  
*Vector* #213)  
Dominic Harman, *Hideaway* (Cover  
*Interzone* #157)  
Gerald Guabert, *Afetere's Eyes*  
(*Scheherazade* #19)

today.

Note that several of these were picked up second-hand, and that the only hardback is *The Amber Spyglass*, which I *absolutely couldn't wait to get hold of* after reading the first two books in the trilogy.

#### Gary Wilkinson

*45* is a series of autobiographic essays and anecdotes by Bill Drummond, the ex pop-star of KLF fame and one half of the art-anarchist collective The K-Foundation. Reflecting on his life, music, art and everything, it is more inventive, mind-expanding and downright weird than the vast majority of sf or fantasy. One of the best books I have ever read.

Another slice of life that seems stranger than fiction is *Angry White Pyjamas* by Robert Twigger. A failed poet, Twigger finds himself washed up in Japan as a very bored English teacher. He decides to undertake the gruelling year-long Riot Police martial arts course to put some meaning back

into his life. Profound, inspirational and also very funny; in Twigger's eyes Japan becomes a very alien country, both in and out of the dojo.

I normally loathe fantasy but *Perdido Street Station* by China Miéville is not your average fantasy. Set in a teeming baroque city where surreal cyberpunk meets Lovecraft via a mutated Dickens, its seven hundred pages flew by.

The last Banks for a while – and if perhaps, as hinted in a recent interview it proves to be the last Culture novel for a long time, if ever, then *Look to Windward* is a fine swan-song for the sequence.

Another untypical, in fact, post-modern fantasy was *Ash* by Mary Gentle. A medieval alternative-history that slowly becomes something else entirely. Although perhaps a shade too long, its conclusion, where the book transforms into something else entirely, and the verve of its Joan of Arc-like central character makes the long journey in reading it well worth the effort.

## The Science Fiction Films of 2000

by Colin Odell & Mitch Le Blanc

A few years ago, you'd have been hard pressed to find a science fiction film in the cinema. Nowadays there's hardly a week that goes by without you being able to see something sf at your local multiplex. But have any of them been any good this year?

### WHAT, YOU MEAN THE BOOK CAME FIRST?

#### *Battlefield Earth*

The most critically mutilated and hated film in living memory, *Battlefield Earth's* reputation lay in the fact that no-one (apart from us) went to see it but felt compelled to put in their bit about how wretched it was. Chief concern was the 'S'-word, a word so powerful that *Battlefield Earth* came close to being banned in some European countries on the grounds of religious propaganda and brainwashing. In the cold light of day it is but a Hollywood blockbuster: big, stupid, has an impressive ending that rivals *Independence Day* in its requirement to suspend disbelief and generally keeps you entertained. It feels closer to 1970s sci-fi than the modern variety but that's not necessarily a bad thing. Flawed, cheesy looks and with some stinking dialogue, but ultimately the most offensive thing about it is how they manage to get in McDonalds product placement. Mindless piffle but more rewarding than *Gone In 60 Seconds* or *MI:2*.

#### *Breakfast of Champions*

Which film starring Bruce Willis played screen #35 out of 35 at Warner Star Village for one week only? The answer is Alan Rudolph's adaptation of Kurt Vonnegut's wonderful book. Unfortunately most people just didn't get it which is a big pity as this is another in a long line of flawed but brilliant Vonnegut films. Its main fault lies in the fact that in order to get anything out of it you need to be familiar with the source. We were and loved every minute of it.

#### *A Clockwork Orange*

After a quarter of a century of self-imposed ban and the proliferation of grainy nth generation videos, Kubrick's sf masterpiece gets the cinematic treatment it always deserved in a shiny new print and gorgeous mono sound. So what if the 'yoo'f stayed at home and missed out on the re-release of the year, it's their loss. Still as brilliantly satirical and viciously camp as the day it was filmed.

#### *Sleepy Hollow*

Tim Burton's re-telling of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* is a real visual tour de force, confirming his position as the auteur of big budget Hollywood. Living proof of the tag line 'Heads Will Roll', this is a decapitation fan's dream with some simply astonishing effects realising the headless horseman's violent predilection for removing the noggins of all and sundry. The title is apt, since although the film is visually sumptuous, costumed to the max and has seminal performances from all concerned, emotionally it seems a bit, well,

hollow.

### And the winners are... (drum roll please)

Best Fantasy Film: *The Little Vampire*  
Best Horror Film: *The Ring*  
Best SF Film: *Memento*  
Special 'Camp' Award: *Charlie's Angels*

### BIG, BOLD, BEAUTIFUL AND BRAINGLESS?

#### *Charlie's Angels*

Unlike the undistinguished and diluted John Woo/Tom Cruise summer smash *MI:2*, *Charlie's Angels* is blissfully unconcerned with matters of taste, decency and being serious. And all the better for it. Our three angels have to prevent the cessation of privacy that will be invoked if the Black Star consortium use stolen software that traces vocal DNA by using their mobile phone communications satellite as a high-tech tracker. We are in politically incorrect territory here but hey, all the girls kick ass better than their pathetic male counterparts. All the glasses are colour tinted, all the gadgets are *Avengers* daft, everything that could be

believable is escalated to the preposterous. There are big explosions, intricate heists, computer hacking, car chases, lederhosen, guns, cunning disguises, crass gags and lots of fashionably improbable wirework martial arts. More insane than a farm full of cows, it's as though the filmmakers have tossed every action idea into a kitsch bowl and mixed it up using a camp whisk.

### ***Galaxy Quest***

A brilliantly obvious premise (actors in a TV sf-show are kidnapped by aliens who think they are really that heroic) accompanied by great effects and a cast clearly enjoying themselves, *Galaxy Quest* manages to ride a fine line that could have killed it dead. Neither mocking the fanbase nor relying on the audience understanding fandom, it gets on with pastiching every sf cliché. Starting in Academy ratio, the film opens into glorious anamorphic Panavision revealing the enormity of the situation. Rickman steals the show and, whilst this is not going to bear too many repeat viewings, it's a helluva lot of fun while it lasts.

### ***The Hollow Man***

Paul Verhoeven alert! Sadly this is Verhoeven-lite with many of the potentially more disturbing aspects of the screenplay shuffled to the background. It's a pity because Bacon gives a sound performance, even when transparent, as a man driven to madness by apparently irreversible invisibility. Complementing his performance are some quite remarkable and graphic effects that unfold like a living *Gray's Anatomy*. The voyeuristic aspects of the story bode well but unfortunately it deteriorates into another *Terminator*-style 'how many times can we kill him' ending that just seems tacked on. Better than average, but Verhoeven can do so much more.

### ***Mission To Mars***

Brian de Palma fails to realise the promise of his early career by producing a stupefyingly dull *2001*-meets-*ET* with a red filter wedged to the camera, some impressive but tedious effects and a decidedly ropy latex alien. Watch *Phantom of the Paradise* again instead and save your pennies.

### ***Unbreakable***

Another underplayed and intelligent film from *The Sixth Sense*'s M. Night Shyamalan, this subtle offering concerns Bruce Willis, the only survivor of a train crash, being led to believe that he might just be a real life superhero.

### ***The X-Men***

Bryan (*The Usual Suspects*) Singer proves his worth in *The X-Men*, Marvel's grim crusaders brought to celluloid life. Treading the ground between serious (concentration camp prologue, mutant rights, moral ambiguity on both sides) and spectacle (cracking costumes, twenty foot long tongues, people thrown about like rag dolls and lots of pyrotechnics) the attempt to make a thought-provoking popcorn film works to some extent. All the performances are exemplary, the set pieces stunning and Hollywood's return to using outrageous wirework is most welcome for those of us who like their spectacle to be spectacular and their art artistic.

## **SMALLER, SWEET AND STRANGE**

### ***Being John Malkovich***

Although the Coens' madcap version of Homer's *Odyssey O*

*Brother Where Art Thou?* was mighty strange you were at least prepared for it, not so with Spike Jonze's barking *Being John Malkovich*. A puppeteer finds himself engaged in a business enterprise renting out John Malkovich's inner self via a doorway found behind a filing cabinet on a half-sized floor in an office block. As you do. A great fantasy which, while it ultimately peters out a touch, has more than enough to maintain a 'cult film' status. An assured debut feature.

### ***Memento***

What if your memory was restricted to the last few minutes of your life? How would you live? In *Memento* the answer is to use a system; tattoo your body with messages and Polaroid everything you come across. To reinforce the premise the film is structured in tight pockets correlating to Leonard's memory span which plays in reverse, unravelling pieces to the mystery of not only his life but the savage murder of his wife that triggered the condition. With first rate performances all round this was one of those little films that came from apparently nowhere. Feeling like the best of urban-based '60s science fiction this is one of the films of the year, intriguing, disturbing and one you must see several times.

### ***Titan A.E.***

The premise is the usual space opera one – save the last remnants of the human race that has been scattered sparsely across the galaxy following the obliteration of Earth by an evil alien race. Everything about *Titan A.E.* is larger than life; huge explosions, hide and seek in a belt of ice, strange creatures, death defying stunts, zero-G and exotic landscapes. The world explodes for your pleasure and there's enough character interaction (script doctored by *Buffy*'s workaholic creator Joss Whedon) to pull it all through. This is spectacle at its best and most enjoyable, with the huge possibilities of CGI mixed with more fluid cel animation to produce something far more emotional than last year's *Phantom Menace*. Unfortunately the concept of a cartoon that appeals to those other than children (still a blinkered opinion held by many) did not ignite the box office. Link this with the similarly lacklustre response (in the States) to Miyazaki's long awaited *Princess Mononoke* and the sorry situation is that large-scale animation still seems limited (in the West) to Disney's annual outings. C'est la vie.

### ***Pitch Black***

This mid-budget Australian SF/horror hybrid is an inventive and enjoyable romp with sudden jumps, gory deaths and, while some of the cast wave tell-tale 'I'm beastly fodder' placards, the question of who will survive is very much open. Crash landing on an apparently deserted planet the survivors soon realise that the previous inhabitants met with a less than friendly welcoming party – savage hordes of carnivorous flying beasts that gnaw humans to the bone in seconds. Fortunately they can only survive in the dark. Unfortunately the planet is due for a month long eclipse in, oh, about a couple of hours. To make matters worse one of the party is a convicted felon and very dangerous. With effective use of tension, the result is no masterpiece but a solid rollercoaster ride. The black and white blurred 'thing-o-vision' is particularly effective proving that you don't need to shell out all your cash on big stars and ILM.

## **HOW HORRIFIC**

### ***The Ring (Ringu)***

Without a doubt the finest horror film of the year, *The Ring* is a subtle Japanese techno-Ghost story almost entirely free of viscera yet disturbingly nasty with plenty of jumps and creepy bits. The tale concerns the distribution of a videotape which, once viewed, means that the spectator has exactly a week to live, or does it? Coming across as a restrained hybrid of *Videodrome* and *The Sixth Sense* but far scarier, it is a triumph of imagination over budget. Laid back in pace and high on tension this is the most unsettling but rewarding horror film since George Sluizer's masterful *Spoorloos* and cannot be recommended highly enough. The sequel (unambiguously titled *The Ring 2*) is due for release in art cinemas next year so watch out for the original appearing as part of a repertory programme. Catch it now before the Hollywood remake.

Elsewhere the horror film rode the gamut of enjoyment from A to Z. *House On Haunted Hill* was a nasty but fun remake of the William Castle classic (sadly devoid of the rubber skeleton). *The Haunting* was a beautifully designed but excruciatingly poor remake of Robert Wise's classic. *Scream 3* was the weakest of the trilogy, *Scary Movie* an atrocious so-called comedy. *Final Destination* an enjoyably preposterous romp and *Urban Legends: Final Cut* a distinct improvement on its lacklustre original with an incredibly gruesome first murder. *Blair Witch 2: Book of Shadows* wisely ditched the verité format of its (bizarrely) celebrated forebear but unwisely trod the tediously familiar ground of post-modernism. Polanski's *The Ninth Gate* flew the flag for cerebral horror in a film surpassed in length only by Frank Darabont's *The Green Mile* (his second life-affirming period prison drama adapted from a story by Stephen King) which featured Tom Hanks having painful urinary problems. The MTV visuals and John Woo-style doves of *Stigmata*, together with some sterling performances could not save it from being vacuous tat.

### IT'S LIKE, YOU KNOW, FOR KIDS...

Despite a number of high profile blockbusters (and unmitigated disasters), 2000 should perhaps be noted as a great year for films aimed primarily at children. Normally a good year yields at most two bona fide classics but this year several magical fantasies vied for the pocket money. *Pokemon* was not one of them. Neither was *Dinosaur* – \$200 million is a helluva lot of money and somewhere amidst the

awesome groundbreaking CGI and the stunning sound, someone forgot to put in a story.

Uli (*Last Exit To Brooklyn*, *Christiane F*) Edel's *The Little Vampire* is a thoroughly delightful tale of an American newcomer to Scotland befriending the younger (only just past 300 years old) boy in a family of vampires led by a domineering Richard E. Grant. There's little time before a centennial comet passes which will allow the vampires to live in peace as humans once more. Naturally there are obstacles such as the smelly vampire hunter and his arsenal of vamp-snuffing gadgets. Part *Moonfleet* in feel this is great fun, the vampires aren't compromised by being in a kids' film and anyone who doesn't warm to a shed full of vampire cows hiding from the day clearly needs to lighten up.

*The Little Vampire's* star Lipnicki also appears in *Stuart Little*, another film based upon old and established childrens' books. Again the trick here is that the film doesn't patronise its audience and just gets on with the show. Stuart is a lively little fellow and while he is viewed by many as 'different' no one seems the slightest bit concerned that he is a talking mouse. There are some great action scenes, some dark sequences where Stuart is due to be 'whacked' by the local mouse Mafia under the order of the Little's cat (whose position he threatens), as well as a bonding between the family amidst the slapstick.

Anyone who has heard of John Lasseter will know any film bearing his name is the cause for celebration. *Toy Story 2* is another triumph, proving that state-of-the-art CGI comes into its own only when married to a decent script and strong characters – it is a means to an end, not the end itself. Constantly engaging, very funny and perfect for all ages there is more than enough subtext to win over adults. Woody, Buzz and the gang tackle the weighty subjects of consumer marketing strategy and the purpose of childhood and friendship in a modern context.

*Chicken Run* was the long awaited first feature from Aardman and proof that Mel Gibson makes a better cock than he does a yawn-inducing reactionary Brit-basher. There was much to enjoy in the deranged live action version of *Asterix and Obelix Take On Caesar* although we'd rather have heard Gerard Depardieu as Obelix as well as just admiring his Roman bashing antics and voluminous waistline.

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COLIN AND MITCH CONTINUED TO PRODUCE BOOKS IN 2000 AT AN ALARMING RATE – ED.

## A Listing of SF, Fantasy, Horror and Associational Films released in the UK during 2000. compiled by Andrew M Butler

*American Psycho* – Adaptation of cult novel with troubled history (at one point Leonardo DiCaprio was to be the star) where 1980s yuppiedom meets *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. Borderline horror (serial killer) with faint fantastical traces.

*Asterix and Obelix Take On Caesar* – Gallic live action version of graphic novel.

♀♀ *Battlefield Earth* – John Travolta enters a new career nadir in Scientology vanity project.

♂♂♂ *Being John Malkovich* – John Cusack continues to prove his good taste in choosing product and his acting ability. Cameron Diaz continues to astound, and the best thing Malkovich has done in years. Full release after the festival circuit.

♀ *Blair Witch 2: Book of Shadows* – Barely glimpsed follow-up to the overrated smash hit.

*Breakfast of Champions* – Blinked and missed adaptation of Vonnegut's most indulgent and tricky novel.

*The Cell* – Jennifer Lopez stars as psychotherapist who enters the mind of a serial killer who's the only one to know where his latest victim is.

*Charlie's Angels* – Cameron Diaz continues to kick butt.

♂ *Chicken Run* – Finest socialist chicken movie of the year.

*A Clockwork Orange* – Long awaited British re-release after Kubrick's death.

*Dinosaur* – Disney does *Walking With Dinosaurs*.

- Eye of the Beholder*** – Ewan MacGregor as agent on the trail of a female serial killer, who seems more interested in helping her than catching her. Meanwhile he is haunted by his daughter – who is dead or in the custody of his ex-wife or, well, maybe he's just imagining her. Disappointing and overly enigmatic film from the director of *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*.
- Final Destination*** – Teen horror about a group who got off a plane that then crashed.
- Fortress 2*** – Brennick is imprisoned in another prison, in outer space, and has to escape.
- Frequency*** – Cousin to Benford's *Timescape*, with radio communications across a generation, from ex-NYPD Blue producer Gregory Hoblit.
- ◊◊◊◊ ***Galaxy Quest*** – Stand out film of the year; a pastiche of Star Trek and its fans, and decent enough sf in its own right.
- Gladiator*** – Associational. Joaquin Phoenix chews the scenery marvellously in Ridley Scott's CGI-infested sandals epic; Russell Crowe spends the time looking depressed and having flashbacks to Tarkovsky movies. Derek Jacobi could act his rôle in his sleep and Oliver Reed didn't have to be alive to finish his filming.
- The Green Mile*** – Overlong fantasy prison drama, with all the clichés of the form and none of the racism you'd expect from the context. Not for the weak of bladder.
- ◊ ***The Haunting*** – Pointless big budget remake of Robert Wise classic adaptation of Shirley Jackson's masterpiece.
- The Hollow Man*** – Verhoeven remakes *The Invisible Man* and helps us out with the Kevin Bacon game.
- ◊ ***House On Haunted Hill*** – Pointless big budget remake.
- The Little Vampire*** – Superior children's tale.
- Love's Labour's Lost*** – 1930s based musical which shares the plot of a Shakespeare play.
- Magnolia*** – Overly long follow-up by Paul Thomas Anderson to his slightly overrated *Boogie Nights*, all men are beasts and all women are substance abusers. Anderson wastes a top notch cast, including William Macy, and even a late shift into surreal fantasy can't save it.
- Mission Impossible 2*** – Tom Cruise, John Woo and Australian sets. Did he get it right second time round?
- Mission To Mars*** – Earnest space epic, beginning in *The Right Stuff* territory, but badly losing it with a dose of von Däniken and Graham Hancock.
- ◊◊◊ ***Memento*** – Guy Pearce from *LA Confidential* and Carrie-Anne Moss and Joe Pantoliano from *The Matrix* in intelligent and mind exercising thriller about an amnesiac avenging his wife's murder.
- The Ninth Gate*** – Rare outing for once prolific horror thriller director, Roman Polanski, with Johnny Depp.
- ◊ ***O Brother Where Art Thou?*** – Coen Bros 1930s-set musical comedy version of Homer's *The Odyssey*, needed more Holly Hunter and John Goodman, but had crazy plot, hair care products, too many dogs and fat men shouting.
- ◊ ***Pitch Black*** – *Nightfall* (in reverse) meets *Alien*; entertaining bloodfest where even the kids get it.
- ◊ ***Pokemon*** – The film of card collecting game.
- Red Planet*** – Briefly seen narrative about colonising Mars as Earth is dying. Starring Val Kilmer, which ought help you decide if you've missed anything.
- ◊◊ ***The Ring (Ringu)*** – Japanese horror about a nasty video.
- Scary Movie*** – A parody of a parody with a misjudged cameo from him off *Dawson's Creek*; failed to be sufficiently scary or funny.
- Scream 3*** – Third entry in the parody horror franchise, complete with Jay and Silent Bob cameo. They say this is the last one. As if.
- The 6th Day*** – Arnold Schwarzenegger sends in the clones, or rather discovers he has been replaced by one.
- Sleepy Hollow*** – Tim Burton reunites with Johnny Depp for grim fairy tale which underuses Christopher Walken.
- ◊ ***Stigmata*** – Preposterous *Exorcist* rip off for an MTV generation.
- Stir of Echoes*** – Kevin Bacon stars as a man hypnotised by his sister-in-law who is contacted by the spirit of a dead woman.
- Stuart Little*** – Family comedy about an adopted mouse.
- Summer of Sam*** – Borderline horror with talking dog from Spike Lee.
- Supernova*** – Walter Hill-helmed blinked and missed sf in which a medical ship mounts a rescue which ends up endangering their ship.
- Titan AE*** – Starrily voiced, much trailed, hardly released animation, which sank Fox's cinema animation wing.
- ◊ ***Titus*** – Superior adaptation of Shakespeare's video nasty.
- ◊ ***Toy Story 2*** – Superior CGI animated sequel.
- Unbreakable*** – More twist-in-the tale nonsense from M. Night Shyamalan who directed *The Sixth Sense*, starring Bruce Willis (acting like he's one of the guys from *Awakenings*) and Samuel L Jackson as a man who breaks bones – his own – every time he falls over.
- ◊ ***Urban Legends: Final Cut*** – By the numbers horror.
- What Lies Beneath*** – Rip off of someone ripping off Brian De Palma ripping off Hitchcock; Michelle Pfeiffer is haunted by a dead girl. Also starring Harrison Ford and directed by Robert Zemeckis waiting for Tom Hanks to peel off the pounds for the second half of *Cast Away*.
- The X-Men*** – The increasingly usual comic book on big screen mistake: too many heroes, too many villains, not enough screen time for each.

# Fandom 2000

## by Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer

TO SUPPLEMENT OUR COVERAGE OF BOOKS AND FILMS OF THE YEAR, WE OFFER AN OVERVIEW OF THE YEAR IN FANDOM, WRITTEN BY CO-EDITORS OF THE FANZINE *BANANA WINGS* AND FAN GUESTS OF HONOUR AT THE 2001 EASTERCON.



With no conventions in the early part of the year (although the early spring slot previously occupied by small 'relaxacons' was to some degree filled by the US double-bill of the literary-focused Potlatch and fanzine-oriented Corflu in Seattle) the first major event of the year for most people was the Eastercon, 2Kon, at the Glasgow Central Hotel. An all-fantasy guest list – Guy Gavriel Kay, Katherine Kurtz, Deborah Turner Harris – had attracted some advance comment, and a minimalist approach to programming on the day, variously claimed to have been a deliberate policy or a consequence of illness amongst the organisers, led to a good deal more afterward. The guests were well received but, whatever the justification, the low-key programme was not. 2Kon had associated itself quite strongly with the infant 'UK in 2005' Worldcon bid whose reputation undoubtedly suffered in the immediate aftermath. However, as US fan E.B. Frohvet has noted, this may well prove to be a difference that makes no difference given the absence of any sign of an opposing bid.

PLOKTA.CON, brought to you by the producers of the fanzine of the same name, was an altogether smaller event over the late May Bank Holiday weekend, although some claimed – only partially jokingly – that there was more going on at this single-stream, one-hundred-person convention than at the Eastercon a month earlier. Both the guest of honour (Ken MacLeod) and the venue (The Holiday Inn, Leicester) were extremely popular.

And in July came the eccentrically-named Aliens Stole My Handbag, whose organisers seemed to believe that 1997's Year of the Wombat convention had been far too staid. Robert Rankin was main guest of honour (other guests included Dave Langford and John Whitbourn), sharing the limelight with a piercing workshop, a fetish disco and a convoy of military vehicles to Horsham Common in homage to *War of the Worlds*, although in practice the convoy turned out to consist of one truck and a few rather embarrassed cars.

Lexicon in August was the latest Unicon – a series of conventions held at institutes of higher education – which returned to Oxford for the first time in many years. It also achieved something of a coup by getting Philip Pullman for its guest slot, something that was only slightly mitigated by the convention being a few weeks too early to cash in on the long-awaited publication of *The Amber Spyglass*, which he slipped off at spare moments to make increasingly final corrections on.

Novacon finished up the year with an expanded guest list – David Hardy, Rog Peyton, Chris Priest – for its thirtieth annual outing. The hoped for increase in membership numbers did not materialise, although this may in part have been attributable to the bad weather and poor rail service in mid-November which threatened to at least double journey times.

As previously noted, the UK05 Worldcon bid now seems to be a shoo-in after the 2000 Worldcon in Chicago, generally regarded as the last chance for any credible opposition to emerge, came and went. At PLOKTA.CON, joint convenors KIM Campbell and Vince Docherty surprised nobody with the announcement that they had selected Glasgow as the site for the bid, rather than rival Brighton; the former is allegedly much improved since 1995 whereas the latter's conference

facilities may not be available five years' hence. A more radical move was announced later in the year: for various reasons, the convention will run in early August (over the Scottish Bank Holiday) rather than over the traditional late August Bank Holiday or Labor Day weekends. The bid will be formally presented at Con José, the 2002 Worldcon in San José.

Business settled at the Chicago Worldcon included the selection of Toronto as the venue for the 61st Worldcon, in 2003, and the extension of the eligibility period for the 2000 Hugo Awards, to be presented at this year's Worldcon in Philadelphia. This gives a blanket extension of Hugo eligibility for 2000 to all books first published outside the US in 1999.

Closer to home, the 2001 Eastercon, Paragon, announced a change of venue at 2Kon. High room rates and a change of management had forced a relocation from Blackpool's Norbreck Castle Hotel to the Hanover International near Hinckley, Leicestershire. In the light of this it was interesting to see that a very much last-minute bid for the 2002 Eastercon on Jersey was successful, despite announcing room rates broadly similar to those which had been rejected by the Paragon organisers. The perceived shortage of people willing to run Eastercons, coupled with the difficulty in finding

appropriate venues with sufficient numbers of bedrooms and adequate function space, has once again provoked much speculation into the future of the British National SF Convention. Such speculation isn't anything new, but it is perhaps worth noting that at the time of writing, two months before the bidding

session, there was still no sign of any bid for the 2003 Eastercon

It was a relatively quiet year for the various fan funds, with voting and campaigning underway but no actual visitors to these shores. Nova-winning fan artist Sue Mason was a convincing winner of the Europe to North America TAFF race in April (the other candidates were Tommy Ferguson and Tobes Valois) and attended the Worldcon in Chicago in early September. There was no GUFF trip during the year between Australia and Europe, but Eric Lindsay and Jean Weber were successful in a race to attend the 2001 Eastercon (the other candidates were Damien Warman and Juliette Woods, also on a joint platform).

In October the TAFF administrators announced that Bill Bowers, tied winner of the 1976 race who had been unable to make the trip at the time, hoped to be able to attend the 2001 Eastercon on a special 'Silver Jubilee' trip (sadly, it now seems unlikely that Bill's health will permit him to make this trip either). Shortly afterwards they announced a regular race as well, with voting taking place through to January 2001. Victor Gonzalez was declared the winner; the other candidate was Tom Springer. Easter 2001 looks to be a busy time for fan fund winners.

Irwin Hirsh, winner of the 1987 GUFF trip to the Worldcon in Brighton, established a new web site devoted to the Australian fan funds, covering DUFF – the Down Under Fan Fund (trips between North America and Australasia) – and FFANZ – the Fan Fund for Australia and New Zealand – as well as GUFF, at <http://www.users.bigpond.net.au/hirsh/fanfunds.html>. Links to these and other formal and unofficial fan funds can be found at

**...in practice the convoy  
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<http://www.fanac.org/fanfunds/fan-funds.html>.

Other fannish activity online was booming. SF newsgroup activity remained high – although the international newsgroup *rec.arts.sf.fandom* came close to being bogged down, along with the world outside, in seemingly endless and even more off-topic than usual discussions about the US Presidential race, and the quieter *uk.people.sf.fans* represents an addition (or echo) to RASFF rather than a real alternative. Many online sf fans have been turning to moderated e-mail lists like Timebinders, the Memory Hole Mailing List, and Trufen – focusing respectively on fan history, fanzines, and fandom itself, at least in principle. Such newsgroups and lists increasingly represent an electronic alternative to APAs (Amateur Press Associations, paper-based discussions distributed among a closed circle by an administrator), although most British-based APAs are still going strong.

Club activity in 2000 was marked by the decidedly different approaches of the South Hants SF Group's 'Byzantium' event in September and ZZ9 Plural Z Alpha's twentieth anniversary party two months later. Byzantium aimed to bring together sf groups across the south and south-east of England in the SHSFG's regular haunt of the Magpie pub in Fratton, near Portsmouth. Special guests John Whitbourn and Ben Jeapes offered succinct showcases in the ten minutes' programming allocated every hour, with various sf groups filling the other slots. A similar event, 'Constantinople', is already scheduled for 2001, organised by the Southampton-based group Solent Green.

Meanwhile ZZ9, the *Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* Appreciation Society, celebrated their anniversary in the Florence Nightingale pub in London – currently home to the monthly First Thursday meetings and ZZ9's own events and, until the end of last year, the BSFA's London meetings – with old and current members, a selection of other London-based fans, physically challenging party games, an auction, and almost too many party-poppers.

Of the fan awards presented at Eastercon, the Doc Weir Award, usually described as being for the unsung heroes of fandom, went to Tim Illingworth. The Ken McIntyre Award for a piece of fan art went to Sue Mason who, as well as winning TAFF, went on at Novacon 30 to collect her third fan artist Nova as well. Yvonne Rowse also won her third Nova Award, for fanwriter this year, with *Plokta* (edited in its various forms by Steve Davies, Alison Scott and Mike Scott) winning the fanzine category after several years' strong contention.

Fanzine production in the UK last year remained roughly consistent with 1999 levels with about 100 issues of 50-odd titles, and a predictable mix of old favourites, newcomers and returnees.

Aside from newsletters such as Dave Langford's *Ansible*

and Bridget Wilkinson's *Fans Across the World Newsletter* which appear as monthly single-sheets with additional electronic distribution, and Terry Jeeves's *Erg* which continues with the quarterly schedule it has followed since 1959, few titles appeared more than two or three times. An exception is *Plokta*, which managed five issues during the year. In addition to its Nova win, it joined Dave Langford's *Ansible* on the Hugo ballot (where the winner was Mike Glycer's US newszine *File 770*). Dave was also the sole British representative in the fan writer category, where he scooped his fourteenth win.

Amongst the other prominent titles of recent years, Yvonne Rowse's 1999 Nova Award-winning *Barmaid* only saw two issues during 2000 (halving its 1999 frequency), and Sue Jones's small circulation but popular *Tortoise* slipped to triennial from its former quarterly schedule. Interestingly, it was the older fans who seemed to be more productive: Simon Ounsley returned to publishing with three issues of *Connection* in six months, and Sandra Bond produced two substantial issues of *Quasi Quote* and two more of the lighter, slimmer *Bogus*. Other returnees during 2000 included John Owen's *Crystal Ship* and Dave Wood's *Xyster*.

One possible cause for the relatively low frequency of appearance of many titles is cost. The use of Adobe Acrobat and PDF files for fanzine distribution over the internet and email has begun to take hold in the US – although only John Foyster in Australia seems to be designing fanzines for on-screen reading – but so far this seems not to have been adopted in the UK. Use of PDF virtually eliminates distribution costs and transfers the price of hard copy production (if required) to the recipient. An alternative way of reducing costs is international collaboration, such as the sercon Anglo-Australian *Steam Engine Time* from Bruce Gillespie, Paul Kincaid and Maureen Speller and the fannish Anglo-US *Gloss* from Lilian Edwards and Victor Gonzalez.

Sadly, last year saw the death of veteran fan publisher Ken Cheslin. In recent years Ken had produced a number of substantial volumes of articles and stories by fellow fifties fan John Berry, most recently *Robbery With Violets*, as well as a superb collection of artwork by the late Arthur 'Atom' Thomson. His contribution to keeping alive the fan writing and art of the past was invaluable.

Another notable fannish reprint project was Sansato Press's publication of a hardcover edition of William F Temple's *88 Gray's Inn Road*, including two sf stories, 'Mind Within Mind' and 'Always Afternoon'. The title novella, originally written in the 1950s under the title 'Bachelor Flat', is a semi-autobiographical account of the attempts of three young men to set up home in London in the late 1930s. Bill Temple's real-life flatmates were Maurice Hanson and Arthur C. Clarke (here fictionalised as 'Ego', a leading light of the British Interplanetary Society), and Clarke contributed a preface to this edition.

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# Non-fiction published in Britain in 2000

## by Marcus Shreck

Outside the august pages of *Vector* the non-fiction scene in Britain is remarkably thriving, although this seems to be thanks to the efforts of three or four names who

appear to be everywhere, and risk burning out if they're not careful. At the risk of shamelessly promoting names you are only too familiar with, take a bow Andy Sawyer, Colin Odell

and Mitch Le Blanc and Andrew M Butler, the latter described by a guest editorial in *Foundation* as "indefatigable". I fear they are all too right.

The editorial appeared in the first of three issues of *Foundation: The International Review of Science Fiction* produced during 2000, #78, which was a selection from the academic track of the 1999 Worldcon in Melbourne, Australia with contributions from Bruce Gillespie and Janeen Webb on George Turner, examinations of Cordwainer Smith and Jack Dann, plus a symposium on the posthuman with authors Gregory Benford and Joe Haldeman, Australian critic Helen Merrick and British fans and critics Maureen Kincaid Speller and Andrew M Butler, inspired by a review in the *New York Review of Science Fiction* by Rob Latham. Rather than talking about the stories in the anthology reviewed by Latham, the panel discussed the possibilities, limitations and dangers of the posthuman, although they lobbed a few potshots at the reviewer. Rob responded in issue #79 (Summer) in the letters column, an issue with a perceptive and glowing review of *Perdido Street Station* by Mark

Bould (who had interviewed author China Miéville for *Vector*) an article on John Sladek by Andrew M Butler and an obituary of Sladek by John Clute. The same issue features a substantial interview with Suzette Haden Elgin by Dunja Mohr with comments on that author's novel *Native Tongue* by Val Gough, Candas Jane Dorsey and Features Editor, Farah Mendlesohn. The final issue of 2000 (Autumn) featured an interview with Thomas Disch by Elliot Atkin, who has been researching a PhD on the author at the University of Liverpool. It also included a contribution from highly successful Canadian author Robert J Sawyer.

The Science Fiction Foundation, publishers of *Foundation*, also produced a collection of essays on Terry Pratchett with contributions from John Clute, David Langford, author Cherith Baldry, *Vector* reviewer Penelope Hill, Farah Mendlesohn, Edward James and others, including SFF librarian Andy Sawyer and that man Butler again. It contained chapters on individual sequences (children's books, Death, the witches, the wizards, the City Guards, the Librarian) and themes (faith and ethics, coming of age, mapping and theories of humour). Terry Pratchett had initially treated the volume with some understandable suspicion, but appears happy to sign copies which come his way. Elsewhere in this issue, K.V. Bailey writes of the way that this book sent him back to reading the novels – probably the highest praise imaginable – and Michael Dirda wrote in the *Washington Post* "this is a good and intelligent book". A couple of reviews in Pratchett fanzines were less charitable, being suspicious of literary criticism.

The Science Fiction Foundation Collection's home at the University of Liverpool is home to the Liverpool University Press, who continue to publish their series of 'Science Fiction Texts and Studies'. They also seem to continue their policy of whispering their publicity from the hilltops, with Eastercons the only chance for most of us to purchase them. Year 2000 volumes include a book on the great writer James Tiptree Jr in Inez Van Der Spek's *Alien Plots: Female Subjectivity and the Divine in the Light of James Tiptree's 'A Momentary Taste of Being'*, a rare venture into relatively modern writers as the series had begun with early sf, Wells, Victorian invasion narratives and Charlotte Perkins Gilman. This bias to pre-generic sf continues with *Jules Verne: Narratives of*

*Modernity* edited by Edmund J Smyth. The publication of *Speaking Science Fiction* – co-edited by Andy Sawyer – at the end of the year, based on a conference of the same name at the University of Liverpool in 1996, demonstrates both the glacially slow process of academic publishing and the sterner imperative of the deadline for research funding which fell at the end of the year. (Oh, and Andrew M Butler writes on Jack Womack's Dryco novels, and at least manages to mention the novel which was published whilst the collection was in press.)

Arthur C. Clarke Award shortlisted author Adam Roberts wrote a volume on *Science Fiction* for Routledge's Critical Idiom, in some ways a later version of Patrick Parrinder's *Science Fiction: Its Criticism and Teaching*. (London and New York: Methuen, 1980) but with much more critical theory.

Whilst it contains much that is thought-provoking, it is filled with a number of elementary errors. Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska's *Science Fiction Cinema: From Outer Space to Cyberspace* is a slim volume from new film specialist press Wallflower Press which is a tad overpriced for the content. The same series offer introductions to

## ...take a bow Andy Sawyer, Colin Odell and Mitch Le Blanc, and Andrew M. Butler

other genres as well.

Outside the academic world, the Pocket Essentials offer slim volumes of criticism for under a fiver. Mitch Le Blanc – here posing under the impenetrable pseudonym of Michelle – and Colin Odell, frequent contributors to *Vector* and former editors of *Matrix*, produced a film by film guide *David Lynch* which also covers the television programmes he has been involved with. The same authors (with the names mysteriously reversed) wrote a volume on *Vampire Films*, including around a hundred films. Whilst such a long list of titles risks sacrificing depth, it shows more critical sense than much of the coverage of horror films. Andrew M. Butler (would you believe it?) sidles into the action with Pocket Essential guides to *Philip K. Dick* and *Cyberpunk*. The former offers far too much information on the novels, along with space for commentary on the letters, nonfiction and even the screenplay, and not enough on the short stories. The latter volume moves beyond its title subject to cyberpunk in its widest sense; beginning with a chapter on William Gibson and Bruce Sterling, it moves onto explore the cyberpunk movement as the product of the authors in *Mirrorshades*, much of which is hard to define as cyberpunk. The latter chapters include materials on post-cyberpunk writers such as Neal Stephenson and Richard Kadrey and what he labels cyberpunk-flavoured – Jeff Noon and Jack Womack among others. The same fluid definition allows him to examine a range of films – *Blade Runner*, *Videodrome* and *The Matrix* being the more obvious, but also *Run Lola Run* and *Dark City*. Curiously he omits *Tron* and *Robocop*. Other volumes in the series are of genre interest, John Ashbrook's *Terry Gilliam* and John Costello's *David Cronenberg* (both contributors to *Matrix*). Ashbrook examines the films at great length, and includes a useful annotated listing of the films that Gilliam has failed to make, ending with works in progress *Don Quixote* and *Good Omens*. Since the writing of the book, *Don Quixote* has indeed fallen through.

Michelle Le Blanc and Colin Odell supplemented their Pocket Essentials career with the collection *Horror: Box-Office Hits*, a cover mount for the short-lived *Science Fiction World* magazine. The book was scuppered by production difficulties – the running heads from an earlier cover mount, *Cult TV*, and the omission of the top one hundred listing of

horror films on the inside covers which Le Blanc and Odell were annotating. Nevertheless, the critiques display the perception and wit which has shown through in earlier books. This volume was more appreciation than criticism, with some horror films which one would expect to be damned coming quite well out of the deal.

In the fanzine world, Maureen Kincaid Speller, Paul Kincaid and Bruce Gillespie have edited a long-anticipated non-fiction magazine, called *Steam Engine Time*. Alongside solid articles by the editors and others, are a number of

recommendations for reading by fans from across the world. Some of the material is reprinted from apazines, but deserves a wider audience. It is of course churlish to note that some of the pieces are review articles of books from a number of years ago. Fandom can be overtaken by glaciers just as much as academics. Mention of Bruce Gillespie brings us full circle to a journal technically outside the remit of this survey, the thirtieth anniversary issue of *SF Commentary*, a collection of the late George Turner's criticism; a fantastically produced artifact and full of hours of absorbing reading.

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## I Hate It Here: Warren Ellis and *Transmetropolitan* by John Newsinger

'I will tell you things that will make you laugh and I will tell you things that make you uncomfortable and I will tell you things that will make you really fucking angry and I will tell you things that no one else is telling you'

Spider Jerusalem

In his column in a recent issue (July 2000) of *Comics International*, David Bishop, a former editor of *2000AD*, summarily dismissed Warren Ellis's science fiction comic, *Transmetropolitan* as nothing more than a discharge of bile. Bile there certainly is, but this hardly sums up what is arguably the most interesting mainstream comic in publication at the present time. What one suspects Bishop really objects to is the political edge to the comic, its hostility to Clintonism and Blairism. For others, of course, this is part of its attraction.

Ellis first came to notice as the writer of the 'Lazarus Churchyard' strip that appeared in the short-lived monthly magazine *Blast* in 1991. Inevitably, he joined the emigration of British comics talent to the United States, where he took over the *Stormwatch* comic, a standard superhero publication. Ellis used his Jenny Sparks character to give the comic a new direction. When she was recruited to Stormwatch, a United Nations security team, she complained to its leader that in the past "we always went after the soldiers not the generals". He convinces her that this time it is different, that this time they will go after "the causes, not the effects". One consequence of this is that in this particular comic's universe, the good guys find themselves coming into conflict with the US government. One issue, for example, has Jenny Sparks carry out a purge of the Lincoln police department, removing corrupt, brutal and murderous police officers from the scene. *Stormwatch* has since mutated into *The Authority*, which has been taken over by another fine British writer, Mark Millar.

While Ellis's *Stormwatch* and *The Authority* stories are certainly interesting, there is an inevitable question mark over just how much even the best writers can do with Frederick Nietzsche's particular contribution to popular culture. The likes of Frank Miller (*The Dark Knight Returns*), Alan Moore (*Watchmen*, *Promethea*), Grant Morrison (*Animal Man*, *The Doom Patrol*), Kurt Busiek (*Astro City*) and Pat Mills (*Marshal Law*) have all had a go at subverting superhero comics and although they have produced some fine work, it is debatable whether they successfully escaped the sub-genre's limitations. Ellis's radical take is very clever and very enjoyable, but exhibits the same limitations.

Much more interesting is *Planetary*, another superhero comic that Ellis still writes. This was characterised by a

romantic melancholy that was often superbly realised by John Cassaday's artwork. Two particular issues, 'Island', that came out in May 1999, and 'The Day The Earth Turned Slower', out in February 2000, provide wonderful demonstrations of Ellis and Cassaday's combined strengths. In the first story, a group of Japanese terrorists have landed on Island Zero and have to be prevented from discovering its secrets. It is the home of monsters, of the monsters who inhabited Japanese popular cinema. In the other issue, the creatures from 1950s American cinema are revealed to be the result of experiments carried out, at the time, on American leftists. This particular issue is tremendously powerful.

Ellis also had a brief stay on the *Hellblazer* comic. John Constantine, the Liverpool spiv and magician, seemed to have been made for him. This was not to be. Ellis parted company with the title when his 'Shoot' story was refused publication. He had never really gotten into his stride.

It was the *Transmetropolitan* comic that first appeared in September 1997 that established Warren Ellis's reputation as a major writer. *Transmetropolitan* is an unmistakably political comic. Although set in a future City, very much a science fiction environment, it is a protest against the inequalities and injustices of contemporary society. In an interview with Mark Salisbury, Ellis made clear how he had first approached the idea of *Transmetropolitan*.

I started by thinking about the kind of science fiction I had always liked when I was reading it, which was easy because it was the science fiction that approached social fiction; a tradition that came from H.G. Wells of using the future as a tool with which to explore the present.

Ellis's rage is fuelled not just by the way the rich and powerful abuse their power, but by the way the majority of the population put up with it. His vehicle for all this is one of the most remarkable characters in comics today, the gonzo journalist, Spider Jerusalem, a sort of cross between Hunter Thompson and Nick Cohen. He is a bald tattooed egoist, given to drugs and drink in considerable excess, a misanthrope with a passion for justice, a lover of humanity who is continually let down by the object of his affection, a relentless and ruthless crusader. After years of living as a recluse in the country, Spider has returned to the City, looking for work as a journalist. He is taken on by *The Word* to write a weekly column. The editor warns him that he must not repeat his notorious article covering the result of the last Presidential election: the word 'fuck' typed eight thousand times.

All comics, repeat all comics, have a political dimension. Who would deny the political potency of Superman, for

example, or of Batman, the billionaire vigilante who polices Gotham City? The politics of most mainstream comics cut with the grain however. What sticks out are those comics with radical politics, those that in whatever way go against the tide. In recent years there have been a number of examples of comics with radical politics on both sides of the Atlantic. *2000AD* has often carried stories with quite explicit anarchist politics ('Finn', 'ABC Warriors') while in the States *Hellblazer* and *The Invisibles* both took up a radical leftist stance. The contribution of Alan Moore hardly needs a mention. Without any doubt, however, *Transmetropolitan* is the most ferocious in its assault on what can be legitimately characterised as the Clinton-Blair New World Order.

*Transmetropolitan* is a protest against an America where eight years ago, when Clinton was elected President, the top bosses earned roughly one hundred times the pay of their workers and now earn nearly five hundred times as much. This is a society where social inequality has reached unprecedented levels. The richest society in history is characterised by the most incredible wealth and luxury existing alongside the most appalling poverty and squalor. And to police the poor there is a penal regime that imprisons and executes a higher proportion of its population than any other advanced country. This is a land where politics is completely dominated by wealth. And, of course, the comic is also a protest against attempts to take Britain down the same road. Today, for example, a larger proportion of British prisoners are held in private prisons than in the States and New Labour is committed to further privatisation, not least of state education. The problem with *Transmetropolitan* is not with its politics, but with the fact that there are too few comics with similar politics.

The early issues of *Transmetropolitan* show Spider familiarising himself (and us) with the wonders of the City. We are introduced to the problems that confront the 'revivals', those brought out of cryonic suspension; to the 'downloaded', those who have abandoned physical form altogether; and to the 'transients', people who are undergoing surgery to become aliens. Spider's first big story is to expose the brutal police assault on the transient ghetto. He covers the attack quite predictably, from the roof of a strip club. His report is transmitted live:

...there's a jungle rhythm beating out below me; the sound of truncheons hammering on riot shields, police tradition when the streets get nasty. I'm in Angels 8 above what will doubtless be called the Transient Riot. History's only written by the winners, after all, and if the cops want it called the transient riot, then that's how it'll be.

The unwelcomed publicity forces a police withdrawal and that night on the way home Spider is severely beaten as a warning.

Subsequent issues of the comic see him shooting the President with a bowel disrupter set on 'prolapse' – "it's the duty of journalists to strike fear into the hearts of criminals". He watches TV (game shows such as 'Torture Me For Money' and children's programmes such as 'The Sex Puppets'). He trashes a religious convention (designer religions are among his many hates) and writes an affecting column on the plight of the revived. And he goes on to reveal the secrets of the George Wallace Oncogene Farm where cancer research is being carried out on Third World children. This saw the comic through its first scatological year. 'Year Two' was to see him covering the Presidential election, a contest between the right-wing candidate, 'the Beast' and the Third Way candidate,

'the Smiler'.

Politics in the City, according to Spider, seems to involve little more than choosing "the face of the guy who'll be fucking us next". While he is a determined opponent of the Beast, he becomes increasingly disturbed by his Third Way opponent, 'Smiler' Callahan. Beneath the vacuous grin there is a complete lack of principle, an authoritarian disposition and contempt for the poor. Remind you of anyone? The real issues confronting the City are, of course, completely absent from the election campaign.

As the campaign proceeds, Spider succeeds in uncovering a particularly gross scandal with regard to Callahan's running mate, Representative Joshua Freeh. The story takes him to the Long Pig Food Company's farms where they grow non-sentient human bodies for cannibal dinners (you can buy human takeaways across the City!). Freeh, who seems to have no past, was vat grown. He was given a minimal consciousness upgrade, enough to make him a viable politician, indeed the ideal New Democrat or New Labour candidate. Despite his exposure of this scandal, Callahan wins, one of the two worst possible outcomes of the election. He is determined to settle with Spider.

One particular story, 'Lonely City' that covered three issues of the comic (Nos 28-30) lays bare the nature of politics in the City. It opens with a gang of racists looking for a victim. This being the future, they are equipped with a G-Reader that can scan genetic structure. They find someone with deviant genes, seventeen-year-old Rory Flanagan Lockwood, and kick him to death. Spider determines to cover the story. "The cops," he informs his editor, "are going to make this go away. It's a minority slaying and they don't give a shit". In fact the truth is even worse. The police use the demonstration demanding action over the Lockwood murder as an opportunity to stage a massacre, a massacre from which only Spider Jerusalem and his two assistants escape. When he tries to expose the outrage his story is suppressed by Callahan's imposition of a D-Notice.

As the story progresses, Spider seriously damages Callahan's administration, but in retaliation is sacked from *The Word* and driven underground. His life (not for the first time), is in danger, but the weird journalist is determined to see justice done. He is determined to get the President. A comment on his journalistic methods is worthwhile here. While investigating the sexual perversities of President Callahan and his closest aides, Spider is busy beating up a potential source. He turns to a concerned bystander: "what are you fucking looking at... I'm a fucking journalist".

One stand-alone issue, '21 Days in the City' (No. 26), provides a good demonstration of Ellis's creative strengths. It consists of a series of whole page pictures of City life with Spider's scatological commentary. An example:

Sometimes this place just stops and hits you in the eyes. I'm on a train to Venetian End to cover the intestine-rinsing competition at the public sinks there, passing through the Western Lakes. Sunny day. Trout and salmon blasting through the channels and rivers that connect the Lakes to each other. And then I see a dolphin. And then I see a Temp, someone wearing animal traits for a weekend. And for a moment there, I don't have any words.

And another:

Did you ever want to set someone's head on fire, just to see what it looked like? Did you ever stand in the street and think to yourself, I could make that nun go blind just by giving her a kiss? Did you ever lay out plans for stitching babies and stray cats

into a Perfect New Human? Did you ever stand naked surrounded by people who want your gleaming sperm, squirting frankincense, soma and testosterone from every pore? If so, then you're the bastard who stole my drugs Friday night. And I'll find you. Oh, yes.

Marvellous stuff.

*Transmetropolitan* is an outrageous comic strip diatribe against the way the world is and the way it is going. It is funny, obscene, exciting, inventive, and committed. It is unashamedly political. It is the best comic around today.

**Notes:**

Almost all the comic strips mentioned in this article are available in graphic novel form.

Warren Ellis is interviewed by Mark Salisbury in his invaluable volume, *Writers On Comics Scriptwriting* (Titan Books)

Warren Ellis's rants appear in his prose volumes, *From The Desk of Warren Ellis* vols. 1 and 2 (Avatar Press).

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*JOHN NEWSINGER'S BOOK ON JUDGE DREDD, DREDD PHENOMENON: COMICS AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY WAS PUBLISHED BY LIBERTARIAN EDUCATION BRISTOL IN 1999 – 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.

**Brian Aldiss – *Non-Stop***

Millennium, 2000, 241pp, £6.99 ISBN 1 85798 998 8

Reviewed by Mark Greener

As befits a novel marketed as part of a series reprinting the best-ever sf books, the cover of this reissue of *Non-Stop* cites numerous plaudits from science fiction's great and good. And *Non-Stop* deserves the accolades. It really is one of the greatest sf tales ever written – although beginning to show its age.

*Non-Stop* tells the story of hunter Roy Complain, a member of the Greene tribe, who live in cramped quarters on a generational spaceship. The tribe is fearful of outsiders and discourages speculation about what lies beyond their territory. However, Complain is tormented by thoughts of the “big something... I promised myself as a kid”. Unfortunately, he doesn't know what the “big something” is. After a personal tragedy, Complain joins a small group who decide to see what lies “forwards”...

Like many classic sf novels, *Non-Stop* works on two levels. Firstly, as an entertaining action-adventure. Indeed, Aldiss can excel at pure sf adventure. In common with some of his other books – *Earthworks*, for example – *Non-Stop* could make a cracking Hollywood action movie.

But *Non-Stop* is a classic because the narrative works at a second, deeper, more profound level. There are some thought-provoking details, such as the game – Travel-up:

a metaphor for our obsession with the trivia and superficial. The Greene tribe seems a metaphor for many people in modern society, trapped in a world they don't understand, but are too timid to explore. The Greene tribe's isolationism contributed, perhaps, to their social decay. (A theme worth considering in light of the immigration debate.) And the main narrative focuses on the impact when, rather than complain, Roy acts. What he learns transforms his view of his world – and of himself.

At heart, *Non-Stop* is a modern myth. Indeed, Aldiss's narrative uses several mythic elements, including a quest for meaning, personal transformation and the reclamation of a birthright. So, *Non-Stop*, like all serious literature – and it is serious literature – offers an opportunity to reflect upon and learn something about ourselves and our place in society.

After its publication in 1958, *Non-Stop* rapidly became a classic. So it's all the more remarkable that this is Aldiss's first sf novel. (His first novel the *Brightfount Diaries* was published some three years before.) Aldiss has slightly revised the new edition. Nevertheless, in places, *Non-Stop* shows its age – in the same way that *Brave New World* or *Nineteen Eighty-Four* seem somewhat dated. The plot

seems a little too straightforward compared to some of today's complex, sub-plot laden, supposedly sophisticated narratives. Whether this is a criticism is a moot point. A book doesn't have to be complex to be profound. More

seriously, the characterisation seems somewhat thin. Don't let this put you off. If you haven't read *Non-Stop*, do. If you have, it's worth re-reading. This is one of science fiction's true classics.

### Brian Aldiss – *Supertoys Last All Summer Long*

Orbit, 2001, 232pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-84149-043-1

Reviewed by Mark Greener

A new short-story collection from one of Europe's leading sf writers is always welcome – and *Supertoys* is no exception. It is, quite simply, stunning.

Aldiss is a rarity among 'sf writers'. His work belongs on the shelves alongside Amis, Burgess and Ackroyd – serious writers who use sf when the narrative demands – rather than beside the space operas and sword and sorcery sagas. This collection proves – if proof were needed – that Aldiss is a serious, literary writer. And despite publishing his first novel in 1955, this isn't the work of a writer rehashing past glories, issues and themes. The stories are vital, relevant and contemporary.

The titular sequence of three stories is, essentially, Pinocchio retold. An android, David, believes himself to be a real boy. But unlike the fairy tale, those closest to him reject David's love. Using man-made creations as a counterpoint to explore the nature of humanity is nothing new in sf: consider *Frankenstein*, *Terminator II*, and *Star Trek's* Data to name three examples. However, Aldiss gives the story considerable intensity, poignancy and emotional impact. (Aldiss sold the sequence to Spielberg, who took the project over following the death of the original director Kubrick. A movie is in production. I hope I'm wrong, but my guess is that the emotional impact will end up saccharine and sentimental. Read *Supertoys* now before the media blitz colours your expectations.)

However, the *Supertoys* sequence ultimately left me

somewhat disappointed. The issues Aldiss raises touch on society's still unresolved attitudes towards children. The tragedies that hit the headlines with sickening regularity are an indictment of society's failure to resolve its care of the most vulnerable. These urgent, important issues need exploration at book length, rather than in short stories.

Still, that's a quibble in a collection that has a couple of potential award winners among the new stories. There's not really a theme to the stories. Some examine the 'developed' world's economic and environmental hubris – "contempt for the dignity of nature" as Aldiss describes it in 'Becoming the Full Butterfly'. There's a couple of intelligent, moving meditations on mortality and the difference between heaven and hell. And there's one story of true wit ('Headless'). Wit seems sadly lacking in much modern sf, in which the humour seems more intent on gaining cheap laughs.

It's a measure of the stories' intelligence and sophistication that those that aren't new are reprinted from sources as varied as *Nature*, *Harper's Bazaar*, Channel Four and the *Daily Telegraph*. They show a writer at the peak of his powers, confident in his virtuosity, certain of his subject matter. His humanity and intelligence – hallmarks of Aldiss's work for almost half a century – shine through. This isn't a book to just read. It's a book to linger over, to savour, to relish.

### Brian Aldiss and Roger Penrose – *White Mars*

Warner Books, 2000, 323pp, £7.99 ISBN 0-7515-2978-8

Reviewed by L.J. Hurst

Mankind may arrive on Mars within the next fifty years; there may be water, there may be fossil remains of simple bacteria that failed to evolve. There will be no Martians on the canals. There will be no one to resist human arrival; equally there will be no one to provide the berries for the first Thanksgiving meal.

Since the Greeks and Phoenicians, civilisations have sent their explorers partly to discover, partly to trade, partly to colonise. Is this how it will be when mankind reaches for the planets? Earth is more and more overcrowded, and there will be an increased drive for living space. Involuntary contraception or even involuntary euthanasia never get a mention in the debates on population. The temptation must be to move the crowds out to the planets; rather than reduce the Earth's population, to export its surplus – and to support those surpluses the planets must be terraformed.

*White Mars* supposes that Mars will not be made green with plants, it will remain scientifically virgin. Those allowed to travel will be either a YEA (Young Enlightened Adult) or DOP (Distinguished Older Person), able to contribute to some part of the experimental work.

Like Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red/Green/Blue Mars*

series, Aldiss and Penrose suppose that Mars will become cut off (by the collapse of the advanced economies) and so become forced to draw up a constitution for the new Areoite society – where there are no weapons, no money, the food is minimal and the water ration tiny.

If your mind is on higher things you may not notice any of these problems. The higher thing on Mars will be the super-collider built to look for the "smudge", the ultimate matter. In Roger Penrose's noosphere these devices lead through quantum mechanics to concepts of being and then to the Ultimate Being, and that is the way things start to go on Mars as well.

Then something peculiar happens: they discover a Martian. More importantly, the Martian discovers them. (I will not tell you why there is time to prepare for the meeting.)

This book comes with two sub-titles: 'The Mind Set Free' and 'A 21st-Century Utopia' (both echoes of H.G. Wells), neither of which is correct. The setting free of the minds consists of two strands: the constitutional debate, and the metaphysics implicit in quantum theory. The weaknesses of living under a constitution, as opposed to a system of justice, became apparent in the USA at the end of 2000, and

therefore is not a worthwhile line of reasoning to follow, while a system of physics which leads to something other than itself ('metaphysics' literally) impeaches itself by its self-contradiction.

There is an interesting strand in *White Mars* – the Areoites can beam their debates and documentaries back to Earth, but they cannot receive anything coming the other way. Except one day a spacecraft arrives from the UK – unfortunately, these islands will not have re-asserted themselves as a world power, it is United Korea.

Later on a second craft arrives with friendship packages from a terrestrial charity. There must have been close to a complete and catastrophic breakdown of all civilisation on Earth, before it reconstructs itself, and this is all we read of it. It is an astonishing omission.

I once struggled to read Penrose's *The Emperor's New Mind*. If Brian Aldiss's name did not come first on the title page of *White Mars*, I would think that this was Roger Penrose's work, edited by Aldiss through friendship. It remains confused.

## Gregory Benford – *Eater*

Orbit, 2001, 386pp, £6.99 ISBN 1 84149 017 2

Reviewed by Colin Bird

*Eater* showcases Benford's strengths as a writer: realistic depictions of scientists at work, cosmic speculation grounded in authentic science and the ability to spin a rattling good yarn. This is a return to form after the unnecessary expansion of an excellent novella into the rather lacklustre novel, *The Martian Way*.

*Eater* is set a couple of decades into the future when astronomers detect evidence of an alien object entering the solar system. The object turns out to have the characteristics of a black hole, converting asteroids to fuel in a process which convinces the astronomers it is under some form of intelligent control (and also gives the object its name: 'Eater'). As the intruder approaches Jupiter it broadcasts a tantalising message to humanity: "I desire converse".

Proof of the object's sapience, and hence its potential threat to Earth, triggers political machinations aplenty and one of those secret government agencies, which always emerge in such circumstances, soon takes over the astronomer's efforts to communicate with the sentient black hole.

The first section of the novel is fascinating and involving

as Benford carefully reveals the nature of the alien intruder. The author's characteristic attention to scientific veracity ensures the story is rooted in plausibility albeit with several flights of wild speculation as he explores the parameters of his well-imagined alien. Benford also makes a creditable stab at the hoary old question of how we would be able to comprehend a truly alien mind giving us an eerily convincing, inscrutable and enigmatic creation.

The book dabbles with some fairly conventional Earth-in-peril story-lines towards the conclusion and not all of Benford's non-scientist characters are quite so believable. The religious implications of humanity's encounter with an object with almost god-like powers are glossed over too readily. The author is an advisor to the US Department of Energy, NASA and the White House Council on Space Policy, so you would expect an advocacy of science in his novels. But he's certainly no apologist for scientific arrogance, depicting his astronomers with the full array of human foibles and weaknesses.

A fine novel which conveys big ideas with a human perspective and tells a rattling good story in the process.

## Catherine Asaro – *The Quantum Rose*

Tor, 2000, 398pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0-312-89062

Reviewed by Gary Wilkinson

'Romantic science fiction'; well, that's a phrase to send chills down my spine...

*The Quantum Rose* is billed as "A New Novel in the saga of the Skolian Empire". I've not read any of the others in Asaro's series. [*Ascendant Sun* was reviewed by Andrew Seaman in V212.]

This one appears to be a stand-alone but there are appendices explaining how this novel fits in with the others. It uses the time-honoured structure for a romance: the love triangle. Kamoj Quanta Argali is the beautiful (they are always beautiful), young, female ruler of an impoverished province on an agrarian planet. We have one of the sf standards: a regression from the original technological prowess of the planets original colonists and the forgetting of their history and corruption of their language. For instance Kamoj's bodyguard is called Lyode: a consolidation of 'light emitting diode', a phrase they have forgotten the meaning of. One translation of Kamoj's name is 'bound quantum resonance'; though she prefers the alternative – 'quantum rose'.

The planet operates on a system of feudal capitalism – a corruption of old ideas of corporations – and marriages

have become dowry-bought mergers.

Kamoj has been contracted to marry Jax Ironbridge, the governor of a nearby province. Although Jax is handsome and not without some virtues he is basically brutish and cruel. And his province is wealthy which would allow Kamoj's to prosper. However Kamoj is saved from a loveless marriage by a mysterious hooded stranger from another planet, Havryl Lionstar, who buys out the contract. At first she is happy with him, although Jax is not happy to see his 'property' taken away from him...

Unfortunately the book never really transcends its obvious pulp origins and, to be honest, in its lack of narrative drive, I found myself completely unengaged by it. There is some depth in the characterisation; both Jax and Havryl are not what they first appear. Unfortunately, although there are very good reasons for this, Kamoj is too passive; she just waits for events to happen to her and the inherent drama of her situation is not exploited. Although the plot itself seems to stand alone, the background on the Skolian Empire has to be shoe-horned in via lots of 'tell me about the place you come from' conversations.

*The Quantum Rose* has a rather unusual, and frankly

bizarre, afterword where Asaro explains in mad technobabble how the plot was built on aspects of quantum theory.

I'm not totally opposed to reading romance – if well done. *The Quantum Rose* is just not a very good one: more Mills and Boon than *Romeo and Juliet*.

## Marion Zimmer Bradley – *Priestess of Avalon*

Voyager, 2000, 382pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-00-224709-7

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

Like *Lady of Avalon* and *The Forest House*, *Priestess of Avalon* is another 'spin-off' from the concept of a Goddess-worshipping society which first appeared in *The Mists of Avalon*, Marion Zimmer Bradley's Arthurian novel. Though Bradley is the only author credited on the cover, we learn inside that although the concept was hers, the historical research was carried out by Diana Paxson, who completed the project after Marion Zimmer Bradley's death. On purely stylistic grounds, I should imagine that the bulk of the actual writing is also Paxson's.

The novel tells the story of Eilan, identified here with Helena, the consort of Constantius and mother of Constantine the Great. As Eilan, she is the daughter of a High Priestess of Avalon, and becomes a priestess herself, before she has to choose between Constantius and Avalon.

As Paxson says in her introduction, the provable facts about Helena are few, and so imagination has to come into play to make her the central character of a novel. However, such facts as there are, along with the legends which have gathered around her, like the supposed discovery of the fragments of the True Cross, establish her as a Christian, so I wasn't convinced by this attempt to

portray her as a worshipper of the Goddess. Although she shows sympathy – of a rather patronising kind – towards Christianity, she retains her original faith, and there's nothing in the novel to explain why she should have been identified as a strong supporter of Christianity to the extent of being canonised.

Another problem is that the whole central section of the novel, when Eilan is absent from Avalon, deals with the political upheavals in the Roman Empire; Eilan herself takes little part in these events, so there's always a sense that the really interesting action is going on somewhere else. In Eilan's old age, as Empress Mother, she gains some autonomy, and I found this section of the novel more impressive than anything that has gone before.

The novel is readable, and will probably have an enthusiastic following among readers who imagine that the neo-pagan Goddess-worship it describes reflects historical reality. But a reader who has enjoyed *The Mists of Avalon* and the best of Marion Zimmer Bradley's 'Darkover' novels will, I imagine, find it deeply disappointing.

## Jonathon Carroll – *The Land of Laughs*

Gollancz (Fantasy Masterworks 9), 2000, 241pp, £6.99, ISBN 1-85798-999-6  
Tor Orb, 2001, 253pp, \$13.95 ISBN 0-312-87311-5

Reviewed By Iain Emsley

Carroll's first novel, *The Land of Laughs* (1980), beguiles the reader, managing to misinform the unwary on every page. Set in the small town of Galen, Thomas Abbey finds himself caught in a game of masks and puppetry in which he must recreate both his own, and the town's, magus-like father.

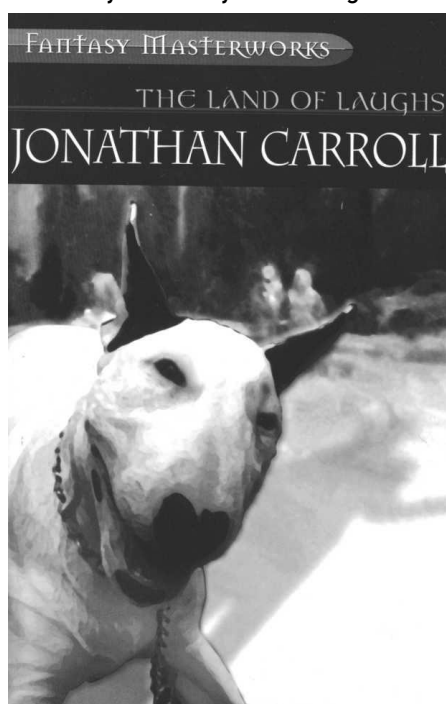
Thomas Abbey is obsessed with Marshall France, a legendary children's author. Although warned that France's daughter Anna will not talk to him, Abbey travels to Galen, France's small home town, to research his biography. What he does not anticipate is Anna's encouragement after he completes the first chapter and is gradually accepted by the town. However, France's magic, which has created the town, begins to fade and Abbey finds himself having to bring Marshall France back to Galen.

All of the major characters are flawed in some way and have to face their own weaknesses. Thomas Abbey has always lived in the shadow of his film star father, mentioning that

he should have been called "Stephen Abbey's son" (page 1). Although encouraged to write his own memories of his famous father, he becomes even more determined to write about France. His own apparent insecurity gives him a link to Anna, France's daughter. Ostensibly a secure character, she still yearns for her father, and Thomas is able to bring him literally back to life.

Thomas's companion, Saxony, with her interest in puppetry, presents the most problems. As Thomas and Anna are forced to confront the legacies of their respective fathers, Saxony also has to force Thomas to face up to the realities around himself. In essence she acts as the catalyst, which enables the resurrection of Galen to begin, but is consumed in the resulting reaction.

*The Land of Laughs* is a subtly layered novel, each bringing different perspectives to the surface. A master of style and atmosphere, Carroll effectively brings Galen to life, as Thomas does France, lifting it off the



page.

**Mark Chadbourn – *Darkest Hour***

Gollancz, 2000, 467pp, £10.99, ISBN 0-575-06903-1

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

*Darkest Hour* is the second volume in 'The Age Of Misrule' trilogy. The basic premise of the books is that the ancient Celtic gods have returned to this world. Science and technology begin to fail while the power of magic grows stronger. It's dark fantasy with an Arthurian flavour, Arthur himself presented not as a man but as a metaphor for the 'Pendragon spirit' which infuses the land and its people.

In the first volume, *World's End*, a group of people come together to combat the powers of evil, which seek to destroy humanity. This second book continues their story until a major crisis in the struggle.

The central characters are engaging, and come across as real people, not conventional fantasy creations. They grow and develop as the story progresses, and their relationships change; this is just as important as the battles and other encounters they face with the inhabitants of the fantasy world. There's a genuine strangeness in the presentation of the Celtic powers; they have an ambiguity, an untrustworthiness, which leaves both the reader and the characters wondering what their true shapes and purposes are. The 'big scenes' are genuinely powerful, but at the same time I wondered whether the issues of spirituality which are so important to the story have been really thought through.

The setting is Britain, and Chadbourn presents the

background vividly, especially in the use he makes of ancient sites like Glastonbury and Stonehenge. He's also good at showing ordinary life being affected by the changes, and how ordinary people try to carry on in various communities as the supernatural invades their lives. However, as his central characters travel, I sometimes felt the book was becoming a kind of guided tour to the sacred places of the old religion, as if the map is dictating the story. It's a bit confusing. I also felt on occasion that some of the combats became a bit repetitive – there are only so many ways to rip your enemy to shreds – and that the human body was sometimes taking more punishment than strictly possible.

The style is powerfully visual, yet at the same time I was constantly irritated by grammatical errors, particularly the use of 'like' instead of 'as if'. Call me a boring pedantic nitpicker, but it bothers me, and an editor should have picked it up.

In spite of these criticisms, I'm keen to read the third and final volume. Although *Darkest Hour* begins with a summary of *World's End*, in the form of a chronicle, I'd suggest beginning with the first book. *Darkest Hour* ends on a real cliff-hanger, so you might want to wait until the third book appears, and then read the whole trilogy together.

**Raymond E. Feist – *Krondor: Tear of the Gods***

Voyager, 2001, 372pp, £17.99 ISBN 0-00-224680-5

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

This is the third instalment in Ray Feist's extended series, 'The Riftwar Legacy', which began with *The Betrayal* and *The Assassins* (reviewed respectively by Graham Andrews and myself in V204 and V209) and is set in Krondor around 20 years or so after his best-selling 'Riftwar Saga'.

Once every ten years or so, a huge gem is miraculously grown in a secret place in the mountains. This gem is called The Tear of the Gods, and it is the very core of the Ishappian faith in that it magically allows communion with the gods. Unfortunately, following a daring but ultimately bungled raid by pirates, the Tear is lost beneath the waves of the Bitter Sea whilst being transferred to the Temple of Ishap. Thus begins a scramble for its recovery, and powerful dark forces are determined to find it first for, should they succeed, darkness will again rule the West.

Once again, it's our man Squire James (formerly Jimmy The Hand) and his cousin William who have to get to the Tear first – aided this time by the court magician, Jazhara, newly arrived from Great Kesh. Unfortunately, as is always the case, the loss of the gem is a closely guarded secret –

which means that only our own elite half dozen and every villain and his mate in the known world knows about it.

I wasn't hugely impressed with the last volume in this series, but the addition of Jazhara has injected something that perhaps the tale needed – a fairly strong female presence. The ongoing saga of 'The Crawler', the unidentified villain behind all Krondor's ills, is taken forward and, although the reader still has no idea who he is, pointers are there and one can now begin to make a stab at his identity. Whether or not that stab is correct, of course, remains to be seen.

*Tear of the Gods* is exactly what fans of Ray Feist expect. It's a swashbuckling yarn of piracy, political intrigue and magic and can actually be read as a stand-alone novel that has a beginning, a middle and an end in itself. You have to read them all though if you want to follow and understand the bigger picture. I enjoyed it as always, but still want Feist to invent a new world and tell a different tale. There really is only so much you can do with the same old predictable characters.

**Simon Green – *Blue Moon Rising***

Millennium, 2000, 448pp, £6.99 ISBN 1 85798 987 2

**Simon Green – *Beyond The Blue Moon***

Millennium, 2000, 395pp, £10.99 ISBN 0 575 07045 5

Reviewed by Colin Bird

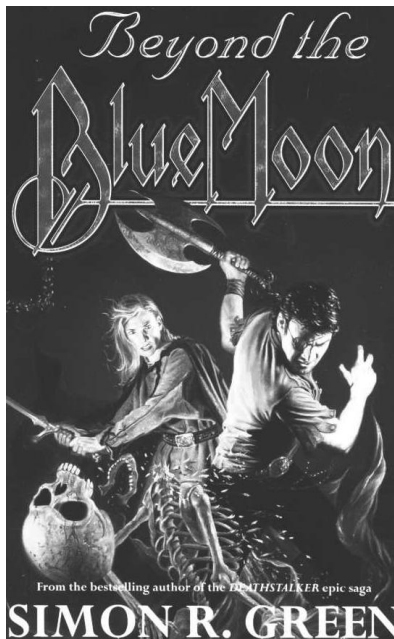
These two novels represent bookends to Green's successful 'Hawk and Fisher' tales in which the author sets

familiar cop scenarios within a fantasy milieu. [Mat Coward reviews *Hawk and Fisher 1: Haven of Lost Souls* in

V210.] *Blue Moon Rising* is a reprint of a 1991 novel which relates the origins of the husband and wife team of crime-fighters. *Beyond The Blue Moon* sees them return to the lives that they abandoned at the conclusion of the first book.

The story begins with an amiable young knight sallying forth on a quest to kill a dragon. In truth his manipulative father, King John, would rather he not return from his hazardous mission allowing his more favoured son, Prince Harald, to inherit the throne of the Forest Kingdom. But the prince finds the last remaining dragon to be a rather toothless monster who submits cheerily to the young knight. Rupert sets off to return home with the dragon in tow, together with a feisty young princess and a surly unicorn. The party travels through the depths of the baleful Darkwood where they encounter the troops of the malign Demon Prince. They escape when the dragon sends Rupert over a rainbow for help and he returns with a powerful magical sword.

The party return to the kingdom's magical castle only to find the Demon Prince's forces closing in on the heart of the realm. Rupert is sent off once again on a quest to find the High Warlock, an exiled sorcerer who may have magical means to stop the encroaching darkness. Princess Julia is left behind to fight off unwelcome suitors and to get enmeshed in a web of treachery and conspiracy. There is hewing and hacking aplenty and a good time is had by all in a final battle of good versus evil.



After the events of the first book Prince Rupert and Princess Julia slough off their responsibilities and ride off into the sunset, losing their regal identities along the way, to become Hawk and Fisher. Their adventures as Captains of Haven's City Guard are related in several other books.

In *Beyond The Blue Moon* Hawk and Fisher are called back to the Forest Kingdom to discover who has assassinated King Harald. Their investigations are soon subsumed by a new threat: the appearance of the Inverted Cathedral within the boundaries of the castle. Evil forces are at work attempting to open a gateway within the Cathedral through which they can enter and gain dominion over the realm of Man.

You don't need me to tell you how formulaic this all is. Magic bleeds slowly from the world under the onslaught of Man's Age of Reason. Sorcerers are eccentric and untrustworthy. Princes must prove themselves in battle and spunky princesses find themselves betrothed to men they do not love. In my view the blueprint needs changing but,

alas, fantasy like this still sells by the truckload.

*Blue Moon Rising* has a certain charm and simplicity and Green's breezy style and humour makes it by far the more successful of the two offerings. *Beyond The Blue Moon* is plagued by info-dumping dressed as reminiscence in an awkward attempt to bridge the gap between the two novels and is for hardened fans only.

## Joe Haldeman – *Forever Free*

Reviewed by Mark Greener

Millennium, 2000, 277pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-85798-931-7

*The Forever War*, an undisputed sf classic, deservedly won the Nebula, Hugo and many other accolades. *Forever Peace*, a thematic sequel, repeated Haldeman's sweep of the main awards. Now, 25 years after *War's* publication, comes a true sequel, *Forever Free*. But was it worth the wait?

*The Forever War* was Vietnam writ galactic. The cream of a generation taken to fight for causes they find difficult to comprehend. A generation who watched their peers die fighting a culture they don't understand. A generation which returned to a world they barely recognise, only to be told that their struggle was futile. "[I] wish I could say that it was for a good cause... it was not," the returning veterans learn near the end of *The Forever War*.

*The Forever War* was a book conceived and born of experience. Drafted to Vietnam in 1967 as a combat engineer, Haldeman was severely wounded. Haldeman's experiences, for which he won the Purple Heart, honed the book's edge.

*Forever Free* picks up the story of William Mandella, 22 years after the end of *The Forever War*. Now 54 years old, Mandella lives with his family on the planet Middle Finger, eking out a living as a fisherman and teacher. This is no

land fit for heroes. The veterans aren't even part of mainstream human society, now dominated by clones. The clones treat the veterans as a gene pool in case their bioengineering goes awry. While they are still young enough, the veterans decide to hijack a spaceship and use relativity to return 40,000 years in the future. Things go awry and they return to Middle Finger sooner than they expected, to find a planetary Marie Celeste...

*Forever Free* is more mature, more reflective, more literary than *The Forever War*. And the focus differs. *War* reflected on contemporary issues. *Free* is a more conventional sf story about characters in unfamiliar situations. Even the ending reworks a well-worn, perhaps even clichéd, sf theme.

Nevertheless, *Forever Free* still examines issues facing the Vietnam generation: alienation, disenfranchisement, frustration. There's an echo of conflict's seeming inevitably among those trained for battle. *The Forever War* arose largely when ex-military from Vietnam "dusted off their medals". For the *Forever War's* veterans, in their 50s, the hijack seems almost a way to recapture their glory days.

Indeed, despite the intervening decades, the leading



characters, while well drawn, seem largely unchanged. Maybe that's the point: Haldeman notes that some deep-seated attitudes don't change. But I found the lack of development between the periods in which the two books are set stretched credibility.

Taken on its own merits, *Forever Free* is tightly constructed, finely-written and well-characterised. For instance, when the veterans return to the suddenly deserted plant, Haldeman evokes a tense sense of mystery and unease, although I found the explanation a bit

disappointing.

*Forever Free* wouldn't be an unworthy winner of the main awards, but it is only *one* of the best new sf novels I read during 2000. For me, *Forever Free* failed to live up to its predecessor. Perhaps inevitably after a quarter of a century, *Forever Free* lacks the emotional intensity and edge of its predecessor. For a sequel to a virtuoso examination of conflict's causes and consequences, *Forever Free* seems just a bit too conventional, a bit too nice.

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

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

Reviewed by Stuart Carter

*Eye & Talon* is the fourth *Blade Runner* book (*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* is counted as number one). I read the first but have missed the interim pair. However this part stands securely enough without them. In fact, given that this is the fourth book I did wonder what exactly Jeter has been doing in the preceding interval.

Iris is a blade runner for LAPD, in fact she's *the* blade runner for LAPD, their brightest and best, but her career goes somewhat awry when her boss hands her a supposedly plum job tracking down an owl that once belonged to the now defunct Tyrell Corporation. It's not a blade runner job and Iris is reluctant to take it but there are dark, disturbing and hidden reasons for her reassignment...

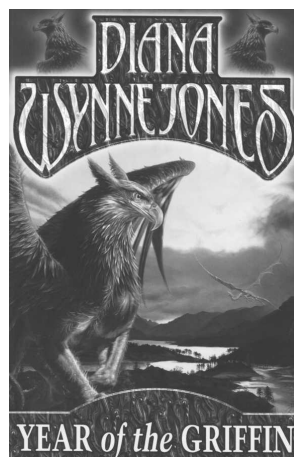
Two things worried me immediately upon picking up *Blade Runner™: Eye & Talon*. Firstly, that ™ sign, which hovered around every mention of the words "Blade Runner" on the title and the book's jacket, and secondly that the inner dust-jacket blurb made no mention of what the book was about, but only of the fine pedigree Dick's book and Scott's film together confer and how this addition to the *Blade Runner™* vision is a fully "authorised" addition

by an "acclaimed" author.

Which is great, I'm very glad, but couldn't we be given just a little bit of information about how the "acknowledged heir to the spirit of Philip K. Dick" intends to "carry forward the vision of *Blade Runner™*"?

As it turns out *Eye & Talon* is not a bad book, it twists and turns through a plot Dick might have been pleased with and cleverly incorporates large amounts of detail from Scott's film. Jeter writes individual scenes well, although I sometimes suspected he had been hamstrung by the constraints of writing a series of *Blade Runner™* novels.

Our eye on the action, Iris, is both infuriating and infuriated. She conveniently meets conveniently well-informed characters at convenient intervals... and Cheshire Cat-like they tell her almost nothing, which is cute and mysterious enough to begin with, until they keep on doing it and it simply becomes tedious. Even Iris herself always wriggles out of actually finding out anything much until the very end, so that although *Eye & Talon* could make up about one-third of quite a good novel it's used to fill all of a rather thin one.



### Diana Wynne Jones – *Year Of The Griffin*

Gollancz, 2000, 357pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-07047-1

Reviewed by Sue Thomason

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 co-operative anarchy and good humour win the day (and the space race as well). Recommended as the perfect antidote to a wet winter Saturday afternoon...

### Graham Joyce – *Dreamside*

Tor, June 2000, \$23.95 ISBN 0 312 86633 X

Reviewed by Iain Emsley

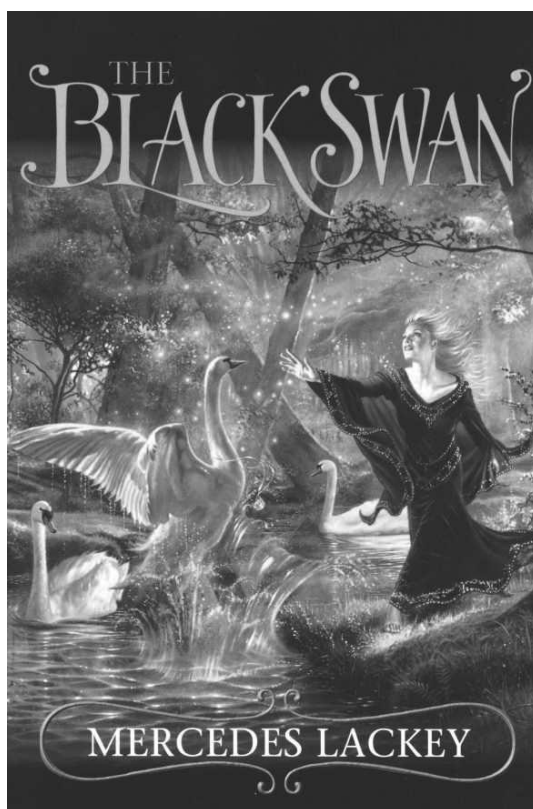
This reprint of Graham Joyce's first novel is most welcome. Set between the waking and dreaming worlds, this disorientating novel follows the tribulations of a former group of students as they face up to the results of a dreaming experiment at university.

Eleanor wakes Lee from a recurring dream with the word "Remember". Brad lies in an alcoholic stupor, desperately avoiding any dreams, whilst Honora dreams of the wasteland where she abandoned her baby. All had taken part in what had seemed a harmless university experiment in lucid dreaming. As members of the group managed to take control of their dreams, they contrived to meet in a dreamworld idyll and carry on their waking relationships in their dreams. However, the dreams began to take control, violently forcing the dreamers apart. Ten years later the dreams resurface and the participants find themselves having to accept the consequences of their actions.

There is a tangible sense of loss throughout the novel as the characters have to make peace with themselves and accept the consequences of their actions, and so begin to move on. Perhaps this is where the strength of the novel lies; that each character is so ordinary, they have to face their own failings and to accept that their dreams of invincibility lie broken around them. The novel does not descend into a twee study of youth and does not offer a happy ending, rather a snapshot is taken in which we find these characters dealing with their broken lives.

The maturity with which Joyce writes in this novel is, at times, astonishing. He disorientates the reader as the

relationships between the two worlds shift from being intertwined to being polar opposites, moving the perception of the threat. Joyce does not allow the supernatural elements to overtake the narrative, rather they add to the confusion between the worlds. This is a very human novel, relying upon its protagonists to move the plot forward.



### Mercedes Lackey – *The Black Swan*

Gollancz, 2001, 376pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-071974

Reviewed by Lesley Hatch

I am not wholly familiar with the story of *Swan Lake*, but I get the feeling that Lackey has taken the story and done a little embroidery to good effect. It begins with the transformation of a swan into a young girl: she is the latest addition to a flock being assembled by Baron von Rothbart, an exceptionally unscrupulous sorcerer. His reason for this is that he considers his wife's death to be the ultimate betrayal, and he seeks out women who have betrayed their lovers, then casts a spell on them which leaves them as swans by day and women by moonlight.

His daughter, Odile, though terrified of him, has learned far more magic than he intended, and she finds herself

becoming more sympathetic towards her unfortunate charges when he leaves her to act as custodian while he pursues his own ambitions. Things come to a head when Odette, a princess and *de facto* leader of the flock, bargains with Rothbart that if she can get a man to pledge himself to her, knowing her full story, then he will free them all from his spell.

Thus begins the journey to the palace of Prince Siegfried and his mother Queen Clothilde, who has plans to dispose of him so that she can remain as Regent. Siegfried is the most objectionable young man you could wish to find: selfish, hedonistic, and very fond of drink and

women.

Having made the acquaintance of the Queen, the Baron has his own plans: to give Odette her chance, but use his magical skills to achieve his own ends, one of them being to become ruler of Clothilde's (and Siegfried's) lands.

By the time the swan maidens arrive at their destination, Odette has won Siegfried's heart, and Odile has begun to care more for 'her' girls than for her own father.

It is at this point that Lackey puts a whole new slant on the traditional story which could, in the hands of a less skilled author, have turned into pantomime (or farce). However, this is not the case, and we do get to a happy ending for all concerned, though with unexpected twists along the way.

I thoroughly enjoyed this novel: it made a refreshing change from some of her recent work, and I can recommend it to fans of fantasy and fairy-tale alike.

## Ursula Le Guin – *The Wind's Twelve Quarters*

Gollancz, 2000, 303pp, £10.99 ISBN 0 57507139 7

Reviewed by Kathy Taylor

*The Wind's Twelve Quarters*, republished under Gollancz's 'yellowback' SF Collector's Edition series, is a collection of seventeen short stories that show the development of Le Guin's short story work during the period 1964 to 1974. The book would be worth buying for the stories alone but the foreword and the introductions to each story, written by Le Guin, add considerably to the interest. Most short story collections I can read, if not quite in one sitting, at least over a day or so. This one was too rich a confection. Many of the stories demanded time to think about, or to let their impact die down a little before sampling the next. Rather like the difference between scoffing a 200g bar of Cadbury's chocolate and trying to eat a bar of Valrhona of the same size.

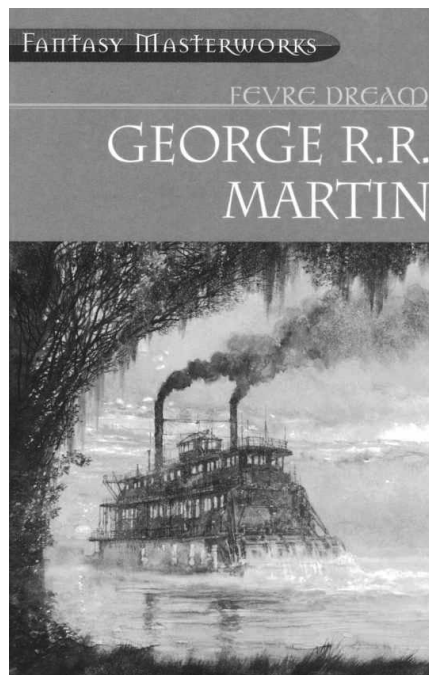
Some of the stories are straightforward science fiction or fantasy narratives; others are more complex surrealistic tales that Le Guin calls psychomyths. The first two stories, 'Semley's Necklace' and 'April in Paris', are typical of the earlier, more straightforward stories. They have well-delineated characters, an interesting if not very original premise, are well written and easy to read. The third story, 'The Masters' is the first of the psychomyths. It shows a greater play of ideas and glimpses

of the mastery of language that is to later develop. A good example of the later being, "He had been trying to measure the distance between the Earth and God", a phrase Le Guin picks out in her introduction.

'The Masters', written in 1963, contrasts well with 'The Stars Below', from 1973. Both contain the themes of the idea of science and the suppression of knowledge by a powerful authority. Both have a central protagonist who seeks to learn, not for the power or money this might bring, but for the sake of the knowledge itself. However by

the time of 'The Stars Below' Le Guin's mastery of language has developed to the point that shows why she is a worthy Hugo winner. Although 'The Stars Below' did not, as far as I know, win a major award, the collection does include both a Hugo and a Nebula winner. The Hugo winner is 'The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas'; a very strong story and along with 'The Field of Vision' one of my favourites. The Nebula winner is 'The Day Before the Revolution', which originally appeared in *Galaxy* in 1974.

If you have not yet had the pleasure of reading Ursula Le Guin, or indeed have only read her Earthsea works, I would strongly recommend this collection as an introduction.



## George R. R. Martin – *Fevre Dream*

Gollancz, 2001, 350pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-331-9

Review by Andrew A. Adams

This is the 13th volume of Gollancz's Fantasy Masterworks series, and definitely deserves re-publication as a classic of the genre. Vampires are once again in vogue, with *Buffy* on TV sparking a new wave of undead heroes and villains. Since Bram Stoker wrote *Dracula* the thrall of the vampire's gaze has held the dark fantasy novelist in its power. Martin's vampires are a different take. Everyone who writes a vampire novel thinks they've got a new take, from the pseudo-scientific version (*Lifeforce*: yuck) to various horrific takes (Robert Morgan's 'Teddy London' series).

The focus of this book is the steamer captain Abner Marsh, who is approached by a mysterious stranger called

Joshua York. Abner is a wonderful character, in all senses of the word. He comes alive off the page from the first. Fat, with a warty face, he is nevertheless an endearing, charming character with a strong sense of honour and justice, but an obsession with the *Fevre Dream*, the biggest steamer on the river which York builds for Marsh. The 'deal with the devil' that Marsh makes for the steamer is that he will not question York's activities. This lasts only long enough for the nocturnal habits, blood-soaked excursions into the wild, and disgusting drinking habits to pique Marsh's curiosity. York's confession of being a vampire is no surprise to the reader, but is quite a shock to Marsh. York, though, is a 'good' vampire. Or at least, he no longer

drinks human blood. The 'reformed' vampire has become a common character in recent years, but York is no tortured soul hungering for a humanity he can never achieve. He is dedicated to the survival of his race despite their often horrific acts, brought on by their thirst for blood. York is a complex character, not always likeable, but always interesting. In contrast to him we have sections with Damon Julian, an ancient vampire who rules a brood as their bloodmaster, with the help of a human 'vampire-wannabe' called Sour Billy Tipton. Billy Tipton is probably

the most evil character in the book. His pandering to Damon Julian and his brood in the hope of being embraced plumbs the depths to which humans can descend.

What sets this book apart is Martin's haunting prose. He describes the squalor of the frontier towns of the Southern States in the 1850s contrasted with the splendour of the big side-wheeler steamboats. The rough accents of Marsh contrast with York's cultured and educated tones, and even the minor characters have their idiosyncratic speech patterns. Highly recommended.

### George R.R. Martin – *A Storm of Swords*

Voyager, 2000, 973pp, £17.99 ISBN 0-00-224586-8

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

*A Storm of Swords* is the third in Martin's epic (there really is no other word) 'A Song of Fire and Ice' sequence, originally conceived, according to Martin, as a trilogy, rapidly revisioned as a quartet before the first book was completed, but now set to span six books. ("I'm determined to hold it at six and try and fight expansion beyond that." – George R.R. Martin: 'Necessary Lies' (*Locus*, December 2000).) Which might come as some relief to those, like this reviewer, pondering the fact that although Book 2 was filled with a lot of action and bloodshed, very little of it had done much to advance the overall plot, and wondering if 'A Song of Ice and Fire' was going to turn into one of those seemingly never-ending series like Jordan's 'Wheel of Time'.

One of the problems, as I mentioned in reviews of the previous two volumes, *A Game of Thrones* (V192) and *A Clash of Kings* (V204), is keeping track of the huge cast, which now takes up an appendix of almost 50 pages at the back of the book, as at least half a dozen (currently) separate plots are played out over a vast landscape of several thousand miles and a couple of continents.

*A Storm of Swords* opens in the aftermath of the War of the Five Kings, in a ravaged landscape roamed by marauding bands of outlaws, mercenaries and soldiers from both the winning and losing sides of the war, with little to distinguish between them. Apart from tearing the land apart, nothing much has been resolved. Rob Stark still holds the North. The Kingslayer, Jaime Lannister, is in

chains, held by Catelyn Stark, Rob's mother, as a potential hostage for the return of her two daughters. A thirteen year old boy, Joffrey, the incestuous son of Cersei and Jaime Lannister, now sits on the Iron Throne.

Preoccupied with bloody internal divisions, few are aware of even greater threats: from the North, beyond the Great Wall, as the Wildfolk (and worse) flee south from the coming winter; and from across the sea, as Daenerys Stormborn, with her three hatchling dragons, returns to reclaim the Iron Throne of her murdered father, Aerys Targaryen, last of the Dragon Kings.

With *A Storm of Swords*, the fantasy elements become more overt, and start to underscore at least one of the meanings of the overall series title, and hint towards a possible resolution. But not the one I had pegged at the start of this book. In fact, in the middle of this volume, Martin does something so outrageous that you're left gasping in astonishment. (And it's not the only time he does it; the whole book is a series of carefully timed cliffhangers, which work – largely – because of the way the books are structured, switching between half a dozen or more viewpoints, often separated by hundreds or thousands of miles, at the start of each chapter.) Add to this the way Martin subtly shifts the reader's perceptions of the main characters, constantly undercutting generic fantasy distinctions between right and wrong, good and evil, and it's hooked me right back into the series.

### Hope Mirrlees – *Lud-In-The-Mist*

Millennium (Fantasy Masterworks 11), 2000, 273 pp £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-767-5

Reviewed by Carol Ann Kerry-Green

Master Nathaniel Chanticleer, Mayor of Lud, wants nothing whatsoever to do with faerie or its influence. In fact in the laws of Lud it does not exist. Yet Lud itself is set where two rivers, the Dapple and the Dawl meet, where the Dapple has its roots in the land of Faerie, beyond the Debatable Lands and the Elfin Marshes. But with the arrival in Lud of Willie Wisp, Master Nathaniel's one-time stable boy (or is he now Professor Wisp the new dancing master at the girls' finishing school?), can the residents, and particularly the Mayor, ignore the land of Faerie much longer?

Against his will and inclination, Master Nathaniel and his family are snared by faerie influence. First his son, young Master Ranulph, is bewitched after eating forbidden

faerie fruit and is sent to the country on the advice of the local doctor Endymion Leer. Then, his daughter Prunella is swept along by Professor Wisp and dances her way with the rest of her schoolmates to the land of Faerie. Unable to ignore the strange goings-on anymore, and more and more suspicious of the role played by Endymion Leer, Nathaniel sets off to recover his son and daughter.

This is a very whimsical fairy tale, originally written in 1926, where the fairy inhabitants themselves are rarely encountered, yet where they exert a great influence over the lives of the residents of Lud-in-the-Mist. The book was a delight to read and well deserves its place in Millennium's Fantasy Masterworks series.

### L.E. Modesitt Jr. – *Timegods' World*

Tor Books, 2000, 544pp, \$17.95 ISBN 0-312-87495-2

## Reviewed by Alan Fraser

*Timegods' World* is an omnibus edition of two related novels, *Timediver's Dawn* (1992) and *The Timegod* (1993). These are the dates given, but the titles are listed in reverse order in other Modesitt books, and my impression is that *Timediver's Dawn* was written as a prequel to *The Timegod*, the volume's major work.

We're told the books "contain intriguing hints of connections to the fantasy universe of Modesitt's best-selling Recluce novels". Indeed they do. Modesitt linked his 'Fantasy' and 'sf' novels explicitly in *Adiamante* (1996), where Sybra – the homeworld of most of the 'angels' whose starship crash-lands on the world of Recluce in *Fall Of Angels* – is named as an Earth-colonised planet.

*The Timegod* is the story of Loki (yes, the one from the Norse pantheon), who is a 'timediver', a member of the Temporal Guard based on the planet Query. The timedivers are immortals who, by mental power alone, travel backwards and forwards through time in all the systems in their (also our) part of the galaxy, manipulating and even destroying cultures to ensure Query is never threatened. Although *Timegods' World* is described as "reminiscent of the Change War stories of Fritz Leiber", such as *The Big Time*, I found Modesitt's Temporal Guard much more like the Eternals in Asimov's *The End Of Eternity*.

Young Loki joins the Temporal Guard to embark on the personal journey of education/self-discovery that forms the storyline of most of Modesitt's books (see his latest Cyador books for confirmation). Though never becoming a leader, supposedly because of his impetuosity, Loki becomes the Guard's best timediver, who can undertake the most demanding and perilous assignments. Eventually, of course, he starts to question the motives for his actions; that's when Loki realises he's on his own in the Guard, and he has to make a stark choice.

*Timediver's Dawn* is set millennia before the start of *The Timegod*, and tells how the Temporal Guard was established. Query in this time is a high-tech society, but where some are stigmatised as 'witches' – cast out or killed because of their strange powers, such as not ageing and being able to travel long distances instantaneously. The Queryans' first contact with an alien race leads to a devastating attack that destroys all Query's cities and major towns, including the hometown of Sammis, son of a high-ranking government lawyer and student at the local Academy.

When the surviving population turns against the 'gentry', Sammis (whose mother is secretly a 'witch' and who is discovering he has some strange talents himself) escapes the killing of his family, but is press-ganged into a band of the ConFed Marines, who are rebuilding the government structure. He ends up in a group guarding a military project investigating 'mental travel' in order to fight the aliens. Sammis is identified as having mental travel potential, and becomes a project trainee, eventually discovering that he can not only travel across Query, but also to other planets, as well as backwards and forwards in time. His mission, together with the woman who heads the mental travel project, is to develop the power of the newly-named 'timedivers' – not only to defeat the aliens, but also their own ConFed Marines, whose leader has designs on becoming an omnipotent military dictator.

*Timegods' World* is an entertaining read; back then Modesitt could fit two books into 500 pages, whereas he manages over 900 a volume now. The storytelling benefits from the crisper style. The trouble is that he's used the same plot structure so many times since, that when Sammis starts his training in the Marines or Loki starts his training in the Guard a feeling of ennui sets in!

## Linda Nagata – *Limit of Vision*

Tor, 2001, 384 pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0 312 87688 2

## Reviewed by Robert W. Hayler

High-level biotech research has produced an artificial, intelligent life-form modelled on neurons and named for their size: LOVs exist at the limit of vision – they are just big enough for the human eye to perceive unaided. Scientists working with the LOVs find themselves at the centre of attention when one of them dies mysteriously. Fears of contagion turn into a full-scale clampdown when the LOVs find a way of getting off their orbiting research station and descending to Earth. Some survive and a colony is established on a politically neutral patch of ground. The world watches as a new type of intelligent life, and a new type of human/alien symbiosis is developed. Outside the colony warring politicians and big business wait for their moment...

This plot summary does not do justice to a complex, intriguing and involving book. Nagata is properly renowned for her deft handling of high technology and certainly does not disappoint here. The LOVs are plausible but intriguingly alien and the prospect of human/LOV symbiosis both frightening and exciting – exactly as it should be. The background technology is heavy but skilfully kept low-key. New twists on tropes established in

the Neal Stephenson school of cyberpunk keep such recognisables as the glasses-by-which-you-have-contact-with-everyone-everywhere (termed 'farsights') interesting.

If there is one problem with the plotting it is that rather too much time is spent scrabbling in the mud in the second half of the book. The constant rain, and the hardship of the besieged colony are well painted but after the frenetic opening it does grind the reader down. Characterisation might be a little weak too. No one protagonist is particularly memorable, which is a shame given the possibilities that symbiosis allows – see, for example, Nagata's last book *Vast* for a much better treatment of the same theme.

Nagata uses the limit of vision metaphor to shape the book and does so successfully. It is intentionally ironic that these things that are so small become the centre of the world's attention. The political argument about whether the LOVs are a contagion that should be eradicated or a resource that could be exploited boils down to the vision, in the wider sense of fears and hopes for the future, of those protagonists with power. The use of farsights, a

technological means of expanding your capabilities and level of connectedness, is seen both as usual and necessary, and alien and frightening, depending on who is looking on. And so on. Nagata plays her hand very cleverly.

Despite a slight unevenness in pace this book runs

rings around the competition. This is another sharply written and rewarding novel from one of the leading exponents currently in the field. She is one of very few authors whose work I anxiously anticipate and, again, the wait has been worth it.

## Stan Nicholls – *Warriors of the Tempest*

Gollancz, 2000, 280pp, £9.99 ISBN 0 575 07 069 2

Reviewed by Kathy Taylor

*Warriors of the Tempest* is the third book in the series 'Orcs, First Blood' and like its precursors strongly recommended. It tells of the continued attempts of Stryker and his war band, the Wolverines, to obtain more 'stars' in order to gain a better future for their race or at least a more powerful bargaining position. They are opposed in this quest by two main forces, Jennesta and Hobrow. At the start of the series Jennesta owned the Wolverines and it was she who sent them out to capture the first artefact or star. As time progressed Stryker and his band have become more and more of a problem to her, not only because of their defiance and possession of a growing number of stars, but more dangerously because their exploits are inspiring rebellion within her ranks. Hobrow, the leader of a Uni army, is driven by both religion and vengeance. Part of his determination to destroy Stryker and the Wolverines comes from the fact that they stole a star from his people and in doing so threatened the life of his daughter Mercy. As a Uni, he believes in the existence of one god and the purity of humans. Hobrow views the Wolverines as a particularly pernicious set of demons that it is his duty to destroy.

Although I would strongly recommend reading the two previous books in the series, *Bodyguard of Lightning* and *Legion of Thunder*, first it is not necessary to do so. In the opening section of the book, 'The Bleeding of the Orcs', Nicholls provides a good summary of the first two novels. I prefer this approach to the more frequently used method

of providing lumps of exposition. Unless these are very well integrated they can appear forced and often break up the flow of a story.

With *Warriors of the Tempest* Nicholls is in excellent form. The prose is well-written, never obtrusive, its structure matching the pace of events, and its evocative phrases adding to the atmosphere. The characterisation is excellent. Even the near walk-on characters such as Glozellan are given a semblance of reality and the major protagonists such as Hobrow are superbly portrayed. At one point Nichols describes Hobrow as "the kind of man who, had he gone naked and wreathed in smiles, would still be marked out by the cold fervour in his heart." The plot is fast moving and at the end comes to a very satisfying conclusion.

However, *Warriors of the Tempest* is more than just an excellent fantasy adventure, like most of the best writers, Stan Nicholls has something to say. One of the issues raised is that of religion and religious violence. Hobrow with his prayers and his black-clad army produced strong echoes of the Lord Protector Cromwell and the Roundheads but with his drive for racial as well as religious purity there are more contemporary echoes in Europe. Nicholls also looks further at the nature of prejudice as Stryker and some of the others have to re-evaluate how they see and treat humans. There is insufficient space here to discuss his treatment of these and other issues as fully as they deserve.

## Frederik Pohl – *Chasing Science: Science as Spectator Sport*

Tor, 2000, 240pp, \$23.95 ISBN 0312867115

Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

*Chasing Science* is a strange mixture of autobiography and popular-science; a personal account of Pohl's love of science written, it seems, to encourage people to follow in his footsteps. In eleven chapters (the final one of which is basically a list of places to go throughout the world) Pohl takes us to places where "science happens" from the laboratories of Big Science – the atom-smashing locations like Fermilab – through the space programme to the heart of volcanoes, the wonders of the sea, caves and tunnels and the mysteries of archaeology. This is science for the hobbyist, for people who go to hands-on science museums and as such it's on a fairly basic level. Pohl communicates his own enthusiasm effortlessly and presents enough information to make you want to know more. There are enough interesting facts to keep you speculating for days: personally, I found it fascinating to know that the Icelandic Althing, the world's oldest Parliament, was held on opposite sides of a small valley which is where the easternmost extension of the American tectonic plate meets the westernmost extension of Eurasian plate. Pohl

also reminds us of ancient technology: the Turkic inhabitants of the Gobi desert, for example, constructed underground aqueducts from mountains scores of miles away.

But the oddly apologetic tone in which Pohl suggests that, hey, you can even go to *science fiction conventions* and learn about science seems to mark a confusion about what the audience for this book actually is. The sf readership will know Pohl. The pop-science, non-sf readership will not particularly care who the author is and will be more interested in the information he gives. And as such, yes, it's well-written, yes, it's informative, and I now know where to go for locations of scientific interest in Uruguay, Taiwan or Mexico, but there are numerous enough gaps in the coverage of the UK to make me wonder if this is anything more than a personal account by Pohl rather than something which can be recommended as a serious guidebook for scientific hobbyists. It's interesting, but apart from the fact that it's Frederik Pohl writing it, hardly fundamental.



**Sean Russell – *The One Kingdom***

Orbit, 2001, 550pp, £10.00 ISBN 1-84149-020-2

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

Orbit are launching this new Canadian fantasy author in a blaze of publicity in January, and publishing this as a £10 hardcover to aid sales.

*The One Kingdom* is billed as the first book in a series (trilogy?) entitled 'The Swan's War', and follows the exploits of three young men from the Vale of Lakes – far in the north of The One Kingdom, following the river Wyndd through the Wildlands to Inniseth. Two cousins, Tamlyn and Fynnol, and their friend Baore, set off with ancient artefacts dug from the fields of a battle which took place centuries before – their hope is to sell these in the south and make their fortunes. Not very far into their journey they encounter problems with mysterious mounted soldiers that result in the death of a stranger they meet on the road. Having narrowly escaped with their lives, this chance encounter is later to have far-reaching repercussions. Following this first abortive attempt to go south, they take with them Cynddl, who is a revered 'storyfinder' from the notorious Fael – a nomadic race much mistrusted and misunderstood.

Deep in the South a feud between two powerful families, the Wills and the Reneé, has raged for centuries. Following decades of relative calm, this enmity is again coming to the boil and threatens the peace in the One Kingdom. Naturally, our friends are floating down the river to become embroiled in the forthcoming battle for supremacy.

Russell has produced an intriguing debut novel. His characters are engaging, often frustrating, but well-drawn and interesting. The trip down the river Wyndd seems to go on forever, dotted with sporadic contretemps along the way, but this strand is bolstered throughout by the more interesting political machinations in the South. The novel really starts to take off when all arrive together at Inniseth.

There is nothing really new in this novel I'm afraid, but it is engrossing for the most part, and I shall certainly look up the next volume when it is published to see how things develop. Routine fantasy fare, but a cut above the average at least and well worth a look.

**Robert Silverberg – *Sailing to Byzantium***

iBooks, 2000, 419pp, £9.99, ISBN 0 743407180

Reviewed by Chris Hill

*Sailing to Byzantium* is a nicely-presented collection of five Silverberg novellas from the seventies and eighties.

In 'Sailing to Byzantium' the immortal people of Earth alternately create and destroy copies of great cities of the past. Charles is an anachronism, a man from present-day New York who is touring these relics when he falls in love with one of the people, Gioia. But why does she study herself for signs of ageing and why does he not remember details of his own past?

This story is beautifully written, elegant and elegiac. If the conclusion seems a little weak it is perhaps because the idea it presents has become rather commonplace since the story was first published in 1984.

In 'Homefaring' (1983) an experimental subject, McCulloch, is transported into the mind of intelligent descendants of lobsters, millions of years in the future. But when the experiment comes to an end he finds himself reluctant to return home. This story actually works rather better than I expected and is nothing like as silly as the synopsis might suggest.

'Thomas the Proclaimer' (1972), with depressing realism, depicts the aftermath of a genuine miracle when the sun is made to stand still in the sky for twenty-four

hours. As arguments, denials and the rise of cults follow the event, Thomas, a reluctant prophet, finds himself move from potential saviour to scapegoat.

'We are for the Dark' (1988) is perhaps the weakest in the collection. A way of travelling to the stars is discovered, but the technology is controlled by a religion that lays down strict rules for the colonisation of the galaxy. But when the colonists start to disobey the rules a disgraced priest is sent to investigate. While the story has some nice ideas it spends far too much time setting up the situation. It could have been told in half the length and would have been twice as effective.

Finally 'The Secret Sharer' (1987) is based on the Joseph Conrad story of the same name. In Silverberg's version the captain of a space ship reluctantly shelters a disembodied mind which has escaped from storage in the passenger section. The quality of the writing is fine, but perhaps I would need to have read the original Conrad story to get all the resonances. As it is, I found it a bit ordinary.

So overall a good, solid collection spoiled by a couple of stories that fall somewhat flat.

**Theodore Sturgeon – *The Dreaming Jewels***

Gollancz, 2000, 156pp, £9.99, ISBN 0-575-07140-0

Reviewed by N.M. Browne

This is one of the Gollancz SF Collector's Editions in that famous yellow jacket that still makes my heart beat faster.

*The Dreaming Jewels* is one of those 'What is human?' stories with a 'They walk among us' sensibility. Fifty years after it was first published it should feel out of date – there's a misanthropic, mad genius, anxious to destroy all human kind, and a cast of mutant freaks. But it still works.

It helps that the writing is crisp and spare and that it retains some of the disciplined feel of a short story. The plotting is neat and economical with the right number of small twists and revelations to keep the pages turning quickly. It was refreshing to read a short book where every episode counts. The only bit that didn't work for me was the attempt to find a motivation for the evil genius's

misanthropy, oh, and I don't think you'd call any of the characters well-rounded, but that, in its way, is the point!

The Earth in *The Dreaming Jewels* is littered with crystal-like life forms, which can singly or in pairs create replica animals, plants and humans or near-humans. This is not something the organisms seem to do as an end in itself but as a 'by-product' of their dreaming.

Horty Bluett is an eight year old boy who runs away from an abusive foster parent with his toy jack-in-a-box, Junky, and into the arms of a troupe of carnival midgets.

Maneater, the carnival owner, has discovered something of the nature of these jewels and their amazing powers. He can control them to a limited degree with his mental power to cause them pain, but is searching for a human by-product of their dreaming who could communicate with them more directly. Maneater would then control that human and destroy the world. He confides his plans to the midget, Zena, who does all she can to confound him and care for Horty. The rest you'll have to read for yourself. If you haven't already, I recommend that you do.

## Caroline Stevermer – *When the King Comes Home*

Tor, 2000, 240pp, \$22.95 ISBN 0-312-87214-3

Reviewed by Tanya Brown

When Hail Rosamer was eight, she announced to her mother that her next pair of shoes would be red. "Perhaps when the king comes home," said her mother: "which I was already old enough to know meant 'no'."

The proverbial king is Good King Julian, monarch of Aravis two centuries before Hail's birth. Although he's invoked daily by the people of Aravis, there's no good reason why he should return. His senile, heirless descendent King Corin has held the throne for many years, and Aravis is capably governed by the prince-bishop and his group of advisors. Aravis – one of the small group of imaginary East European countries which were the setting for Stevermer's earlier *A College of Magics* (Tor, 1994) – has been at peace for decades, and life is placid.

Hail's ambition is to be a great artist, and this is a world in which many of the great artists have been women. A headstrong girl, she is nevertheless determined to learn all that she can from the acclaimed Madame Carrier – despite her clashes with her fellow apprentices, and her increasing frustration at her own lack of skill. She studies, and falls in love with, the art of Gil Maspero, King Julian's contemporary. By reproducing a siege medal of Maspero's, Hail finds herself accused of counterfeiting: fleeing the city, she recognises the profile from the medal on the face

of a living man. Has the King come home?

*A College of Magics* was acclaimed for its blend of school story, epic fantasy and Edwardian travelogue. The charms of *When the King Comes Home* are more subtle. Stevermer builds up character and setting for a quarter of the book before the story truly begins. The narrator is an older, wiser Hail, looking back to her youth and the great lesson she learnt: a lesson that may be wasted on the inattentive reader, so delicately is it imparted. The older Hail's voice, wryly affectionate towards the promises and possibilities of her lost youth, is poignantly distinct from the impetuous romantic who rushes into danger for the sake of principles and scholarship.

The conflicts that Hail encounters are rarely black and white. The prince-bishop's counsellors are motivated by both political and personal concerns. The villain of the piece, far from being a black-hearted monster, is a former librarian. Hail perceives the flaws in those she admires without loving them any the less, or recognising the flaws in herself – although, looking back, she wryly admits that her companions were more tolerant than she deserved. Her single-minded obsession with the long-dead Maspero is almost her undoing, but also her salvation.

## Matthew Thomas – *Terror Firma*

Voyager, 2000, 437pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-00-710022-1

Reviewed by Chris Amies

*Conspiracy Theory* meets *Independence Day* in the company of a man in a turquoise tracksuit? Stranger things have happened (though the survivors tend to be in padded cells) and Matthew Thomas's followup to the Millennial outbreak *Before and After is Terror Firma* and as any pilot will tell you, the firmer the *firma* the less the terror.

There's a UFO-spotter and his name is Dave. For some reason a lot of these people tend to be called Dave; though maybe it's just a factor of being born around 1970 and growing up listening to morose weedy singers going on about how miserable they are. There's also a grizzled war veteran called Frank and the golden journey to Area 51: natch. Matthew Thomas considerably widens his scope for this novel so instead of a hillside in Wales we have a remote Himalayan kingdom struggling into the modern era (though certain interests may not let it), as well as the aforementioned Area 51 and a remote island inhabited by some (nominally) very dead people.

Fans of the British Monarchy probably shouldn't read

this book. Nor should anyone else unless they fancy shedloads of conspiracy-nut pisstake. Hopefully it won't make anyone wonder about the Secret Chiefs of the World or the Men In Black, but for anyone au fait with the wilder edges of conspiracy paranoia, or who just thinks Pokemon are sinister, it's a hoot.

But chapters called things like 'Communion' and references to the dreaded folk-singer chromosome make this at times a fast trip through an assemblage of jokes, and this reviewer wonders how it would play to an audience who didn't have a background of reading the *Fortean Times*. The heroic spaceship stealing doesn't need you to have seen *Independence Day*, but once you have you see where it came from. Perhaps this is a symptom of a late-phase genre rather similar to Victorian architecture, bits being pulled out and patched together according to their need, and although a lot of authors from Von Daniken onwards have passed off their laudanum dreams as truth, few have actually written Fortean novels so far; but we live

in strange times, and far from landing one in the booby hatch as Jonathan Meades would have us believe, believing in fairies at the bottom of the garden gets you a five-book contract.

*Terror Firma* is, like *Before and After*, about the millennial sleep of reason and nowhere near the real paranoia of the age which concerns globalisation and alleged killer diseases, GM crops and global warming, as if

we had not enough to concern ourselves with without redrawing *American Gothic* to involve aliens as does this cover. The paranoia is the message and here you have the genuine, tinfoil-on-the-windows thing. It's also an adventure novel full of chases and hairbreadth escapes, because, after all, just because you're paranoid, as they say, doesn't mean they're not after you.

### Harry Turtledove – *Through The Darkness*

Tor, 2001, 478pp, \$27.95 ISBN 0-312-87825-7

Reviewed by Lesley Hatch

And the war drags on, to quote Bob Dylan (if I remember rightly). As with the previous novel in this series, Turtledove has cleverly used events taken from real-life warfare and placed them in his universe to good effect, while remaining true to his original ideas. We get to meet his viewpoint characters once more, though life does not run smoothly for all of them, and, in the case of at least two, events force them to take radical decisions to save their lives.

All over the world, soldiers, behemoths, dragons and leviathans continue to fight each other, the blood magic is still practised, to devastating effect, on either side of the conflict. However, things are not going at all well for the various protagonists, with the exception of the mages who continue their experiments, which get taken a stage further with the aid of a mage from another country. However, they still have no clear idea of what they are going to do with the resulting magic.

Elsewhere, the war is taking its toll on the lives of the rich and poor as supply lines are sabotaged, and it becomes an unsettling time for many. The Marchioness we met in the previous volumes gets news of her brother, who

is now a resistance fighter, and the young lovers of different races find their lives made even more difficult when her people are herded into ghettos. Despite this, the occupying forces are not having it all their own way on the home front – in their own way, the ordinary people are committing various acts of resistance and conducting their own little war of attrition, in all kinds of ingenious little ways.

The story works well, as did its predecessors, and again there are a couple of unexpected twists: the formation of a penal brigade, with the aid of a local collaborator, is a prime example. Another involves the decision by one realm to take as refugees people who would otherwise be sacrificed in the blood magic, to the annoyance of their allies.

In conclusion, I must say I had assumed this novel to be the final volumes in a trilogy, but the ending makes it clear that this is not the case, and this caught me by surprise. Turtledove has definitely maintained the standards he established with volumes one and two, with commensurate ease. Here's to the next one!

### Lawrence Watt-Evans – *Night Of Madness*

Tor, 2000, 384pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0-312-87368-9

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

This fantasy is set in a world where practitioners of magic – witches, demonologists etc. – are bound by the laws of the Wizards Guild. Only one type of magic may be practised by any one person, and anyone with political power is forbidden to use magic at all. This orderly system is thrown into disarray on the eponymous night of madness, when all sorts of people suddenly acquire the ability to use a form of magic that comes to be known as warlockry, and general mayhem ensues, with some warlocks rioting and looting and others flying off to some unknown destination in the north. In the city of Ethshar of the Spices, young Lord Hanner finds himself not only an unwilling warlock, but also the spokesman of others. Many folk view the newly-created magic-users with suspicion, driving them out of their jobs and homes, while the ruler of Ethshar of the Spices, Azrad the Sedentary, threatens them with exile or even death, so Hanner gathers his fellow warlocks together at a mansion belonging to his Uncle Faran and does his best to find out all he can about warlockry. Faran is also a recipient of warlockry, but unlike Hanner, he is delighted. As advisor to Azrad, he was

forbidden the use of magic but has studied it in secret for years, and now thinks to use his unexpected powers to seize the throne.

This is a mildly humorous tale that appears to have no agenda other than to provide a light read, but even on these limited terms it does not really succeed. Of the main characters, only the well-intentioned Hanner and the ambitious, womanising Faran are more than one-dimensional. The first part of the book introduces a whole bunch of minor characters that have been affected in some way by warlockry, but most of them, the palace guard, the serving girl, etc. are straight from central casting, and the reader does not have much interest in what happens to them. Once Hanner has gathered them together, there is a *lot* of talk about the whys and wherefores of warlockry, a few experiments to determine the extent of the warlocks' powers, and Hanner spends a *lot* of time thinking things through in his own mind. He does get some answers, and by the end of the book the warlocks' problems are resolved with just a little violence, but by then this reader had ceased to care.

### John Whitbourn – *Downs-Lord Day*

Earthlight, 2000, 404pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-671-03301-8

## Reviewed by K.V. Bailey

This is the second volume of a trilogy (called "a triptych") presenting an alternative empire at successive stages of its history. England and alternative New-Wessex are interpenetrable by elusive portals accessing their respective planes of existence. It was through such a portal that the priest Thomas Blades had (in *Downs-Lord Dawn*) entered a New-Wessex dominated by the ogreish predatory Null. Here, becoming god-king, he had challenged their dominance and made New-Godalming his capital before, broken by 'angelic' incursions, returning to England and a penitent's life. Now, 430 years on, under the feckless god-king Blades XXIII, New-Wessex fares badly. The Null-inhabited Wild hems it in. Its only outposts are Sark, Dieppe and Sicily. Guy Ambassador is sent through a time/space-bridging portal to bring back the first Blades, now a beggarly recluse living on Capri. He finds him with the help of Sir Theophilus Oglethorpe, a Jacobite exile, and son of Colonel Oglethorpe of *The Royal Changeling* – a novel obliquely ancestral to the trilogy. Oglethorpe, despairing of his cause, accompanies Blades and Guy back to New-Wessex, where, with Blades's dynamic revived, all three become members of an ambassadorial mission to Null-Paris, Guy with a clandestine plan to overthrow the Null. Oglethorpe's more direct and murderous initiative, however, precipitates

matters and leads first to the siege of Dieppe and ultimately to a denouement and epilogue that I won't divulge.

A plot outline cannot convey Whitbourn's current style, compelling but increasingly capricious, and spawning such extravagant images as "Guy... jab-jab-jabbed with his sword like a schoolgirl at a hated sampler." A comic spin on violence doesn't prevent some of it being anatomically graphic – as in the dismembering of two intrusive angels. The angels, a third sentient species, are regarded as heartless enemies by humankind (whom the angels sportively regard as mere "insect time-dwellers"). Their place within the trilogy's quasi-metaphysical framing is uncertain.

One of several sketchbook-type illustrations represents Guy's personal cosmography: The Angelic host holds a Mercury/Venus orbit about a central star, with the Commonality of Mankind and his own Ambassadorial Clan in middle orbits, but the Null far out on the edge. Symbolic meteoric or cometary events are shown, with angels leaving orbit to observe or intervene. The central star-orb is captioned, "Blades: The Unconquered Sun – or else a false tinsel star". The same questioning ambiguity pervades the story, making it an entertainment with depth.



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.

**Stephen Baxter – *Longtusk***

Millennium, 2001, 292pp, £5.99 ISBN 1-85798-739-X

The second of Baxter's 'Mammoth' books (following *Silverhair*). Sixteen thousand years BCE, and the ice hangs poised threateningly above the plains on which the mammoths live, plagued by the Lost, the pale predators of the southlands. This is the story of Longtusk, the only bull mammoth to be recorded in the age-old saga of his race.

**Ben Bova – *Jupiter***

Tor, 2001, 368pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0-312-87213-8

Hodder and Stoughton, 2000, 433pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-340-76764-2

NEL, 2001, 433pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-340-76765-0

**Ben Bova – *The Precipice: The Asteroid Wars: 1***

Hodder and Stoughton, 2001, 439pp, £17.99 ISBN 0-340-76960-2

Having done the Moon (*Moonrise and Moonwar*), Mars, Venus and now Jupiter, Bova pauses his outward journey through the solar system to start a new series which, from the jacket blurb, almost reads like *Dallas*-style corporate war in space, complete with immensely rich business rivals, brilliant female astronauts, fusion rockets, and the fate of a rapidly degenerating Earth in the balance.

**Ray Bradbury – *The Machineries of Joy***

Earthlight, 2000, 255pp, £5.99 ISBN 0-671-03771-4

Along with *The Illustrated Man*, one of Bradbury's finest

collections of short stories. 21 tales – from the title story (taking its title from a quotation from Blake) to 'A Miracle of Rare Device', the classic 'Boys! Raise Giant Mushrooms in Your Cellar!' and 'The Anthem Sprinters'. Ranging from Ireland to America and Mexico City ('El Dia de Meurte'), from sf and fantasy to mainstream short stories, this is a small gem of polished storytelling that deserves a place on everyone's shelf.

**Orson Scott Card – *Shadow of the Hegemon***

Orbit, 2001, 365pp, £16.99 ISBN 1-84149-037-7

Reviewed in the Tor edition by Claire Brialey (V214). A sequel to *Ender's Shadow*, and both forming an intriguing alternate perspective on the events in the first book of Card's 'Ender' series, *Ender's Game*. The 'shadow' in the title of this book and its prequel has a double meaning, both as the role of Ender Wiggin's lieutenant, Bean (who is the main focus of these two later novels) but also for the shadow which Ender (first as the saviour of Earth, then reviled as an unwitting xenocide and self-appointed Speaker for the Dead in the original novel's two sequels) casts over those around him.

**Arthur C. Clarke – *Profiles of the Future***

Indigo, 2000, 213pp, £7.99 ISBN 0-575-40277-6

Paperback version of the 'Millennium Edition' of Clarke's non-fiction collection, begun 1961 as a series of essays for *Playboy* magazine, assembled into book form the following year and

revised 1982. As Clarke says, looking back in his introduction to this volume, "What, no VCRs, no laptops, no Internet, no World Wide Wait – sorry, Web – no CD-ROMs! How did people manage to live in those primitive times?" What's fascinating now, as Andy Sawyer noted in V210 in his review of the hardback edition, are those places where Clarke takes us through his visions to show where he was wrong, either through misplaced enthusiasm ('Ground Effect Machines' as the next transport revolution) or from developments that took off faster, or in different directions, than he anticipated (the communications revolution), while others (cyborgs, downloading consciousness, von Neumann 'replicator machines') are, 40 years on, still part of sf and popular science speculation.

#### Richard Garfinkle – *All of an Instant*

Tor, 2000, 383pp, \$15.95 ISBN 0-312-87260-7

"A strange odyssey of a book" said Stuart Carter, reviewing the Tor hardback edition in V209, "[R]eminiscent of a bizarre cross between Olaf Stapledon's *Star Maker* and Edwin Abbot's *Flatland*. The former for its immense scope, the latter for a single weird idea taken to its limits." The weird idea (Garfinkle's first novel, *Celestial Matters*, was based on the notion that the Greek cosmology of concentric crystal spheres was real) is that time exists in two layers. We exist in the lower layer, Flux, embedded in linear time and cause and effect. Above is 'Instant' where all time exists simultaneously, and which is gradually becoming colonised by tribes of humans, all warring to try and impose their preferred version of history back in the Flux. "Deceptively simple [but] simple rather than simplistic... letting you forget just how bizarre the world you're reading about is until suddenly you have to reread a whole page s-l-o-w-l-y." Intriguing.

#### Graham Joyce – *Leningrad Nights*/James Lovegrove – *How the Other Half Lives*

Millennium Binary 1, 2000, 61+69pp, £4.99 ISBN 1-85798-759-4

#### Kim Newman – *Andy Warhol's Dracula* /Michael Marshal Smith – *The Vaccinator*

Millennium Binary 2, 2000, 91+72pp, £4.99 ISBN 1-85798-760-8

I'm actually not sure whether the titles of these books are *Binary 1* and *Binary 2*, or whether Binary is Millennium's series name for these two back-to-back pairing of four novella-length stories. All four stories were initially published by Gollancz in one hardback volume, edited and introduced by Peter Crowther, under the title *foursight*, and reviewed by Paul Billinger in V212.

#### Mercedes Lackey and Larry Dixon – *Owlknight*

Gollancz, 2001, 326pp £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-741-1

Mass market edition of the third of Lackey and Dixon's 'Owl' series (*Owlflight*, *Owlsight*) and which was reviewed and recommended (although with a reservation about the novel's tendency to pause for over-lengthy descriptions) in trade paperback edition by Lesley Hatch in V214.

#### Holly Lisle – *Vengeance of Dragons*

Millennium, 2000, 441pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-758-6

Books 2 of 'The Secret Texts', and previously reviewed in trade paperback edition by Iain Emsley (V213). This second volume trades the "claustrophobic, fraught atmosphere" of Book 1

(*Diplomacy of Wolves*, reviewed V205) to more fully develop the characters and several plot threads. The quest is on for the Mirror of Souls. Kait believes it will restore the lives of her massacred kin; Crispin believes it will make him a god. Both are terribly wrong.

#### Richard Matheson – *The Incredible Shrinking Man*

Tor, 2001, 351pp, \$14.95 ISBN 0-312-85664-4

An omnibus collection, originally published 1994, of the titular novel (1956) which inspired the classic 1957 film, plus nine short stories, including 'Nightmare at 20,000 Feet' (adapted as an equally classic episode for *Rod Serling's Night Gallery*), 'Duel' (which became the basis of Spielberg's first film), 'Mantage' and 'Shoofly'.

Altogether now: "Help me. Help me..."

#### Lance Olsen – *Freaknest*

Wordcraft of Oregon, 2000, 258pp, \$12.00 ISBN 1-877655-35-X

Number 23 in Wordcraft's 'Speculative Writers Series' (which includes works by Misha, Don Webb, Jessica Amanda Salmonson and others), *Freaknest* comes with back cover blubs by Richard Kadrey, Michael Bishop and Don Webb and an opening sentence that reads:

"Dr Jaundyce Mizzle-Sluggbury, the one-hundred-and-twenty-three-year-old Klub Med executive who's wealthied himself fat and greasy as a bacon-wrapped chunk of filet mignon through his company's seminal investigations into cryonics (in 2021 he was instrumental in tugging back one Anna Tesla-Huntingdon from the brink of 20001 smack into a bout of spontaneous psychosis), debarked from the beetlish black cab outside his Knightsbridge flat at 3 Hans Crescent across the street from Harrod's counterfeit-gothic façade."

[Wordcraft of Oregon, P.O.Box 3235, La Grande, OR 97850 <http://www.oregontrail.net/~wordcraft>]

#### John Sladek – *Tik Tok*

Gollancz (SF Collector's Edition), 2001, 184pp, £9.99 ISBN 0-575-07235-0

#### William Tenn – *Of Men and Monsters*

Gollancz (SF Collector's Edition), 2001, 251pp, £10.99 ISBN 0-575-07234-2

Sladek's hilarious satire in which his eponymous and outwardly mild-mannered robot engages on a murderous and amoral rise to power as the first robot candidate for the Presidency of the United States, and dealing with the humans around him on their own terms, thanks to a malfunction of his "asimov circuits".

*Of Men and Monsters* is Tenn's only full length novel, from an equally satirical sf writer (the savage and funny 'The Liberation of Earth') in which giant aliens have conquered the Earth, but small groups of humans live and survive – like mice (or Borrowers) – in burrows in the walls of their massive houses, scavenging and stealing, until they start to invade the aliens' giant starships.

#### Sheri S. Tepper – *Beauty*

Millennium (Fantasy Masterworks 14), 2001, 476pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-722-5

Tepper's savage, witty and acerbic revisioning of the *Sleeping Beauty* fairy tale, ranges far and wide, taking in elements of *Prince Charming*, *Snow White* (a singularly vapid airhead) and *Beauty and the Beast*, mixing fairy tale, fantasy sf (abduction by aliens and a vision of a typically Tepperian far future dystopia) and magic realism.

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**Reviewer's Key:** AAA – Andrew A. Adams, AF – Alan Fraser, AS – Andy Sawyer, CA – Chris Amies, CAKG – Carol Ann Kerry-Green, CB1 – Cherith Baldry, CB2 – Colin Bird, CH – Chris Hill, GW – Gary Wilkinson., IE – Iain Emsley, KT – Kathy Taylor, KVB – K.V. Bailey, LB – Lynne Bispham, LH – Lesley Hatch, LJH – L.J. Hurst, MG – Mark Greener, NMB – N.M. Browne, P – Particle, RWH – Robert W. Hayler, SC – Stuart Carter, SJ – Steve Jeffery, ST – Sue Thomason, TB – Tanya Brown, VL – Vikki Lee.