

EDITORIAL TEAM

PRODUCTION AND
GENERAL EDITING: Tony
Cullen – 16 Weaver's
Way, Camden, London
NW1 0XE EMail:
tony.cullen@dfee.gov.uk
• FEATURES, EDITORIAL

- FEATURES, EDITORIAL
 AND LETTERS: Andrew M.
 Butler c/o Department
 of Arts and Media, D28
 ASSH Faculty,
 Buckinghamshire
 Chilterns University
 College, High Wycombe
 HP11 2JZ. EMail:
 ambutler@enterprise.net
- BOOK REVIEWS: Steve Jeffery – 44 White Way, Kidlington, Oxon, OX5 2XA EMail:

peverel@aol.com • Associate Editor:

Tanya Brown – Flat 8, Century House, Armoury Rd, London, SE8 4LH EMail: amaranth@avnet.co.uk

VECTOR

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RENEWALS AND NEW MEMBERS – PAUL BILLINGER, 1 LONG ROW CLOSE, EVERDON, DAVENTRY, NORTHANTS NN11 3BE EMAIL: PAUL@EVERDON.ENTERPRISE-PLC.COM

USA ENQUIRIES – Cy Chauvin, 14248 Wilfred Street, Detroit, MI 48213 USA

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BSFA Officials

TREASURER – Elizabeth Billinger, 1 Long Row Close, Everdon, Daventry, Northants NN11 3BE EMail:

billinger@enterprise.net • MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY – Paul Billinger, 1 Long Row Close, Everdon, Daventry, Northants NN11 3BE EMail: billinger@enterprise.net • PUBLICATIONS MANAGER – Vikki Lee, 44 White Way, Kidlington, Oxon, OX5 2XA EMail:

peverel@aol.com •

ORBITERS – Carol Ann Kerry-Green, 278 Victoria Avenue, Hull, HU5 3DZ Email:

metaphor@metaphor.karo o.co.uk • AWARDS – Tanya Brown, Flat 8, Century House, Armoury Rd, London, SE8 4LH EMail: amaranth@avnet.co.uk

• PUBLICITY/PROMOTIONS – Claire Brialey, 26 Northampton Road, Croydon, Surrey, CR0 7HA EMail: cbsfa@tragic.demon.co.uk AND Mark Plummer, 14 Northway Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 6IE • LONDON

MEETING COORDINATOR – Paul Hood, 112 Meadowside, Eltham, London SE9 6BB EMail:

paul@auden.demon.co.uk • Webmistress – Tanya Brown, Flat 8, Century House, Armoury Rd, London, SE8 4LH EMail: amaranth@avnet.co.uk

Other BSFA Publications

FOCUS – Simon Morden, 13 Egremont Drive, Sheriff Hill, Gateshead, NE9 5SE Email: focus.editor@cableinet.co.uk

MATRIX EDITORS – Andrew Seaman (General), Beechwood Court, 33A Thornsett Road, Kenwood, Sheffield, S7 1NB Email: a.seaman@talk21.com Janet Barron (Books), 3 Ullswater Road, Barnes, London SW13 9PL Email: ullswater@compuserve.com Gary Wilkinson (Film & Media): Email: gary_wilkinson@yahoo.com Avril Brown (Internet): Email: avril@ednet.cc.uk Glenda Pringle (Magazines), 22 Mead Way, Kidlington, Oxon, OX5 2BJ Email: chris@kidlington66.freeserve.co.uk

BSFA WEB PAGE: http://www.bsfa.co.uk/

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The View from the Foresight Centre

round about this time last year, I spent a very pleasant, if utterly strange, evening at the Royal National Hotel in Bloomsbury, as part of the audience of an event organised by the Socialist Workers' Party, Marxism 2000. The event was a blistering attack on the Wrong Kind Of Fantasy and a support of the Right Stuff by one China Miéville, whose *Perdido Street Station* had just been published and who had been a guest at a BSFA meeting. My editorial, comparing the event to an sf convention, amused Mr Miéville no end.

And so it must be with similar potential for amusement that he invited me back, this time to spend a little more time (one evening, plus an entire weekend) at a convention called, with stunning originality, Marxism 2001. 'A New Age, A New Movement' read the posters, with my mental echo of New Labour New Britain. Whilst I'm sure I could write at great length about the event, the fear that at any point I could have been outed as that guy who wrote *that* editorial overwhelms me, and I would rather like to go back next year, if China reminds me what the event is called.

But I'd like to focus on a particularly amusing passage from the editorial: "[Perdido Street Station] is one of the most extraordinary and mature novels of recent years. With writers like Miéville, MacLeod, Meaney and many more, sf in Britain at the end of the century seems to be revolutionary: clearly in a tradition, but still finding new ways to tell new (and old) stories. Could this be another Golden Age? Or am I being just too utopian?" Perhaps, but the weekend prior to Marxism 2001 I spent at another 2001, A Celebration of British Science Fiction in Liverpool, an event oddly like a convention, and oddly like a conference, and oddly unlike either.

For, after all, you don't spend most of such events in the programme, whether it be papers, discussions or readings, you spend it in the bar, or the bookroom. And yet the most common complaint was from people saying that they didn't want to miss a thing. The event brought together around a hundred people – academics, artists, authors, critics, fans – to talk about British

science fiction since the war. And talk about it we certainly did, to and about guests Aldiss, Baxter, Clute, Griffith, Jones and MacLeod, and names ranging from Wyndham to Calder. Paul Kincaid's *A Very British Genre* and Nicholas Ruddick's *Ultimate Island* seem to be the only books devoted to British science fiction (and both authors/critics were there), so clearly there's a huge need to get a conversation underway.

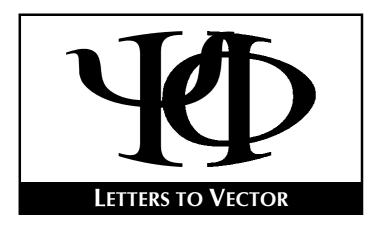
And Nicholas Ruddick rather put a foot wrong, as he cleared a space to talk about science plays in his paper: he claimed that current sf was banal (he didn't use the word) and that literary values were in decline. If Miéville, MacLeod, Meaney, Grimwood and Robson had been in the room, let alone a slightly older generation of Baxter, Greenland and Jones, then I would have been able to refute it thus.

A couple of things that some of the other academics – especially the American academics – said were particularly heartening. Firstly how interesting and knowledgeable British fans were – which we should already know from reading pages of BSFA publications and *Foundation*, among other sources. And secondly how many people felt, at this moment, that British science fiction (rather than American) is at the cutting edge of the genre. Well, you read it here first, folks, although the image of Colin Welland at the Oscars, shouting, "The British are coming!" does loom rather large at this point.

(And then a more science fictional image, of Kevin McCarthy stopping cars, and screaming "They're coming! They're coming!...")

And certainly there was an appetite for further spaces in which to speak British science fiction (to adapt a phrase from the name of the 1996 Science Fiction Foundation conference, now available in book form from Liverpool University Press). For a start, at the end of June next year, the Science Fiction Foundation will be organising the Science Fiction Research Association conference at New Lanark, Scotland, and that seems as good a place as any to carry on the conversation. And who knows, after that, perhaps back to Liverpool for another event on British sf – if we (and I have to admit my own inadequate contributions to organising these events) still have the energy. In the meantime, let's keep talking.

Andrew M. Butler, High Wycombe, Summer 2001.



From Richard Barycz:

L. J. Hurst's mention of Alan C. Elms's *Uncovering Lives*, which, amongst others, deals with our John Campbell, suggests that Elms has come up with some sort of Freudian basis for the fact that John never wrote any original fiction from the age of 27.

However, didn't our John become the editor of some obscure and now utterly forgotten sf pulp called *Astounding Science Fiction* at about 27?

An sf writer who becomes the editor of an sf magazine usually stops writing for a simple reason. For every story they accept and publish they have to reject what? a thousand? or more.

An editor just does not have the time to keep a record of the rejects: the author's name, the story title, the wordage, nor even make a brief synopsis of the story.

If Campbell had continued producing original fiction after he became the editor of *ASF*, you can be very sure that sooner rather than later he would have been sued by an aggrieved author, contending that Campbell's 1951 novel *Conquerors of Mars!* was nothing more than a rip-off and expansion of the aggrieved author's short story entitled 'Conqueror of Mars!' submitted to Campbell and rejected by him in August 1940, and the aggrieved author would have the rejection slip to prove submission at least.

Not a case of Freud, more a case of finance I'd say.

But then, could our John *never* learn to tell his mother and his aunt apart? I would not be surprised if a reviewer of Elms casually mentioned, well, Campbell's mother was a big fat lady and her

sister was a thin neurotic chain smoker.

Mothers of identical twins learn to tell them apart very quickly and I suppose the same could be said of the children of identical twins.

From M G Sherlock:

I'd dispute Paul Kincaid's view (Vector May/June 2001) that "Clarke would never be what one might call a stylist". Doesn't clarity, readability, elegance, and being scientifically well-informed constitute style?

But Kincaid's review of *The Collected Stories of Arthur C. Clarke* generally catches the essence of his work very well. When later foibles like the great man's collaborations with Gentry Lee and other are forgotten, it is short stories such as 'The Star', 'The Sentinel', 'Nemesis' and 'Transience' (surely one of the most elegiac and haunting short pieces ever written) and novels such as the City and the Stars, Childhood's End and 2001: A Space Odyssey which will live on. They are part of science fiction's great contribution to world literature and human culture.

Paul Kincaid replies:

Being scientifically well-informed does not constitute 'style', the content of the stories in that respect has no bearing upon the telling of them. And with few exceptions, Clarke has not been an elegant writer but rather a workmanlike one. He is, indeed, clear and readable, but that does not make him a stylist. His finest work has tended to get to the point briskly and efficiently without pausing for a telling literary effect or a subtle play of words. That's fine, he did not need such effects, such wordplay; he was primarily a storyteller, and the stories he had to tell were good and in some cases great. As a writer he was well aware of his strengths and his weaknesses, and used them as effectively as possible. There is no need to make exaggerated claims for Clarke's literary greatness, for it is irrelevant to what really made him great, which was the harnessing of strong storytelling to fresh scientifically-based ideas.

I do agree that much of his later work, and particularly his collaborations, pale in comparison to a string of wonderful stories produced between the late '40s and the early '60s, and to a handful of novels from the same period. Whether you could call them a great contribution to world literature is a moot point; but

they are indelibly a part of what makes science fiction great.

From Roy Gray:

Idly flicking through the Sunday paper looking for something interesting on TV I noticed: 00:15am Sunday March 11 on BBC 2 The Whole Wide World, Dan Ireland's 1996 film "chronicling the affair between schoolteacher Novalyne Price (Renee Zellweger) and 'cult writer' Robert E. Howard" (Vincent D'Onofrio). The film turns out to be based on the first novel of Novalyne Price Ellis aged 76 after she retired from a 44 year career in teaching. Robert E. obviously made a lasting impression on her through all those years. I'd never heard of the book, or film, so it was interesting to see, even though I missed the first fifteen minutes. This is unlikely to be a film for Conan's modern film-going fans but, if you are interested in this little corner of pulp sf history, it's worth looking out for a repeat or, maybe, the book.

I note that Scott Merrifield did not include Novalyne Price in his sources for the Robert E. Howard article in *Vector*. Did she have some comments on this aspect of REH's character? As I said, I've not read the book myself and what I saw of the film was not particularly enlightening though possibly it slightly favoured the traditional, man of his time, view.

Interesting article by the way. I enjoyed reading it. 🖫

From Pete Young:

Of all the follically-challenged science fiction writers in the world, how many of them are hair, apparently, to Arthur C. Clarke? (PS. I know of at least three... Messrs. Anderson, K.J., Baxter, S. and Sheffield, C. Perhaps *Vector* readers can add more to the list.)

AMB replies: Nice to see a letter from a new member, but as a Short Haired Young Thing I'd better forebear from further comment, save for the feeling that somewhere someone's proofreading slipped up.

Letters to Vector should be sent to Andrew M Butler, D28, Department of Arts and Media, Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, High Wycombe, HP11 2JZ or emailed to ambutler@enterprise.net and marked 'For publication'. We reserve the right to edit or shorten letters.

Maps of Minnesota: Stalking John Sladek

by David Langford

How very little does the amateur, dwelling in home at ease, comprehend the labours and perils of the author, and, when he smilingly skims the surface of a work of fiction, how little does he consider the hours of toil, consultation of authorities, researches in the Bodleian, correspondence with learned and illegible Germans – in one word, the vast scaffolding that was first built up and then knocked down, to while away an hour for him in a railway train!

Robert Louis Stevenson & Lloyd Osbourne, The Wrong Box, 1889

uite so. I had no intention at all of plunging into the mighty research effort of assembling a book of someone else's fiction, but somehow one thing led to another.

It was a terrible shock when that fine writer John Sladek died in March 2000, aged only 62. He'd been keeping his illness (idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis) secret from all but his family and closest friends. As Tom Disch put it, "he just sighed away his life", a few days after being told he had no chance of being listed for a lung transplant. Here's part of what I wrote in my next *Interzone* column:

From his hilarious 1968 debut novel *The Reproductive System* (US *Mechasm*) to the much darker comedy of *Bugs* in 1989, he

exploited sf themes of robots and consciousness to mirror human folly with devastating wit. 'Literary' influences like William Gaddis and Joseph Heller were absorbed into the Sladekian narrative madness, replete with wordplay, anagrams, palindromes, ciphers, obsessive narrative patterns and mathematical games. He skewered irrational beliefs and pseudoscience in his nonfictional *The New Apocrypha*, parodied fellow sf authors in squibs collected in *The Steam-Driven Boy*, and lovingly recreated the locked-room puzzles of 'golden age' detection with novels like *Black Aura*. In person he was splendidly entertaining company, and will be much missed.

When immediate grief had dulled a little, the idea of a memorial collection occurred to several people. Sladek's science fiction was out of print in the USA, but in Britain – where he'd spent most of his creative writing life – five novels were scheduled for reissue in the Gollancz 'yellow jacket sf' imprint, recently revived by Malcolm Edwards at Orion Books. What an excellent thing it would be to reissue all the short Sladek fiction too! His British agent Chris Priest imagined an omnibus of the four published collections (*The Steam-Driven Boy* [1973], *Keep the Giraffe Burning* [1978], *Alien Accounts* [1982] and *The Lunatics of Terra* [1984]; the US *The Best of John Sladek* [1981] was selected from

the first two) plus a few uncollected stories.

I airily reckoned the latter at about seven solo pieces, not counting collaborations with Disch. Either as one fat volume or split into two, the collected short Sladek would be seriously comparable to the much-reprinted complete stories of Philip K. Dick. As connoisseurs know, John Sladek really was that good, with a unique mix of wild inventiveness, sharp satire, and haunting melancholy.

My only role at this point was to stand around supportively at an April 2000 Orion party while Chris pointed out the need for a Complete Sladek collection to a slightly glassy-eyed Malcolm Edwards. From time to time I interjected: "We are the chorus and we agree. We agree, we agree." As a mere enthusiastic fanboy, I looked forward to handing over the list of uncollected stories and leaving the work to Orion/Gollancz.

All is flux, though, in the wonderful world of publishing. By May 2000, Orion was wavering between a Complete Sladek and a relatively slim Best Of. In June, the word was that any comprehensive edition should be taken to a small press; the Best Of suggestion theoretically remained on the table, but enthusiasm somehow seemed to be waning. As July slid into August, it was clear that mainstream British publishers in general had resumed their unholy alliance against the hated foe of short story collections. Summer gave way to autumn, and I tinkered less and less often with the Uncollected Sladek list originally drafted for Orion's benefit.

Then came a slight paradigm shift. I'd been in touch for some while with the new British small press Big Engine, which rather encouragingly wanted to launch with a reissue of my own 1984 borderline-sf farce *The Leaky Establishment* (1984). (Their idea rather than mine. The fact that Terry Pratchett had spontaneously offered to write an introduction to any new edition did tend to help.) Prompted by a mention of that homeless project, Ben Jeapes of Big Engine now fancied doing *The Uncollected Sladek*, with a possibility of later reprinting the existing collections. Talking terms in October, Ben and Chris agreed that the book could usefully be edited by one David Langford. Consternation! Panic!

But then, it was just a matter of assembling a few known stories. Had I not declared in August that (glossing over the fact that my list was already rather longer than April's 'seven solo pieces') I now possessed all John Sladek's published but uncollected stories? Had I not been made smug by the discovery that the on-line International SF Database was entirely unaware of his 1984 collection *The Lunatics of Terra*? This left me feeling well ahead of the game.

Hubris began to take a clobbering from Nemesis later that October. Sladek's widow Sandy gave her blessing to the project and sent a list of literary assets which John had prepared in the sure knowledge that death was coming. Chasteningly, this schedule included ten stories wholly unknown to me. O brave new world. A routine Usenet query about these titles produced

hurt e-mail from Phil Stephensen-Payne, chiding me for having missed the *Interzone* 'Books Received' notice which in very small print listed his and Chris Drumm's *John T. Sladek – Steam-Driven Satirist: A Working Bibliography* (1998). As the man said, it is a capital mistake to theorise in advance of one's data. I abjectly ordered a copy.

Even before this arrived, useful material began to turn up. My on-line pleas had caught the attention of Matthew Davis, who runs a Disch website and had acquired photocopies of obscure Sladek poems, playlets, essays and esoterica in the course of researching Disch. The missing stories 'In the Distance' and 'Comedo' turned out to have appeared in the little magazines Concentrate (1968) and Corridor (1971) published by Mike Butterworth, whom I knew through his world-famous Savoy Books

operation and who still had copies. Kindly fans in the New England SF Association, in particular Anthony R. Lewis, were quick to locate and photocopy stories from *If.* Prodding an itchy place in my own memory led to an issue of *Foundation* where the somewhat deflating Sladek review of Michael Moorcock's *The Entropy Tango* (1981) had taken the form of a short parody. All grist to the anthologist.

Sometimes, even so, it became necessary to fall back on the sordid device of spending money. I found and bought a couple of anthologies via used-book web searches: Douglas Hill's *The Shape of Sex to Come* (1978), containing John's raucously funny 'Machine Screw', and Disch and Naylor's *New Constellations* (1976) with the Disch/Sladek spoof 'Mystery Diet of the Gods'. And for a wince-making sum in dollars, Cheap Street provided their all too beautifully produced Sladek chapbook *Blood and Gingerbread* (1990).

So much for the relatively easy stuff. When *Steam-Driven Satirist* arrived, it unerringly pinpointed the real difficulties ahead. Another story which like 'Machine Screw' had appeared in *Men Only* magazine, an ephemeral glossy devoted mainly to naked female breasts and *not archived by the British Library*. Four shortshorts in Britain's long-defunct weekly tabloid *Titbits*, helpfully dated – from John's own best recollection – "1969/72?". And one which fell altogether outside the usual bibliographic pathways, having been "printed in 1974 in theatre programmes for a London play, possibly at the Haymarket Theatre." There came a certain chill sense that this project might never be completed.

By now our planned book had a name, confided by John in an 1980s interview as his intended title for a collection of intricately linked shorts that never materialised: *Maps*, which, with the subtitle *The Uncollected Stories of John Sladek*, seemed reasonably fitting. One alternative suggestion was culled from John's remarks in the same interview about the mythic persistence of the US Midwest in his fiction:

I am planning someday to set a novel, or at least a short story, in Albania. All I know of Albania is that Americans aren't allowed to go there and that it once had a King Zog; the rest can be made up. It'll probably come out looking exactly like the American Midwest. (Interview by David Langford, *Science Fiction Review*

#46, 1983)

Chris and Ben failed to show any enthusiasm for my argument that *King Zog in Minnesota: The Uncollected Sladek* was an infinitely more striking title.

Serendipity intervened in November 2000 as Matthew Davis's regular web trawling for Disch and Sladek memorabilia led him to a bookseller's listing of *The Lost Nose: A Programmed Book,* a literally unique piece of Sladekiana produced towards the end of the 1960s as a present for the girlfriend who later became his first wife Pamela Sladek. This is a multiplechoice gamebook in which the reader must guide hero Fred on the quest for his lost nose. (Which in some story branches is less

than co-operative: "He called for it to come down, but it merely wrinkled itself with disgust and thumbed itself defiantly at him...") Hand- and typewritten text is supplemented by collages, primitive cartoons, and gummed-in artefacts including paperclips, cigarette cards and cogs from a watch mechanism.

Unfortunately, the people at Ulysses Bookshop in London's posh Bloomsbury district understood the rarity of *The Lost Nose* very well, and wanted £550 for it. They also reckoned it was too fragile to photocopy. In a fit of dynamism early in December 2000, I travelled into London to visit the bookshop, bought a digital camera on the way, photographed the whole booklet (with permission) while being jostled by other customers in the very narrow confines of Ulysses, and used a palmtop to transcribe the text sections that seemed likely to reproduce poorly. All this

Hubris began to take a clobbering from Nemesis later that October.

would have been a great coup if I'd had more than ten minutes in a pub to learn the workings of the camera. As it turned out, some paragraphs were still blurry, and I sheepishly returned two weeks later to reshoot the pages with improved technique.

My fear here had been that *The Lost Nose* could vanish forever from sf circles at the whim of some well-heeled outsider. Happily, as a result of extremely broad hints dropped in my newsletter *Ansible*, the Science Fiction Foundation later acquired this chapbook for its collection at Liverpool University library. An interactive CD-ROM edition with page images in full colour is being planned by the Foundation; I was content with the full text, supplemented where necessary with a few line graphics like John's origami Buckingham Palace which folds into a perfect, featureless cube.

No Sladek collection would be complete without such weird and gratuitous diagrams, and I felt I was following the obsessive footsteps of the master as I spent hours fiddling with CorelDraw

software to recreate his elaborate flowchart of possible reading routes through *The Lost Nose* – including the restoration of a pathway he'd omitted. Quite unexpectedly, *Maps* now contained a map. Next I was reminded that John had written bridging passages to cover lost pages in a certain Philip K. Dick MS (*Lies, Inc.* [1984]), since now I found myself concocting plausible sentences to replace a fragment of gummed-on *Lost Nose* text that came unstuck and vanished long ago.

Meanwhile, letters and e-mails too numerous and tedious to relate had gone out in all directions, seeking clues to the three fantasy quest objects of *Titbits, Men Only*, and that uncertainly specified theatre programme. Some gloom arose from the sheer offputtingness of the British Library's information sheet, which made it very clear that no one should so much as think of approaching this Court of Last Resort until they have absolutely, for

sure, exhausted all other possible resources. Interesting hoops must be jumped through for even a short-term pass, including satisfying a stern interviewer that one's purpose is Genuine and Worthy. It came as no surprise that mere British authors and taxpayers appear right at the bottom of the various categories of desirable applicant, whereas, for example, Open University undergraduates are three rungs up from lowlifes like myself and get an automatic five-year pass. Bah. As I gibbered to Chris Priest, "In an ideal world, Society of Authors members would be wafted to the head of the queue!"

But wait... *Titbits*, it emerged, did have some scanty news content and was therefore archived at the far more approachable British Newspaper Library, housed in a vast and charmless building far out from central London (close by Colindale tube station on the Northern Line). One can reserve up to four volumes in advance by e-mail to newspaper@bl.uk, giving 48 hours' notice. Thus, shortly before Christmas, I sat at a battered reading table with the complete *Titbits* for 1969 and 1970, bound up in six-month chunks as massively unwieldy volumes. As the long day wore on, these were replaced by 1971 and 1972, laboriously wheeled from the stacks on a large trolley or tumbril.

It was a dreadful, tacky little magazine. Shock horror exposé stories, tedious celebrity chit-chat, and lubricious reports of 'perverts': I was reprimanded for laughing aloud when a solemn THESE PICTURES WILL SHOCK AND DISGUST YOU headline proved to relate to an exceedingly tame night-club drag act. There were innumerable photos of young ladies in fancy tights – sometimes wearing nothing else, though artfully placed tree-branches or

wisps of gauze tended to occlude actual nipples. (Sociological note: was this '60s fascination with tights the lure of the relatively new and exotic? Naughty magazines seem to have reverted to stockings over the subsequent decades.) All in all it was enough to make people look at me oddly when I complained that after a whole day paging through *Titbits*, my right arm was too stiff to use.

Though one-page, sting-in-the-tail stories appeared regularly, none of these was by John Sladek or his admitted *Titbits* pseudonym Dale Johns. The inference was that John had misremembered his "1969/72?" dates. "Oh yes," Chris Priest confirmed with disarming speed, "it was 1967 when *Titbits* started running sf!" I thanked him coldly.

Real life got in the way for a while (a death in my family), and the tale resumed halfway through January 2001. Our postman brought the dozenth confirmation, this time from the Theatre Museum in London, that "printed in 1974 in theatre programmes

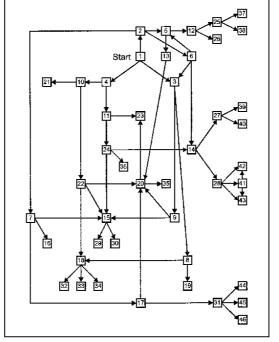
> for a London play" was not sufficient story identification without the name of the play. More than one theatre bookshop had genially invited me to hunt through their three tons of unsorted programmes in a dusty back room - "There might well be a few from 1974" – but life seemed too short. The next envelope in that day's wad of mail came from the Mander & Mitchenson Theatre Collection (Salvation Army Headquarters, PO Box 249, 101 Queen Victoria Street, London, EC4P 4EP), enclosing a photocopy of John Sladek's lost story 'It Takes Your Breath Away' and a letter that sourced it to the programme for "Play Mas at the Phoenix Theatre". Whoopee!

> 'It Takes Your Breath Away', a multiply punning title, proved to be a short murder mystery starring John's series detective Thackeray Phin, from his witty detective puzzles *Black Aura* (1974), *Invisible Green* (1977) and the

prize-winning short 'By An Unknown Hand' (already secured for *Maps*). The haziness about just where this was published was partly explained by another, identical copy that turned up a week later – this time in response to an appeal I'd sent to *The Stage* magazine – and which had been found in the 1974 Piccadilly Theatre programme for *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Apparently the specialist publishing outfit Theatreprint would commission material and include it in multiple programmes. No doubt there are further instances out there; let's leave them as a little exercise for Phil Stephensen-Payne's next bibliography.

A second round of research at the British Newspaper Library began with *Titbits* for 1967 and ploughed steadily through the 1967-1968 'Season of science fiction', still without finding John Sladek. The 'season' opened on 6 May 1967 with a story by 'C.C. Shackleton' (Brian Aldiss) and continued until 20 January 1968 – complete list, including some surprisingly famous names, available on request. In the next *Titbits* the sf gave way to 'a season of thrillers' and pay dirt soon followed. Thriller number two was a hitherto unbibliographed reprint of 'The Way To A Man's Heart' by Sladek and Disch, and more Sladek stories appeared throughout the year. Six, in fact (three bylined Dale Johns), although John himself had only remembered four. Another file closed at last... although, being forbidden to use a camera or make my own photocopies in the BNL, I remained uneasy for several days until their official, expensive copies arrived by mail.

Later came another agonising decision about tampering with a sacred text, since (thanks no doubt to the *Titbits* printers) one short murder story had the protagonist reaching the scene of his



planned crime at 10:15pm, setting a laborious trap that required eight paragraphs of climbing and hauling, and then discovering the time to be 10:15pm. As with the ersatz *Lost Nose* paragraph, the resulting editorial intervention is duly confessed in a note at the end of the book.

What of *Men Only*? My local library in Reading suggested that it might be classed as pornography and (pause to consult huge tome) could therefore be archived by the only relevant organisation listed under that heading. This was the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association, professional takers of offence who are hot for censorship of British media. Somehow the prospect of asking permission to study a hypothetical NVLA collection of naughty magazines did not appeal. Instead I wrote to the British Library, which as already noted doesn't keep *Men Only* but helpfully reported that Cambridge University had a run from 1950 to 1963. Alas, we needed 1974. Then why didn't I contact the magazine's owners, the Paul Raymond Organisation in London? Of course I'd tried that right at the outset, and they still haven't replied, rot them.

Web searches for *Men Only* tend to bring up millions of pages of blushful embarrassment. Nevertheless the truth is out there once you know where to look – as the British Library chap really should have known. At www.copac.ac.uk there's a database of British university library catalogues, which led me rapidly back to my own alma mater with the revelation that *Men Only* is archived in the restricted stacks of the Bodleian Library in Oxford.

It was the work of minutes to e-mail a friendly Oxford postgraduate – the estimable Tanaqui C. Weaver, one of the less well known influences on the character of Delirium in Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* – who immediately stormed the citadel and emerged with a copy of the not particularly filthy but very funny Sladek time-travel story 'Peabody Slept Here'. Could this be closure?

A fascinating incidental discovery was that the naughty parts of the Bodleian had long since grown beyond the bounds of the traditional 'Phi' cupboard, and that *Men Only* was trucked in as required from a repository well outside Oxford. Apparently the real location is Nuneham Courtenay, an almost oppressively quaint and well-preserved winner of Best-Kept Village prizes. It did my heart good to learn that somewhere behind those exquisite, tasteful facades there are all those bound volumes of tit magazines...

Looking at the latest Maps contents list, it seemed that we'd nailed down all the solo stories John Sladek was known to have published. Various poems and playlets had turned up en route, and according to the 1998 bibliography only one was lacking: 'The Brusque Skate' from the launch issue of Ronald Reagan: The Magazine of Poetry (ed. John Sladek and Pamela Zoline, 1968). As it happened, the former Disch/Sladek/Zoline flat in London's Camden Town had been taken over in 1969 by John and Judith Clute, who still live there and 'inherited' various material abandoned in attics, including copies of Ronald Reagan #1. Thus, thanks to John Clute, I very soon had the poem and - more serendipity - a one-page surreal cartoon strip contributed by Sladek to the same issue. It was instant art using stock images of people from the dry transfer sheets of those pre-digital-clipart days; later I located them all in an old Letraset catalogue. This may well adorn the jacket of *Maps*.

Incidentally, the back cover of *RR* #1 is a Sladek-created "cut out and dress your own Ronnie Reagan doll" feature, offering four complete changes of clothing: sportswear, motoring outfit (i.e. Hell's Angel), drum majorette, and senior citizen, complete with truss, surgical stocking, etc. Sf, the genre of prediction.

There remained some early collaborations with Tom Disch, which I'd kept telling myself weren't essential to 'The Uncollected John Sladek' – indeed there once appeared to have been a tacit Sladek/Disch Pact agreeing that joint stories would be reprinted, if at all, in Disch collections. The lure of completeness drove me on, although I'd always been a little nervous of Tom Disch. In a nice-cop-nasty-cop scenario, I obscurely felt, it would be Sladek who

gave you a soothing cup of tea and softened you up with witty anagrams and palindromes... whereupon Disch would stalk from the shadows and thwack you across the face with a quotation in the original German from *The Magic Mountain*.

All entirely irrational, since Tom Disch was highly approving and supportive of the *Maps* project. With a single imperious phone call he caused photocopies of five countem five early Sladek collaborations, three never published, to be sent to me from the Yale archive of his papers. Other sources provided the 1966 issue of *Escapade* magazine that published their 'The Incredible Giant Hot Dog' (a title which is *not a metaphor*), and I wondered whether anyone but myself, even the authors, had previously compared the MS and published story to discover that *Escapade*'s editor had brutally cut both the opening and closing sections.

Just to be on the safe side, I showed the 'final' contents list to assiduous bibliographer Phil Stephensen-Payne. He shyly confessed to having found a reference to one more hitherto unrecorded Sladek poem, 'The Four Cows', said to be in a 1967 issue of Leland Sapiro's upmarket sf fanzine *Riverside Quarterly*. This, at least, was easier than the back rooms of theatre bookshops or the restricted stacks of libraries. Fandom is my home turf. A quick query on a fanzine e-mail list brought two copies within hours, a scanned image from Ned Brooks in America and an electronic transcript from Damien Warman in Australia.

Then in April 2001, when I thought I'd finished, along came the word that a run of David Morton's little Minneapolis literary magazine *region* had surfaced in London, and it was time for further camera-work. I liked the first issue's contributor note on our man, reminding us that he did indeed work for a little while as a railway switchman:

john sladek is 25. he once lived in the physics building & now works for the railroad. (what do you want to be when you grow up?)

region #1, Summer 1963

Those four mimeographed issues contained three further Sladek poems, a Joycean stream-of-consciousness extract from a hitherto unrecorded novel which pushed back his first known publication date to 1963, and a somewhat different 1965 version of the familiar story 'Is There Death on Other Planets?' (Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Dec 1966, collected in The Steam-Driven Boy). All but the last item went into Maps.

(Sladek's revisions to his spoof sf spy story 'Is There Death...' consisted mainly of updating various characters' pointlessly archaic speech. Thus the 1965 "Fie on't... Marry, sir, you lie! What hastow in the satchel, caitiff?" very sensibly became the 1966 "What have you got in that satchel?")

Early estimates of how much material remained uncollected were thus exposed as pathetically inadequate. The latest *Maps* contents list shows twenty-one solo Sladek stories, fourteen poems and playlets, eight pseudonymous shorts, eleven Disch collaborations, and a handful of autobiographical fragments, the whole lot ranging from 1963 to 1992. It was all over except the introduction, which I'd been preparing with copious assistance and illustrative quotations from such old friends of Sladek as John Clute, Tom Disch and – not mentioned above but admirably informative and helpful throughout – Charles Platt.

The one fly in the ointment was that my draft introduction included a quotation from Bob Shaw's *Fire Pattern*. In one brief scene of this 1984 sf novel, the hero contacts paranormal expert John Sladek (supposedly the author of *Psychic Superstars*) and gets only flip, joky, totally unhelpful answers to his queries about spontaneous human combustion: "Maybe people do burst and make ashes of themselves." The secret punchline was that, far from being denigrated by Bob, John had actually had great fun writing all his own dialogue for this passage.

This point seemed well worth making, since I'd come across readers who'd inferred some terrible, bitter Shaw/Sladek vendetta

from that fragment of fun. Unfortunately I committed the routine courtesy of checking whether Bob's family had any objection to what I'd written and quoted, and his son stunned me by demanding a £300 permission fee. For 175 words. The mind reels.

Professional editors conveyed to me that 'the late author's family' is a term of terror in the industry. Charles Platt robustly suggested I should tell the son and heir to piss off. Though knowing that Bob Shaw's own suggested fee would have been at most a pint of beer, I cautiously made a modest counter-offer; silence fell, and despite a follow-up letter continued for months. In the end, for safety's sake, that passage was paraphrased almost out of existence. No ideal book project entirely survives contact with reality.

Meanwhile, *Maps* brings together enough nifty fiction to make me proud of the result, and of its late author. Aiming for completeness, though, inevitably means including a few prentice works and potboilers now characterised by Tom Disch – with particular reference to their James Bond pastiche 'The Floating Panzer' – as "turd-rate and at the Scott's Tissues end of the spectrum of Collected Papers."

With what I imagined to be great editorial cunning, I shaped

the material into internally chronological sections headed 'Stories, Mostly' (including some wildly non-factual essays), 'Poems and Playlets', 'Sladek Incognito' (thus burying the *Titbits* squibs deep in the book), 'Sladek and Disch' (good lightweight fun overall, despite that shaky start), and lastly 'Sladek on Sladek' – the man himself caught in the act of introspection, both comic and perceptive.

Then, of course, I had to resist the Sladekian urge to spend compulsive hours diagramming a recommended reading plan for the whole collection, gently directing visitors to the most entertaining and uplifting quarters. In fact, another map.

(Maps: The Uncollected John Sladek is scheduled for publication in late 2001 by Big Engine, PO Box 185, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 1GR, UK. E-mail: info@bigengine.co.uk, web: www.bigengine.co.uk.)

A SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT EDIT OF THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION. DAVID LANGFORD IS THE RECIPIENT OF NUMEROUS HUGOS FOR HIS FAN-WRITING, INCLUDING THE ESSENTIAL MONTHLY NEWSZINE ANSIBLE. HIS NOVEL, THE LEAKY ESTABLISHMENT, IS ALSO AVAILABLE FROM BIG ENGINE — EDS.

That Titbits 'Season of SF'

C.C. Shackleton, 'Two Modern Myths', 4236 06/05/67 Edward D. Hoch, 'The Last Paradox', 4237 13/05/67 Brian W. Aldiss, 'The Dead Immortal', 4238 20/05/67 Ben Smith, 'I'll See You Tomorrow', 4239 03/06/67 Cyril Kornbluth, 'The Meddlers', 4240 10/06/67

Arthur C. Clarke (actually 'Robin Hood, F.R.S.'), 'The Other Side of the Sky', 4241 17/06/67

Ray Russell, 'The Room', 4242 24/06/67 Tom Boardman Jr, 'Will Power', 4243 01/07/67 William F. Nolan, 'Happily Ever After', 4244 08/07/67 Peter Tate, 'Spectrum', 4245 15/07/67

Tom Boardman Jr, 'Solitude', 4246 22/07/67 Michael Kirsch, 'Stay Away', 4247 29/07/67 William Stark, 'Probe West', 4248 05/08/67

William Stark, 'Flip', 4249 12/08/67

Tim Carnaby (Graham Hall), 'Out of the Frying Pan', 4250 19/08/67

Mark Gale, 'Introducing the Natives', 4251 26/08/67

Peter Tate, 'The Great Queen of the Galaxies', 4252 02/09/67

William Stark, 'The Scrapmerchants', 4253 09/09/67

Peter L. Cave, 'Scoop!', 4254 16/09/67

Anthony Peters, 'Esther Goes To Market', 4255 23/09/67

Bill Cranfield, 'The Edge of the Universe', 4256 30/09/67

Dikk Richardson (possibly Graham Hall; there was apparently a real Dikk Richardson but Hall often wrote under his name), 'Grinnel' and 'A Funny Thing Happened', 4257 07/10/67

J.K. Houseman (Chris Priest), 'The Last Showdown', 4258 14/10/67 Rob Kinnear, 'Landfall', 4259 21/10/67 Peter L. Cave, 'Question', 4260 28/10/67

Graham Morgan (Graham Hall), 'Pop Ten', 4261 04/11/67

Chris Priest, 'The Match', 4262 11/11/67

Peter Cave, 'Like Heaven', 4263 18/11/67

Chris Priest, 'Occupation Force', 4264 25/11/67

Isaac Asimov, 'The Mystery' and 'Hell-Fire', 4265 02/12/67 (the first of these is 'The Message' from Earth Is Room Enough)

Fredric Brown, 'Not Yet The End', 4266 09/12/67

William Temple, 'The Man Who Wasn't There', 4267 16/12/67

David Rome, 'Need', 4268 23/12/67

Clay Allison, 'Christmas on Algar', 4269 30/12/67

J.E. Dick, 'Don't Blame Me', 4270 06/01/68

Isaac Asimov, 'The Watery Place', 4271 13/01/68

Joe Dix, 'One For the Road Back', 4272 20/01/68

'Season of Thrillers' (selective, 1968 only)

John Sladek and Thomas Disch (reprint of 1966 story), 'The Way to a Man's Heart', 4274 03/02/68

John Sladek, 'Just Another Victim', 4276 17/02/68

John Sladek, 'You Have a Friend at Fengrove National', 4278 02/03/68

John Sladek, 'The Train' (his title: 'The Switch'), 4279 09/03/68

Dale Johns (Sladek), 'Timetable', 4282 30/03/68

Dale Johns (Sladek), 'Now That I'm Free', 4293 15/06/68

Dick Howett and Chris Priest, 'The Haul', 4304 31/08/68

George Collyn, 'Be Still, My Sweet', 4311 19/10/68

Dale Johns (Sladek), 'Practical Joke', 4312 26/10/68 Graham Charnock, 'Girl in a Bikini', 4318 07/12/68



Cognitive Mapping 23: Postmodernism

by Paul Kincaid

Probably for as long as we have had language we have listened to storytellers, whether we are Greeks clustered around blind old Homer, or Saxons in a smoky hall hearing tales of Beowulf, or modern day Iranians listening to someone declaim the stirring tale of the demonic, horn-headed Iskander who we know as Alexander. And if, wide-eyed and attentive, we sit in the audience often enough we will hear the story change: lines are forgotten or placed in the wrong sequence, contemporary references are inserted, time constraints result in a necessary elision. The story is not fixed, it never has been.

That same fluidity continued even as story found a new medium on the page. Geoffrey Chaucer gave readings from *The Canterbury Tales* (c. 1387) even as he was writing it, and when he heard criticisms that his rhymes were pretentious he put the comments directly into the mouth of his Man of Law. In what was still, at the time, a primarily oral tradition, Chaucer was simply letting audience and story interact. The introduction of printing, and more importantly the spread of literacy that followed in the wake of cheaper, more readily available books, tended to fix the story permanently in the words on the page. Even so, writers

found ways of loosening that grip. Miguel de Cervantes addressed his readers directly in Don Quixote (1605-15), then pretended that certain sections of his book did not come from his pen at all. Laurence Sterne, in writing Tristram Shandy (1759-67), played with the very physicality of the book, incorporating, for instance, one page that was entirely black.

It was only really with the rise of Realism as the most common literary device during the nineteenth century that this fixity became a necessary part of the storytelling process. The story was a reflection of the world, an expression of reality, and if reality could not change then neither could the story. Increasingly, however, our century has questioned the fundamental notion that reality is fixed. Einstein's Relativity, Heisenberg's Uncertainty,

Popper's Falsifiability, Derrida's Deconstruction, Lorentz's Chaos; the names of the principles that have become the common intellectual currency of our age are enough to show how unfixed

our notions of reality have become.

One response to this has been the rise of what is called Postmodernism. In architecture, for instance, where the term appears to have originated, postmodernism freely mixes styles from many different eras to separate the building from its function - a museum does not necessarily require a grand Palladian manner, an office does not need to be a four-square block, each might partake of elements of the other. In

literature, which took on postmodernism during one of its periodic bouts of experimentalism in the late 1960s and 1970s, it mixes styles and techniques to separate the fiction from the book. These are not necessarily new techniques: as in architecture postmodernists borrow from any age, which is why Sterne's Tristram Shandy is an almost textbook example of a postmodern text even though the author died nearly two hundred years before the term was invented.

In literary terms, postmodernist stories tend to be marked by devices that make the reader complicit in the telling of the story, whether by directly addressing the reader or by making the reader play a part in the construction of the story (as, for instance, John Fowles did by providing alternative endings to The French Lieutenant's Woman [1969]). At the same time, distancing techniques keep the reader alert to the fact that we are being spun a varn; we do not immerse ourselves in a postmodernist tale, living for a while fully within the world of the novel, rather we watch from outside, enjoying the writer's game of shifting between voices and perspectives and techniques and formats (as Thomas Pynchon does in Gravity's Rainbow [1973], or Gabriel Garcia Marquez mixing the fantastic with the real in One Hundred Years of Solitude [1967]).

Simply to list the literary techniques used by writers working within the postmodernist mode would take more space than is available in this article. And even that would be to provide no more than a partial picture. No writer is divorced from her age, any book will, to some degree, emerge from and reflect back the culture in which it was written. And postmodernism - so far as it can be isolated as a cohesive movement at all – is a product of the post-WWII Western World, which is why some theorists such as Frederic Jameson have identified it as the literature of late-Capitalism. Behind the techniques, therefore, there would need to be another and equally extensive analysis of the political and

cultural ideas and assumptions that underlie the literature. (That is, if we are even to accept that postmodernism exists as an identifiable cultural form. As yet we do not have the historical perspective that allows us to identify, with comparative ease, the unifying features that mark out, say, Henry James, Virginia Woolf

and James Joyce as modernists. Postmodernism is a diffuse form and academics continue to argue back and forth with a host of contradictory theories as to what - or even if - it actually is, or was.)

One intellectual position, however, does seem to underpin all (or at least most) expressions of postmodernism: that it is antihierarchical. There are no distinctions between high and low culture, between past and present, between fiction and reality, between author

called high and low art, has brought science fiction into the Most of the readily identifiable postmodern authors have written at least one work that is clearly science fiction, in intent as well as in content: Big as Life (1966) by E.L. Doctorow, Ratner's Star (1976) by Don DeLillo, In the Country of Last Things (1987) by Paul Auster, Xorandor (1986) by Christine Brooke-Rose, while others, such as Robert Coover's surreal account of the Rosenberg case, The Public Burning (1977),or William Vollman's hallucinogenic take on the history of the Americas in The Ice-Shirt (1990) employed fantastical

Molly was snoring on the temperfoam. A transparent cast ran from her knee to a few millimeters below her crotch, the skin beneath the rigid micropore mottled with bruises, the black shading into ugly yellow. Eight derms, each a different size and color, ran in a neat line down her left wrist. An Akai transdermal unit lay beside her, its fine red leads connected to input trodes under the cast.

William Gibson, Neuromancer (1984)

and reader. Such a breakdown of the distinctions between sopostmodern playground.

Asleep. Naked. I saw her. A transparent cast ran from her knee to a few millimetres below her crotch, the skin mottled by blue purple and green patches which looked like bruises but weren't. Black spots on the nails, finger and toe, shaded into gold. Eight derms, each a different colour size and form, ran in a neat line down her right wrist and down the vein of the right upper thigh. A transdermal unit, separated from her body, connected to the input trodes under the cast by means of thin red leads. A construct.

Kathy Acker, Empire of the Senseless (1988)

devices that would previously not have been seen outside the genre. Steve Erickson, all of whose novels have been both science fiction and postmodern, even managed to employ fantastic effects in a book that was outwardly a work of political journalism, Leap Year (1989).

And while science fiction was slow to take up the forms and manners of modernism, it was quick to pick up on postmodernism. Indeed the cross-fertilisation between the two has been extensive: in an essay called 'POSTcyberMODERNpunkISM' (1991) critic Brian McHale has pointed out how Thomas Pynchon was inspired by science fiction in his early work, notably Gravity's Rainbow, how Pynchon's work in turn inspired William Gibson's early novels such as Neuromancer, and how Gibson's cyberpunk, in an extension of the feedback loop, provided further inspiration for Pynchon in Vineland (1990). Though it is difficult to think of a more direct cross-fertilisation than Kathy Acker's plundering of other literatures as postmodernist architects plundered other styles and cultures in her wholesale (and acknowledged) use of passages from Neuromancer in her own novel, The Empire of the Senseless. Clearly familiarity with cyberpunk in general and Gibson's work in particular was meant to create resonances in the mind of the reader which would further enhance the world and the story being created by Acker.

There are science fiction writers who are also postmodernists, notably Kurt Vonnegut whose Slaughterhouse 5 (1969) combined dizzying shifts in time and location, autobiography and fantasy in a graphic conflation of postmodern techniques. Others use postmodern techniques readily and knowingly, as, for example, the narrative circularity employed by Samuel R. Delany in 'On the Unspeakable' (1993) and *Dhalgren* (1974), and the notebook with its crossings-out and emendations which forms the final section of the latter. Still others would probably deny being a postmodernist while using postmodern techniques, for instance the jarring scene in The Affirmation (1981) by Christopher Priest (who has also vehemently denied being a science fiction writer), in which a manuscript is suddenly revealed to be a pile of blank pages will jerk the reader out of the world of the story and into full engagement with the author as effectively as any postmodernist could wish, or even the free and playful use of the postmodernist mixing of real and fictional characters in novels such as Anno Dracula (1992) by Kim Newman. And there are those, such as the cyberpunks, who are acclaimed for writing 'postmodern science fiction' although the narrative devices owe as much to earlier science fiction as they do to the influence of writers like Pynchon or Acker, and most cyberpunk demands awareness of the story more than awareness of the text. (Cyberpunk probably gets called postmodern more as a political, 'late-Capitalist' form than a literary form, taking as its common premise the breakdown of Western, industrial society; although if that is the only criterion there are huge swathes of science fiction from Richard Jefferies's

After London [1885] to lain M. Banks's Excession [1996] which would probably similarly qualify as late-Capitalist.)

Nevertheless, postmodernism has had a far greater effect upon science fiction than modernism did, not just in what has been written but in how sf is perceived. The breakdown of boundaries between high art and popular culture has helped to break down boundaries between science fiction and the rest of literature. This has not only facilitated movement into and out of the genre, but has also led to the development of the strange Marches known as Slipstream inhabited by books as varied as *Cities of the Red Night* (1981) by William S. Burroughs or *Geek Love* (1989) by Katherine Dunn, works which aren't exactly science fiction but which couldn't exist without the freedoms of sf or the experiments of the mainstream.

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Cognitive Mapping 24: Pastiche

Trent watched with undisguised boredom the drips of water

which fell down from the variegated leaves. In the distance he

could hear the pounding drums of the M'suba tribesmen as

they sent out their messages like bespeckled jewels across the

crystalline jungle, disturbed by the appearance and

disappearance of the lost Astronaut. They had been puzzled,

as had Trent been, by the scattered remnants of the

Astronaut's belongings: a cell from the Zapruder footage, a

used condom, a tray from the hotel kitchen in which Bobby

Kennedy had been assassinated, a spare tyre from a Cadillac

John Sladek, 'J G B*II*rd', 'The Five Dimensional Aspidistra' (1972)

and of course the naked photographs of Marilyn Monroe.

by P**I K*nc**d

o get to an understanding of pastiche it is first necessary for us to understand parody. Parody is a form of satire in which the target labelled as fallacious is a writer or film-maker, or other producers of cultural artefacts. Certain tendencies within the

style of the writer are identified, mimicked and exaggerated for effect, the aim being to show the superiority of the parodist over the object of her attack. In this, it should obvious, that parodist depended upon the inherent recognizability of the subject's style. The parodist is thus like to be either a young turk, tilting like Quixote, or one of those literary lions herself,

fending off, and making light of, the apparently lesser upcoming talents.

In John Sladek's collection *The Steam-Driven Boy* (1973) the targets are a series of writers whose reputations seem as

unassailable as any of the more literary lions. If their prose style not necessarily recognisable as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's is in the myriad parodies of the Sherlock Holmes stories, then that is scarcely the fault of the parodist, but rather that of a genre that downplays style as insignificant. Robert A Heinlein, Philip K Dick and Isaac Asimov are all targets for Sladek's satire, and were all then living and defining what sf could and should be.

Tunney sat back in the soft leather of the taxi cab, testing the illusion as he was driven downtown through rain trodden streets. He had been given the run around all day and he was no closer to getting to see the big man. He had to get to see the big man, because he owed it to Archer. Not because of truth and decency and honour. These things were to be purchased by any dame who walked through the door with enough dimes. It was because Archer had his partner and that had to count for something in this crazy mixed up world.

Kim Newman, The Night Mayor (1989)

Sladek was a part of the British New Wave, which had attempted to redefine what science fiction was capable of, and to make the genre (if genre it is indeed) aware of the music of its own language. In his parodies Sladek both satirises the shortcomings of the grand masters of science fiction – although his ecstatic reception by Philip K Dick rather belies any notion of

a successful attack – and pays tribute to those who had so mined out the tropes of science fiction. A sentence of Ray Bradbury's could hardly have been written by anyone else, although it is clear that someone else could write a sentence by Ray Bradbury;

indeed the very unity of Bradbury's oeuvre across fifty years means that a sentence from the 1940s could sit happily alongside one from the 1990s, and surely Bradbury is not the same person now as he was then.

It is in some of the parodies of the wider literature that we can begin to note a shift to pastiche. In the heroic speeches spoken, or rather misspoken, by Bottom in Shakespeare's A

Midsummer Night's Dream (c.1594) we hear the young Shakespeare laying into the lines of his fellow tragedians of the Renaissance. In Alexander Pope's The Rape of the Lock such heroism became necessarily downplayed as it was used to

describe a simple game of cards. T. S. Eliot in his high modernist poem *The Waste Land* (1918) in turn uses Pope's modality of language and the shape of a speech from Enobarbus in *Antony and Cleopatra* in order to both raise and lower the status of the woman being described. It is not so much that Shakespeare and Pope are the object of Eliot's attack, more that techniques are being lifted wholesale from writers whom the poet admired.

Of course the very success of

this technique is dependent upon the recognizability of the style. Science fiction as a genre, if indeed it can be pinned down to anything as mundane as a familial category, is dependent upon pastiche. Those of us who read a great deal of science fiction will begin to recognise not so much the style of an individual prose writer being copied by later writers, but rather the modes and

tropes of the field being recycled by a series of writers. The backyard spaceship of Mary Doria Russell's *The Sparrow* (1995) is in a direct line of descent from the Professor Cavor and Skylarks of earlier writing. Further, it is impossible to read of the events in the life of Father Sanchez without being aware of the trajectory of the narrative of the Jesuit Ramon Ruiz-Sanchez, in James Blish's *A Case of Conscience* (1958). That the author herself may not be aware of such a parallel is often beside the point; pastiche is often but not exclusively in the eye of the beholder.

It was with lan McDonald that the technique of pastiche came into its own, although perhaps some writers had thought of reaching for their plagiarism lawyers. With Desolation Road (1988) he echoed the title of a Bob Dylan track, 'Desolation Row', a surreal series of vignettes, and brought together the Mars as envisaged by Ray Bradbury in The Silver Locusts (1950) – which was in its origin as short stories fixed up as a novel perhaps itself a series of vignettes albeit less surreal – and One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967) by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. In Hearts Hands and Voices (1992) he uses the fabular techniques of Unconquered Country (1986) by Geoff Ryman to give an Asian setting to the Troubles of Ireland. Irish politics also emerge in Sacrifice of Fools (1996) but the models here are police procedural and the aliens could be recognised from those described in White Queen (1991) and North Wind (1994) by Gwyneth Jones.

When the reader is exposed to a sentence from McDonald then she is also potentially exposed to any number of sentences from writers within and outside the genre, and the reader has to be prepared for the shift in registers. The question is whether the sentence from Jones that the reader goes on to read in *White Queen* is still entirely written by Jones, or whether McDonald's sample and remix cultural imperatives have irrevocably unvoiced that kind of sentence.

In *The Night Mayor* (1989) by Kim Newman the pastiche works on a number of levels. Most obviously the voice of Newman the cinephile comes through, with the tone, somewhere

between Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, of the 1930s and 1940s film noir, coming through onto the page. That most American of genres (albeit via the valorisation offered by French critics) has also influenced the most American of subgenres, cyberpunk, albeit a subgenre that has consistently looked to Britain for its models. Novels like Neuromancer (1984) and Mona Lisa Overdrive (1988) look both to film noir and to British models of narrative. Newman, however, pushes the noir narrative into the foreground, so that the reader is forced to recognise that the third thug that beats up Daine is actually a character from Orson Welles's Touch of Evil (1948). At the same time the hapless private eye offers a dialectical of the Heinleinian competent man; whilst in a novel such as Starship Troopers (1959) by Robert A. Heinlein the protagonist can kill a man with his bare hands or with a sword, can debate politics with a father figure and speak any number of languages, the private eye can hardly enter a room without being knocked out.

With all these languages operating at once, and being dependent upon recognition by a reader, it seems only logical to state that the entire genre of science fiction is in fact one of pastiche. Every alien, every spaceship, every big dumb object, is a borrowing or echoing of an earlier representation of an alien, spaceship or big dumb object, or, given that people do not read science fiction in the order that it is published, it is an anticipation of every alien, spaceship or big dumb object. In reading (or rereading) *The War of the Worlds* (1898) by H. G. Wells we are anticipating the cosy catastrophe of *The Kraken Wakes* (1953) by John Wyndham and in turn the new wave psychological thriller *The Drowned World* (1962). Wells is a Borgesian precursor of the Ballardian style, which Sladek went on to pastiche or parody.

It is up to the critic – and in this model of reading science fiction we are all critics – to ride the wealth of sentences from different sources, and to map the cognifyingly estranged linguistics of the page.

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The Old World and the New

Visions of a better future at the end of the world in the novels of Octavia Butler and Severna Park

by Elizabeth Billinger

quick browse around the mythologies of different nations and cultures reveals a vast body of stories explaining the origins of the world, humans and animals, as if in answer to a constant questioning as to the meaning of existence and where we came from. It is noticeable that there are far fewer myths offering a vision of the end of the world and all that is familiar. Perhaps the end of the world is too terrifying a prospect for many of us to contemplate, or humans are so self-obsessed they can only confront a personal end. The ends which are depicted in mythology usually turn out to be points of transition to different states of being.

The Bible destroys the world twice – by flood in Genesis, and by fire in Revelation – yet in both cases the story is of a new beginning. In Genesis, having created the world, populated it with the descendants of Adam (and presumably of Eve, though this seems not to merit a mention) and allowed inter-species breeding between human women and supernatural beings, God notices how wicked everyone on Earth has become and decides that a fresh start is needed. Noah has no faults and thus God selects him and his family to survive the extermination of life on Earth. But what begins as a tale of the end of everything, brought about by the degeneracy of humanity, ends as a tale of hope and new beginnings as the inhabitants of Noah's Ark find dry land again

and commence the process of spreading across the globe.

The Revelation to John is the warning of another end in which God takes things a step further, not only by destroying the living who displease him, but also by judging the dead and consigning to a lake of fire and sulphur all those whose names are not written in the Book of the Living. The Earth is subject to many torments: a plague of terrible sores, the death of the oceans, rivers running with blood, a burning, fiery sun, darkness, thunder and lightning, hail and earthquake. From all this destruction, however, a new world is born. The new Jerusalem, a city of beautiful symmetry and glorious precious stones descends from Heaven to provide a world in which there will be no more grief, pain or death. Once again, the tale of death and destruction becomes a shining vision of a future in which corruption and pain have been eliminated.

The Norse myth of Ragnarök predicts an end to the world very similar to John's revelation, in which the times leading up to destruction are identifiable by the prevalence of wars and the moral breakdown of society. There will be earthquakes and fire and the Earth will sink into the sea but, just as the new Jerusalem descends from Heaven, a new Earth will rise from the sea. The new Earth will quickly be repopulated and will flourish.

Both Octavia Butler's Xenogenesis trilogy (1987-9) and Severna

Park's novel The Annunciate (1999) contemplate turning points at which the destruction of the old recognisable way of life is inevitable, but a future in which the loss of (what is perceived as) humanity offers a means of survival and the creation of a new world. In order to survive, humanity must leave its species behind.

In Dawn (1987), the first Xenogenesis novel, Lilith awakens on an alien spaceship 250 years after the Earth came close to complete destruction as the result of a nuclear war, and the human race almost destroyed itself in riots that "began shortly after the last missile exchange. Thousands had been killed even before it began to get cold. Thousands had simply trampled one another or torn one another apart in panic" (129). Her awakening is the result of intervention by the Oankali.

The Oankali travel the universe entering into genetic exchanges with other species, always searching out trade partners with characteristics that will enhance the Oankali race. They see humanity as an especially attractive partner since there are humans who have "a talent for cancer". Cancer may be a curse to humans, who have never been able to control it, but to the

Oankali whose third sex, the ooloi, analyse and manipulate genetic material within their bodies, cancer has enormous potential and may enable them to fashion a race who can regenerate lost limbs and reshape themselves at will. They also see that the war was "only the quickest of the many destructions that faced humanity" (Adulthood Rites, 200), observing that humans had come to their end as a result of genetic flaws and overspecialisation: humanity is condemned by its mismatched genetic characteristics to destroy itself, both intelligent (a relatively new characteristic) and hierarchical (an ancient trait common to Earth animals).

Lilith is the first human to be awakened and has been chosen by the Oankali to be the first of those humans who will return to Earth and begin to live there again. The Oankali have recreated a

habitable environment on Earth, using both original and modified plants and animals, and once Lilith, and those who come after, have learned the skills necessary to survive in a rainforest-like environment they will be able to found a new community.

It does not take her long to work out that there will be more to the trade than the exchange of the potentials of cancer for a rehabilitated Earth. She realises that what the Oankali are driven to do is a kind of cross-breeding, that the next generation will be neither fully human nor completely Oankali. "What will our children be?" she cries, accusing the Oankali of finishing what the war began, of intending to wipe out what remains of humanity in just a single generation. This problematic issue of what precisely it is that defines humanity, and whether the interference from Oankali represents an ending of humanity, or, as they themselves insist, a rebirth, remains unresolved throughout the whole of Butler's trilogy.

All the surviving humans struggle with the impulse to reject the alien and to protect the 'purity' of the human species, despite the advantages of accepting the Oankali. The ooloi offer pleasure sex - healing, the correction of genetic defects and enhancement of human physical and mental capacity. And for those humans who do mate with Oankali, there is the opportunity to have children, albeit construct children, mixed from genetic material of both species by the ooloi. The resisting humans, however, have been made sterile by the Oankali.

Rejection of the alien is so complete that resister humans are prepared to die rather than seek the healing that can be given with pleasure and without pain by the ooloi. Rejection of the advice and warnings given by the Oankali and "first parents" like Lilith means that the resisters struggle to feed and support themselves. There are raids between resister villages born of the failures to sustain themselves, of boredom, of bitterness and of lack of hope. Without the Oankali humanity is again dying.

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The resisters are, eventually, offered a terraformed Mars as an exclusively human colony. It is not possible for them to remain on Earth because it has been seeded with spaceships which will take sustenance from the planet and then, when both the ships and the human/Oankali descendants are ready, the Earth will be abandoned, leaving a small, cold waste on which nothing will survive. Thus, by the end of the second book, Adulthood Rites (1987), the end of the world has been averted by the intervention of the Oankali, but for many humans the reprieve is only temporary as the exchange of genetic material demanded by their rescuers will destroy all that was definitively human at the point of rescue. And in the future there will be yet another end to the Earth when everything usable has been devoured.

Butler moves on, however, in the final novel, Imago (1989), to offer a new beginning in exchange for the end of the world as we know it. In this novel, a century on from the first recolonisation, a pair of ooloi constructs have been created, even though this has been forbidden. As predicted, the talent for cancer that has been included in their heritage endows them with the ability to change

> their appearance, though this seems to be an involuntary reaction in which they defects. (The

> reshape themselves to please those humans who please them. Jodahs, one of these ooloi constructs, restless and struggling to discover his nature as the first of his kind, roams until he discovers two fertile humans. The humans are a brother and sister who, as a result of inbreeding, are afflicted with disfiguring tumours and have other hereditary brother/sister pairing is the same relationship as the male/female pair in an Oankali mating.) Jodahs is entranced by the pair, by their difference from the humans he is familiar with and in particular by their fertility; and so he bonds with them. Although the settlement of fertile

humans is as fiercely prejudiced against the Oankali as the resister villages, the seductive persuasion of the construct ooloi wins the people over, some wanting to join the Mars colony, but many ready to stay on Earth and mate with the Oankali. By the time Jodahs's family and other Oankali arrive at the settlement the successful bonding between the fertile humans and the construct ooloi convinces the Oankali that the construct ooloi are not dangerous and do not have to be exiled to the home ship. Instead they will be joined by other willing Oankali to plant a new town, a town that will be allowed to grow into a ship.

Butler thus presents the final elimination of humans in their completely unaltered state, not as an ending to be mourned but as a joyful new beginning. The new species which results from the human/Oankali exchange has matured with the creation of individuals of all three sexes and the combination with the newly discovered human settlement indicates by its success and depth of pleasure that it is the next, correct step in the evolution of the

Severna Park's novel, The Annunciate, is set not on Earth but in some other universe, a place where there are three types of human: the ordinary or Jackless, the Jacked who have access to information via implanted sockets, and the Meshed who can access the pervasive information system sustained by propagats (nanotechnology) just by closing their eyes. There has been an uprising to eliminate the Meshed who were perceived as a threat by the others. As a result of the prolonged war the worlds of this system have descended to a deprived and unstable feudal society. It is another universe (like Butler's Earth) in which the telltale signs of the approaching end of the world can be discerned.

Against this backdrop three surviving Meshed - Eve, Annmarie and Corey - wander between the worlds peddling a drug, Staze, that only they are able to make. Staze is powerfully addictive, giving users dreams of one of a limited number of beautiful and peaceful places, but unlike the Meshed who create whole new virtual worlds for themselves in Mesh, the Staze addict is in stasis, unable to move within the dream.

The three travel to an uninhabited planet, Paradise, hoping to find a place to establish a secret base. This planet was the first in the system to be colonised, three thousand years earlier, but it has been blown out of orbit in the uprising against the Meshed. Hidden by an old breed of propagats and thought to be destroyed, it seems to be the perfect hiding place for mass production of Staze. The drug can then be distributed across the system, subduing the Jacked and Jackless, giving power and wealth to the surviving Meshed.

Exploring the abandoned, unwelcoming Paradise the three discover some forms of life, a fungus, moss and wormlike organisms that they christen 'grubs'. Studying these organisms in the lab they discover that although the fungus is an aggressive coloniser, when it starts to attack the grubs and moss they disable and absorb it. The grubs and the moss analyse the fungus, gathering genetic information and then send out their own genetic information until the fungus loses its biological identity and the

threat is gone. Annmarie sums this up as "co-dependency instead of competition. And it makes perfect sense in a place with such limited resources. None of these organisms have the energy to waste fighting to the death" (131).

In their virtual world of Mesh, they find a parallel situation. There is a presence in Mesh, an intruder, the succubus, a presence which can access all their carefully protected individual virtual worlds. Eventually they deduce that the grubs are

interconnected, part of a single entity, of which the succubus is the Mesh manifestation. The succubus is analysing them in the same way that the grubs analysed the fungus before assimilating it. It seeks information and understanding, and from Corey it demands an explanation of reproduction.

The grubs and the succubus seem to present the same kind of threat to the people of this universe as the Oankali do to humans in Butler's Xenogenesis trilogy: there is a biological imperative to assimilate any new life form and an inevitability of change on both sides.

This evolutionary process is accelerated and expanded by two events: the contamination of the grubs, and thus the succubus, by Staze and an accidental impregnation with one of the grubs. The Staze contamination leads to a transformation of Staze dreams which have always been constant and static. Now the images are changing, and changing in the same way for everyone. Because the foetal incarnation of the succubus is carried by a Jacked woman, the being has access to Jack. The people claim the alien baby as the legendary Unknown Child, a saviour, "a being without aggression – a break from our genetic past. The gates between Jack and Mesh and Staze are open. The social and

technical separations are disappearing because of her" (228).

Park seems to be addressing the same dilemma as Butler, that, left to their own devices, humans will inevitably destroy themselves through violence. The only way the species will survive is if its nature is compromised and, as Butler shows, there are many who will view compromise as an evil greater than destruction.

In Butler's novels the benign tyranny of the Oankali is seductive. There are moments when their actions seem questionable, especially their habit of gently forcing humans to do something that the humans desire but do not accept, as when Lilith is made pregnant for the first time without warning or consent. This tactic is justified as giving her what she wants and is ready for but will never be willing to ask for. Although such actions complicate the reader's response to the aliens, there is so much that is positive about them – their need to heal, to eliminate pain and suffering, their lack of violence – that it is hard to reject them and see them as destroyers of the human race.

Park makes her means of salvation much harder to like. Its invasiveness is highlighted as it spreads from the world of Mesh, to Jack and to the Staze dreams of the Jackless. Eve, seen by the succubus as its Mother, and Naverdi, unwilling carrier of the

Unknown Child, reject the alien as an ugly, aggressive force that consumes humans. For the rest of the addicts it represents a way forward, something that rescues them from the isolation of their frozen Staze dreams and allows them to move around within the dreams, to interact with each other after years of isolation. What this means for the Jackless, is that they suddenly have a virtual community and access to information in a way hitherto available only to the privileged Meshed. Again the conclusion is complex

and contradictory, contact with the alien succubus will change the human race forever and this change cannot be undone; for some this seems to be a disastrous ending of the world, for others it is a welcome rescue for a world already at the end of its life.

There seems to be an optimistic thread woven into these stories of the end of the world, both the old myths and the new stories, a reluctance to accept either the spiral of decay or the sudden eruption of destruction which leads inescapably to the end of the world. Rather these stories cleave to the thought that while there's life there's hope, hope of a new and better world to replace the old one that just ended.

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The City of the Future

Gated Communities and Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* by Carol Ann Kerry-Green

A lot of our ride was along one neighborhood wall after another; some a block long, some two blocks, some five... Up toward the hills there were walled estates – one big house and a lot of shacky little dependencies where the servants lived. We didn't pass anything like that today. In fact we passed a couple of neighborhoods so poor that their walls were made up of unmortared rocks, chunks of concrete, and trash. Then there were the pitiful, unwalled

residential areas. A lot of the houses were trashed – burned, vandalized, infested with drunks or druggies or squatted in by homeless families with their filthy, gaunt, half-naked children. Their kids were wide awake and watching us this morning. I feel sorry for the little ones, but the ones my age and older make me nervous. We ride down the middle of the cracked street, and the kids come out and stand along the curb to stare at us. They just stand

and stare. I think if there were only one or two of us, or if they couldn't see our guns, they might try to pull us down and steal our bikes, our clothes, our shoes, whatever. Then what? Rape? Murder?"

n Octavia Butler's novel *Parable of the Sower* it is 2024 in the city of Robledo, a mixed-race, middle-class city on the outskirts of Los Angeles. Lauren, the protagonist, lives with her family in a walled neighbourhood; her step-mother teaches the neighbourhood children in the family home and her father, a Baptist Clergyman, preaches his sermons in the front room. Lauren's family and neighbours are not rich, but they earn just enough to continue to pay their bills and retain a semblance of normal life, albeit behind walls where they are prepared to defend their families and homes by violence if necessary. Robledo is divided up into these walled enclaves, where families such as Lauren's fight for survival and to keep back the mass of the poor who live outside their walls with little or no protection from the ever-spiralling crime, poverty and drug abuse.

A not very pleasant image of the future of the city is portrayed in this work of fiction, but Butler's walled neighbourhoods have their beginnings in the increasing number of gated communities that are springing up all over America and in other urban areas of the world. As the world's population moves towards increased urbanisation, there isn't always the ability to create sufficient housing for the lower income families. In many parts of the world, especially in Third World countries, shanty towns have grown up

on the edges of cities, where people live in tents, cardboard shacks and in the open itself. Many of the inhabitants of these shanty towns scrape a living from scavenging amongst the discarded rubbish of their better-off neighbours. The homeless families Butler describes in the above quotation survive in similar ways; but these scavengers live in the city amongst, yet cut off from, their middle-class neighbours.

In an article published on the World Wide Web, G. Cavallier proposes the growth of urban apartheid as our cities become three-tiered: the rich, the poor and somewhere in the middle the wage-earners – Lauren's family in *Parable*. Cavallier states that upwards of three billion people now live in cities

with twenty having a population of ten million, twenty more with populations of five to ten million and over 250 with populations numbering one to five million. People move to the city for a variety of reasons, but the search for work is still the biggest attraction, although work is often no longer available. The very fabric of how cities are organised is changing as industry fails and businesses move out of city centres away from their traditional employment areas; leaving the once working class trapped in rundown inner-city areas. Cavallier suggests that more and more wage earners are becoming insecure in their surroundings, seeking other ways of living in their environment. New developments are often private, protected from those around them by fences and gates, whilst some established neighbourhoods are retrofitting them.

Edward J. Blakely and Mary Gail Snyder, two American academics, have done some research on the phenomena of gated communities. They have traced the rise of gated communities from their beginnings as retirement villages and compounds of the super-rich to today's middle to upper-middle class enclaves that have sprung up all over America; estimating their population at between three to four million people, perhaps even up to eight million. They have identified three types of gated community: Lifestyle, Élite and Security Zone

Lifestyle communities provide security and separation for the pursuit of leisure activities such as golf and country-club developments. These also include retirement villages, where young people are restricted to visiting but are not allowed to move in. Other developments include places like Mission Viejo

on the outskirts of Los Angeles, a planned community where neighbourhood committees decide rules for residents to abide by: such as the one that dictates that you have to get the architectural committee to agree to your choice of colour for your home before you can go ahead and paint it. Based on a Spanish theme, it also includes an Olympic training swimming pool which attracts swimmers from all over the country. Edward Soja, a Los Angeles architect, calls these communities 'hyper-realities' where 'the copy, the real fake becomes the focus of one's life'.²

Élite communities are enclaves of the rich and famous, new executive home developments for the upper-middle class, where the gates symbolise distinction and prestige. The communities in *Parable* are walled estates, big houses complete with accommodation where the servants live; these communities are inaccessible to the middle class as well as the poor.

Security zones, where the fear of crime and outsiders has led to defensive fortification, are often in the deteriorating inner-city and inner-suburbs; they are an attempt by many to barricade themselves and their property from the perceived threat from outside. Places like this fund the gates from increased taxation, paying for services such as guards on the gates and private patrols by security firms.

Butler's Robledo is made up of lots of security zone neighbourhoods. They provide their own policing, security, medical care and teaching. The only things they need to go outside their community walls for are work that pays for them to continue their lifestyle (though Lauren's father, a university

professor, does most of his work by computer linkup, only going into the university itself once a week) and to buy food and other necessities.

Compare this to Park La Brea which is situated in the Central Metropolitan area of Los Angeles and consists of 4253 apartments and has a population of approximately ten thousand; it caters for a mix of people, from attorneys to Hollywood people. The gardens and grounds are a great draw in the city and since it has been a gated community the fear of crime has waned considerably – though the level of crime overall has not fallen dramatically. In Edward Soja's video on Los Angeles, a young couple who have just moved to this area recount their experiences. The young woman wishes for a safe place to bring up her

child, she feels safe at Park La Brea where she can take walks and sit in the grounds. But, despite the number of families living in the area, she has found it difficult to make contact. Her husband who works outside the gated area misses the street life of New York. He calls life in a gated community a cellular existence, moving from home to office to restaurant to amenities and back again by car without ever experiencing the wider community as he did in

But it isn't just the communities themselves that are gating up their neighbourhoods. In South Central Los Angeles the police have barricaded streets where the most murders have been committed. The area is subject to gang warfare as newer immigrant communities move in to join the older established immigrant communities, conflict rages over security and territory. Operation Cul-de-Sac run by the Los Angeles Police Department has created drug enforcement zones where barriers were erected and 24-hour foot patrols introduced to try and cut back on the killings.

A Community Youth Gang Services member mediates between the gangs and tries to keep the young in school and off the streets where gang warfare is routinely carried out with guns and knives – activities that the gang members refer to as 'gang banging'. Many of them see no alternative future for themselves: their fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters are all members, or have been members, of gangs. The barriers that have been erected in their neighbourhoods have been erected not to keep people out, but to keep people in. These people are seen as the undesirables of Los Angeles, an underclass who have no job

prospects and are often excluded from rising living standards.

Yet, just a few miles from this area is the city of Baldwin Hills, a mainly black middle-class area since the 1960s. As the middle-class white population moved out, the middle-class blacks moved in, however, the shop owners for the most part moved out with the whites. The retailers believed such an area would turn into a ghetto, however the socio-economic status has remained the same and the retailers have been won back by the high profile state-of-the-art security provided at the local mall. Here, cameras watch shopper's and retailer's every move, camera operators are able to

talk to individuals through microphones in the cameras. An on-site LAPD station provides six police officers to patrol the mall. Surrounded by fencing, which the designers have tried to make aesthetically beautiful, and security gates, shoppers and retailers feel safe inside the mall, and the 'bad element' of society is kept out.

This mall in Baldwin Hills is echoed in Butler's society in *The Parable of the Sower*. It is 2027 and Lauren's community lives in fear of attack. The neighbourhood sets up its own patrol to raise the alarm if there is an attack. They are trying to protect their community, their livelihoods, a future

version of Neighbourhood Watch. But their plans are in vain, as their houses are set on fire and the neighbourhood invaded: "The gate had been destroyed. Our attackers had driven an ancient truck through it." Their watchers killed before they could raise the alarm. Lauren manages to escape and survives her first night out in the open. Later on she meets up with two more members of her community who have survived; the rest are dead or left for dead. The only alternative left to Lauren and her companions now is to take to the road, to join the thousands that are already walking the roads until they can find a better place to live where jobs pay in real money.

Before they set off on their journey, Lauren and her companion visit Hanning Joss, a big security store, to spend some of Lauren's hoarded money on supplies they will need for their journey: "Hanning, as I had heard many times on the radio, was one of the safest places in the city. If you didn't like their sniffers, metal detectors, package restrictions, armed guards, and willingness to strip-search anyone they thought was suspicious on the way in or out, you could shop somewhere else. The store was full of people eager to put up with the inconvenience and invasion of privacy if only they could buy the things they needed in peace."⁴

There are many parallels between Butler's society as predicted in *Parable of the Sower* and society today. This, given that many science fiction authors are mainly writing about the present, is not surprising. Is there anything that we can do then to stop the spread of this disintegration of society, a disintegration characterised by Blakely and Snyder in their statement that people are becoming taxpayers rather than citizens, exchanging money for services but taking no active role in democracy? The gated communities are "in effect sealing themselves off from the outside world. This has the potential to reduce social contact and weaken bonds of mutual responsibility."⁵

How can we avoid today's gated communities becoming Butler's walled neighbourhoods? Planning and zoning has always played a major part in any city's development. Industry was confined to certain areas, retail to others, with the workers needed for industry living close by and the centres of cities closing down after the workers have gone home. As the old manufacturing industries have closed down and are being replaced by the new service industries, new ways of working and living need to be explored. People are no longer tied to accommodation near to their place of work. Home working and better transport links

mean many can afford to move to where they wish to live. But this is leading to the deterioration of the city centres.

We can try and avoid Butler's future by paying attention to the needs of all levels of society. City centres need to become not only places to shop and work, but places to live and relax. Brownfield sites within many of our cities could be developed to provide new communities. New industries such as call centres could be encouraged to set up their businesses within already established communities and in city centres instead of in business parks on the outskirts of the cities. If people are cutting themselves

off from the rest of society in order to provide the services they require, then ways need to be looked at to see if those services can be provided for everyone. Otherwise those left outside will suffer from decreasing services as those inside pay only towards what they receive.

Not everyone believes that gated communities are a bad thing for society. Ronald Maheu, a town councillor in Toronto, Canada, points out that for generations we have used gates to identify specific areas and establish a sense of place. He doesn't see gated communities as raising the "spectre of armed camps of suburban residents barricading themselves against the onslaught of the city", but sees

the truth of the matter as being "more mundane: generally a group of 'empty nesters' who share similar attributes and attitudes with their neighbors, comforted by the fact that they have a community mini-golf facility within walking distance, and that all the houses are painted beige." 6

As to the future Butler predicts in her fiction? We'll just have to wait twenty-three years to find out. In the meantime, we can see the seeds that have been sown in large urban areas throughout the world. Can we change the face of our urban societies to accommodate the needs of the rich, the poor and the wage-earner in one single city? Only the future will tell.

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Bookspotting: Home is Where the Wind Blows - The autobiography of cosmologist Fred Hoyle

Hoyle seems

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n 1995 I wanted to find the names of Hoyle and Fowler's coauthors in their celebrated paper on the synthesis of elements in the stars. *Britannica* was no help (I'm not saying it wasn't there, I just couldn't find it.), so I made a quick raid on the local reference library. Short of time, I borrowed four likely books, a Gribbin, two popular astronomy textbooks and *Lifecloud* by the man himself, Fred Hoyle, with D.T. Wickramasinghe.

The textbooks were useless but, of course, Gribbin turned up trumps. (It was the Burbidges, Mr & Mrs what done it, if you must know) I had a quick look through *Lifecloud*, got interested and

read the lot. Hoyle and Wickramasinghe's basic premise is that life has evolved elsewhere in the universe and reached the Earth from space, as bacterial spores and vira, via comet impacts and/or later arriving comet debris and dust. Not a new idea but certainly one that had been out of favour for a while.

I have no qualms with this premise, but my views don't count. The theory has not been well-received by the scientific establishment and there is some evidence of Hoyle's bitterness over this point in the book. A lot of facts are marshalled in evidence and many seem very reasonable; infra red spectra of dust clouds in space, organics in meteorites, the Earth's passage through cometary dust clouds and debris orbits, the longevity and hardiness of such spores.

One fault is that they try to explain too much with the theory. We have ample evidence that bacteria and insects evolve very rapidly, in

response to pressure and stimuli such as antibiotics and pesticides, so we have no need to postulate new strains from space to account for sudden new epidemics.

Why am I telling you this? Well, they also suggest that there has not been sufficient time or fossil evidence to account for the evolution of complex organs, such as the eye, on Earth. They suggest that DNA from space incorporates 'sub-routines', analogous to standard loops in modern computer programmes, which allow rapid development of such complex organs when the right conditions arise. So here we have a rationale for space being full of life, DNA-based at that, and not too different to life on Earth in one of its various epochs. This must be welcome news for sf writers, well, some of them.

As the universe is probably three times older than the Earth this gives the random processes of evolution lots more time to come up with everything we see around us. Hoyle seems happy with Darwinism as long as it happens off the Earth and a long time ago. An interesting book, which prompted me to borrow a copy of Hoyle's autobiography, *Home is where the Wind Blows*.

I found this a messy book which hops around in time and

place and left out points I was particularly interested in. Fred has written a lot, relatively speaking, of sf, for example *The Black Cloud* (1957, a classic really), and *Ossian's Ride* (1959). Not the sort of thing we usually expect of a former Plumian Professor of Astronomy at Cambridge and one time Director of The Institute of Theoretical Astronomy. There is no word of why or how and any consequences, though he does, offhandedly, mention having written *The Black Cloud*.

This autobiography (not his first, he also wrote *The Small World of Fred Hoyle: An Autobiography*, 1986), is quite lengthy

and detailed; encompassing his schooling, Cambridge student days, wartime experiences. The latter include an episode paralleling Asimov's story of the computer that won the war. Hoyle developed a method by which the navy's early radar systems could be used to decide if an aircraft was high up, but a long way off (not an immediate threat) or near and low, and probably lethal. This depended on a series of reasonable assumptions all subject to significant error. Hoyle, a wizard at maths, worked out that these errors would be selfcancelling and the results would be more than adequate. It did not work in practice because users all made cautious assumptions, on the basis that the wrong result could be lethal for themselves. So the errors all added up in the same direction instead of cancelling.

The book continues through Hoyle's career and other activities; Cambridge politics, UK

science policy politics, climbing the Munros, walking in The Lake District, meetings with (and sketches of) other shapers of twentieth century physics and astronomy but saying nothing about his sf.

A tang of bitterness and disappointment with the academic and scientific reception of some of his work, such the evolution of life and continuous creation, infuses the book occasionally but not overwhelmingly. Hoyle is an intelligent man with interesting, if unconventional, views on subjects that interest me. I enjoyed the book, despite its faults, and found it something of a page-turner. Maybe it's an autobiography of ideas with the characterisations, apart from a revealing angle on his childhood, leaving something to be desired. Sound familiar?

It finishes with a look at his theory of continuous creation, which Hoyle feels can solve problems in cosmology that the Big Bang (he originated this description) cannot address, and the place of life and God (is life God's means of observing every sparrow fall?) in the Universe.

So serendipity found a couple of interesting books, maybe you would enjoy them too.

Confessions of A Science Fiction Addict

by N. M. Browne

ou've probably read more science fiction and fantasy than I have. I read 'out' – crime, historical novels, even the odd literary novel. I don't have a problem – but then I did the maths – a book or two a week for thirty years, more than half of which have been in the genre. I've probably read over a thousand science fiction and fantasy books. I know, other people do more, but it's got so bad that I can't even remember what most of them were about, let alone what they were called and who wrote them. Then, I started to think about what I could have learnt if even a fraction of those volumes had been non-fiction. I began to realise

how many substantial reading lists of literary, prize winning and classic fiction I could have read instead and I panicked. I wondered if I should have, could have, read otherwise.

It's not even as if I'm well-read within the genre. Of all those thousand plus books only a fraction of them were good or well respected by aficionados. If you were to run through the list of your favourite science fiction and fantasy books, it's unlikely that I would have read more than a couple of them. I have read compulsively and indiscriminately – stuff you buy in second-hand bookshops and jumble sales, whatever was in the rack at the local

newsagents, whatever I could find in the library. Considerations of quality have rarely featured in the buying decision – length and the possession of a full complement of legible pages have been more significant; "Reduced to clear!" is one of the most exciting phrases in the English language. That's what

I mean by addiction.

There is a further element to this

clear!" is one of

the most

exciting phrases

in the English

language

There is a further element to this compulsion; if you were to ask me what I'm reading now, the answer is, as always, nothing – I have just finished *Sharpe's Prey* (non-genre – good read) and I'm about to start *Ravenheart* by David Gemmell. If I was in the middle of a book I wouldn't answer your question, I wouldn't be writing this, I'd be reading. This is antisocial, addictive behaviour. When I read a long book my children subsist on frozen oven chips, which I barely manage to heat through. I speak mostly in grunts and will do anything

required of me "in a minute..." Reading *Ash* could have ended my marriage if my husband were less understanding. I read a book at one sitting, and if that is physically impossible then I read it in two or three. I will give up sleep and endure daylong headaches to do what must be done. I have always done it and I have always felt guilty about it: I took five fat books on honeymoon; I took *Get Off the Unicorn* into the labour ward – as a form of pain relief for the first stage of labour it was as good as entinox, though less effective for serious pain (It's too hard to strangle your partner, scream and still turn the pages).

I discovered *Vector* rather late in my reading career, so have always felt that this habit is not something a middle-aged mother of four ought to have (not in Richmond anyway).

I know this is ridiculous but, before you judge me too harshly, in the sure knowledge that the value of such work is self-evident, you must know that mine has always been a furtive, solitary habit. I have never attended a convention. I can't think of one friend, apart from my husband, who shares my taste in fiction. I live in the kind of place where people join book clubs. I have lots of friends who talk intelligently and knowledgeably about books and the subject of my preferred reading is an embarrassment; for a start, I always have to explain that 'fantasy' in this context does not involve pornography. I can see them wondering if it's polite to ask what I'm reading at the moment then, having asked, wondering what the appropriate reaction should be to the revelation that I've just finished reading part seven of an epic called something like The Path of the Unbeknighted that is about the size of the London Yellow Pages with embossed silver lettering all over the cover.

This reaction has got worse since I started writing fantasy for children. I modestly explain that I've written a story about magic and sword fighting and that kind of whole Celtic thing and friends look concerned, worried even. Is this (moderately) normal looking woman actually hovering on the edge of those nether worlds of madness we all fight so hard to avoid? Has she never outgrown *The Hobbit*? Has she no literary aesthetic?

Whatever is the stumbling block to understanding why someone might read this stuff becomes a boulder in the way of understanding why anyone should want to write it. Everybody knows that writers should write about what they know.

"But do you know about that stuff?" asked a friend, a successful writer of sex comedies, in a tone of bemused incredulity.

"Well, you know..." I began vaguely, "arrows thud..."

"Yeah," she agreed "and penises throb." We shrugged in acknowledgement of our shared grasp of the value of cliché. I'd be surprised if she's done all the things she writes about, but, working in a recognisable version of this world, friends might question her sex life but not her sanity.

Writing a book is generally seen as good; lots of people do it, have done it or are about to do it any moment soon, if they could only find the time. My local area jumps to the rhythm of the clatter of keyboards. Writers are everywhere, but children's

fantasy? It might just about be OK – if I were J.K. Rowling.

In this milieu even the least analytical person would start to ask "why?" Is it only as I wrote as a stroppy ten year old: "Mr Spock is my favourite TV character because he appeals to me." Is that all that can be said or is further analysis possible? What is it that makes me keep reading this stuff and still loving it even when it's bad? (If you are looking for complex critical analysis here, stop reading now. This is not that kind of article.) You might read science fiction and fantasy for more profound reasons but my justification for four or five thousand hours

of my life not spend mastering the piano/tennis/nuclear physics is:

- 1. I like storytelling There can sometimes be too much story and not enough telling but too often in non-genre books it's the other way round. When I've read four or five pages of the main character's musings on the inside of their fridge/diary/record collection, I long to cut to the chase or at the very least to an alien abduction that would put things into perspective.
- 2. I like escapism my life is fine, but that leaves me free to imagine another one totally unrelated to the one I lead, where the question of what to cook for dinner has more to do with the availability of hydroponics, the biodiversity of a new planet or hunting in the Elven forest than the shelves at Sainsbury's and Jamie Oliver/Nigella Lawson. When I read I want to go places I could never visit.
- 3. I like ideas. I like stories that explore what it is to be human, what may or may not distinguish us from an alien, an orc or a neurologically/chemically enhanced *Hom. Sap.* I like twists that make you reassess the story you've just read, the universe and one's own suppositions about it. I like to be made to think about the world I think I know by being shown a world I don't. I'm still haunted by books I read in my early teens: *Dune, Foundation*, the Mars of Ray Bradbury, the strange sensibility of Alan Garner and the looming presence of Gormenghast.
- 4. I like strangeness: images of flying dragons, wingless garuda, distant suns. I may never have seen attack ships burning off Orion's belt but I think I have and that's what counts.
- 5. I want to be someone else when I read, someone really different, unique extraordinary, not another middle-aged character reflecting on a mid-life crisis and lost youth. I want to be an explorer, a stunningly intelligent scientist, an interspecies diplomat, a telepath, a space cadet, a sorceress, and a mercenary soldier. I want to fly, dive, battle for the good of humanity, take on the evil power-crazed magician, restore world peace and end alien domination. I want it all and I don't want to get off the sofa.

I don't know if that's enough of a justification, but I know that nothing will change even if it isn't. I couldn't stop if I wanted to. I knew *you'd* understand.

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First Impressions

Book Reviews edited by Steve Jeffery

All novels marked: \square are eligible for the 2001 BSFA Award for Best Novel. All collections and anthologies marked: $\mathscr L$ contain stories that are eligible for the 2001 BSFA Award for Best Short Fiction.

Anselm Audley – Heresy

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

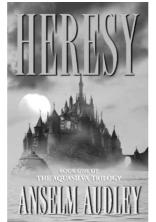
Earthlight, 2001, 405pp, £10.00 ISBN 0-7432-0950-8

Audley made the headlines almost two years ago when he sold his first novel at the age of seventeen, for a reportedly large advance, so I've been quite looking forward to seeing for myself what made this book, *Heresy*, Book One of The Aquasilva Trilogy, special.

Aquasilva is a world where everything is surrounded by water to the extent that even continents appear little more than large islands, most of which are ruled by 'The Domain', a nearfundamentalist religious order. The Domain have their own elite warrior troops called 'The Sacri' whose sole purpose in life appears to be seeking out and burning heretics – this title being applied to anyone who does not adhere strictly to the tenets of Ranthas.

Lepidor is a poor realm that relies on its gemstone mine for its existence, until a rich vein of far more valuable iron is discovered. Cathan, the young son of the Count of Lepidor, realises the implications of this discovery for Lepidor's economy and sets off to break the news to his

father, who is attending a clan congress in the capital. Cathan hopes that trade agreements might be struck with a large merchant house in order to transport the valuable iron. Whilst journeying to join his father, Cathan discovers a plot to unleash a new age of fundamentalism on Aquasilva. He also learns of 'dissidents' – whom the Domain prefer to call Heretics – who are working to break the iron grip of the Domain.



Having found a merchant house and struck a deal, Cathan is abducted, and his world changes forever as he learns the truth about the Heretic movement, calling the Domain's power and worship of Ranthas into question.

Heresy is indeed a novel of note. Although it has all the ingredients of a current day 'high fantasy' (young inexperienced protagonist/hero roped into events against his will, political scheming and plotting, unrequited love and 'evil' religion), the world Audley has created is different and engaging enough to keep one turning the pages. There is a nice blend of 'magic' and technology throughout (the main transport being by Manta – a technologically advanced submarine modelled on the Manta Ray) and the characters are rounded enough for the reader to care about what happens to them. It is quite a gripping read, and I shall certainly look forward to the story developing in future books.

If I have any gripes about this book they are not about the author or the story, but to do with

the woeful copyediting and proof-reading of this book. I don't recall ever reading a book with so many sentences made meaningless by typographical errors. Had I paid £10 for this book I would be wanting a refund – after all, one would return anything else in life that is clearly faulty. My heart goes out to the author who cannot be remotely impressed by his publisher's production of his first novel.

Cherith Baldry – Exiled From Camelot 🕮

Green Knight, 2001, 312pp, £10.99 ISBN 1-928999-16-6

Reviewed by Fiona Grove

The exile of the title is Sir Kay, one of the Knights of the Round Table and High Seneschal to Arthur, and follows from the death of

one of Arthur's favourites, trusted to his care, while Kay was escaping from captivity on a campaign in northern England. Leaving Camelot, Kay travels up to Carlisle where he becomes an unlikely ally of Briant, a rebellious northern lord who holds allegiance to King Claudas of Brittany, and his sorcerous wife, Brisane.

Along the way, Kay also manages to become seneschal to Lady Alienor, chatelaine of a small northern castle, which has few capable men to defend it, the rest having been called up by Lord Briant to attack Arthur at the northern outpost of Carlisle. Kay helps to rally the local villagers to defend their homes and gains trust and friendship in unexpected places.

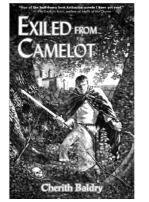
Throughout the whole story, Sirs Gareth and Gawain are the only people who maintain their faith in Kay, which becomes more difficult as more fingers are pointed at Kay for his supposed betrayal. At the same time, Brisane is busy sowing as many seeds of doubt in as many Knights of the Round

Table as possible, using some fairly underhand means, and showing no scruples whatsoever.

The basic story was good, following Kay's journey from Camelot to Carlisle and back, and also including some strong lesser characters, such as Lady Alienor, and the unlikeable Brian des Isles. However I didn't really warm to any of the characters and the whole story left me feeling something was missing.

This is the first of Cherith Baldry's books that I have read, and I couldn't quite make up my mind who it was written for, whether for young adult or adult readers. I think it would probably suit the younger audience better than the older. The book contains sorcery and intrigue, and although at times I felt a certain sympathy with Kay, I think it

lacked some of the depth that would have made him really come to life for me.



J.G. Ballard – *The Terminal Beach* J.G. Ballard – *The Voices of Time*

Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

Phoenix, 2001, 221p, £6.99 ISBN 0-575-40131-1 Phoenix, 2001, 197 pp, £6.99 ISBN 0-575-40130-3

It is coming up for forty years since these rich and disturbing stories first teased our subconscious. Ballard's position as science fiction avant-gardist enriches both sf and that amorphous territory known as the mainstream, among which his beaches, deltas, wrecked urban landscapes and crystalline jungles form fertile psychic landscapes. Tellingly, the first story in The Terminal Beach is that standard – even hoary – trope of the 1960s: a space expedition. But even more tellingly, it is 'A Question of Re-Entry' which the story poses: the astronaut is off-stage, the space vehicle is scattered over chaotic jungle and the focus is on precisely what 'the conquest of space' means to our mammalian drives. The title story collapses exterior and interior landscapes, with the 'strange ciphers', both natural and artificial, of the island forming the 'synthetic landscape' of Traven's existential captivity. The prosesnapshots (this was Ballard's first 'condensed novel', told in hyperrealist scenes divorced from linear mundane realism) emphasise Ballard's guest to both examine and get beneath surfaces. Some stories, such as 'The Drowned Giant', are fabulist rather than sf; in others (e.g. 'The Illuminated Man') science fiction's analytical approach underlines a cool but rich poetry resulting in the bizarre image of the first paragraph.

A minor quibble, though: this edition perpetuates (p. 86) a typo "Simultaneoulsy" from the 1964 Gollancz (1st edn) which

appears in several others (Dent, 1984) but is corrected in the 1964 and 1974 Penguin editions.

The title story of The Voices of Time is Ballard's classic story of entropic 'inner space'. Various aspects of time weave in and out of these tales. 'Chronopolis' gives us a world where clocks are banned: 'The Garden of Time' makes us consider what we mean when we describe a work of art as 'timeless'. Science fiction writers may, or may not, have 'predicted' the exotic gadgetry future generations amuse themselves with, but surely hardly any have extrapolated the undercurrents which make up the tide of the future as vividly as has Ballard in stories like 'The Watch-Towers' – in part occupying similar territory to stories like John Wyndham's 'Pawley's Peepholes', in part a surreal rewriting of the way we conduct our lives half-aware of the CCTV camera over every public space. Ballard's achievement in this story, though, as in so many others, lies in his resolution to avoid the jokey satire of Wyndham's story and the temptation to ham-fisted jeremiad. The unexplained nature of the watchtowers and the population's sudden change of perception suggests a wider pool of interpretation. These stories pack their literary and semiotic punches as powerfully today as they did when first published even more so, perhaps. There are few writers who can compete with Ballard.

Gregory Benford – Artifact 🕮

Orbit, 2001, 416pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-84149-062-8

Reviewed by Colin Bird

This is the first British publication of a novel originally published in the US in 1985 and available here on import for some time. It is a near-future thriller which mixes archaeology with the author's characteristic brand of speculative physics.

Greece is coming under the sway of a hard-line left-wing government, and a team of American archaeologists are feeling increasingly unwelcome at their excavation of a 3500 year-old Mycenean village. Rivalry between the Americans and their Greek partners threatens to explode just as an important discovery is made. The Americans break into a burial chamber and find a strange artifact; a cube with a protruding amber pyramid with strange fluorescent qualities.

The discovery is hidden from their Greek co-workers and the

Americans bring in a materials expert to examine the relic. As the political situation worsens the scientists take the extreme decision to steal the find and take it to America where it can be studied properly. The operation goes awry and a micro-singularity, which has been trapped inside the cube, is released into the environment. The oblivious scientists take the damaged cube to the US where they discover a second singularity and realise the threat the cosmic phenomenon poses to life on Earth.

As you expect from this author, the archaeological background to the first phase of this story is impeccably well-researched and the merging of two strands of scientific speculation is cleverly handled. However, the narrative's jarring shifts into thriller mode are less successful. The American

archaeologists happily conspire to rob the Greeks of the titular artifact because the country is being taken over by a Marxist regime which, Benford has us presume, will stifle scientific progress and leave the discovery languishing in some state-controlled storage facility. Maybe so, but the search for scientific truth often masquerades as cultural imperialism (e.g. the ransacking of tribal herbal lore by western multi-nationals). Maybe the author's notions of progress are tainted by his role as advisor

to the White House.

Artifact represents a dated worldview and its gosh-wow revelations about black holes seem less entrancing than they would have sixteen years ago when the book was first published (can any physicist write sf and not mention black holes?). That aside, Benford is one of the few scientists who can write convincing characters and this book provides plenty of entertainment for his fans.

Stephen Bowkett – Ice: The Wintering Book One Reviewed by Penny Hill

Orion, June 2001, 232pp, £4.99 ISBN 1-85881-873-7

Ice (the first part of *The Wintering*) is Stephen Bowkett's first non-shared world work and it is interesting to see how he is developing as a novelist. His contributions to the *Dreamtime* series were enjoyable but perhaps lacking in depth. Now we are introduced to a world entirely of his own making, one where an initial impression of an idyllic rural society is undermined by its inhabitants' fearful reactions to the sunset or "ungathering".

The adult reader swiftly realises that this is an artificial environment, highly controlled by something unidentified, referred to only as "the Goddess", who (or which) uses advanced technology to run this interior world. I think the intended younger audience might take longer to pick up on these cues, depending on their familiarity with the genre.

Our protagonist Kell is an amiable enough dreamer, looking for something more than the simple farming life laid out for him, whose search leads him out of the world he has known and into a harsh new environment. Unfortunately, I did not find him very compelling as a character and consequently did not care greatly what befalls him — perhaps because I didn't feel there was anything really new in his situation and reactions.

The storytelling itself is sometimes pedestrian, verging almost on the pedantic, indicating a slight mis-judging of the audience. It seems to talk down to its intended teenage audience.

I didn't really find anything new in this book, not in the world-building or the ideas or the story. I found myself groaning when the hoary old cliché of discovering what books are was included – although I suppose it is effective enough the first time a reader comes across it.

I found it took me a while to pick up on the perspective of this book. I was originally expecting our hero to go out, have his adventure and then return home prepared to settle down, but by halfway through the novel it seemed things were being led off in new and promising directions. Maybe the climax to the series will be a return to liberate Kell's friends and neighbours or maybe it will be about choosing to adapt to the new harsh world outside.

There is enough potential here to indicate that Stephen Bowkett is a writer worth watching as he develops. I don't feel he has fully hit his stride yet, but maybe in a few books time he'll come out with something worth getting excited about.

Chris Bunch – Corsair

Orbit, 2001, 406pp, £10.99, ISBN 1-84149 034-2

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

Corsair is a sword and sorcery fantasy, with rather less sorcery than sword – or less sorcery than cutlass, for this is a piratical adventure bringing to mind films such as *The Crimson Pirate* as much as modern fantasy novels.

When Gareth Radnor's village on the coast of the kingdom of Saros is raided by Linyati slavers, only Gareth and a few others, including his friends Thom and Knoll, survive. Thom and Knoll are taken in by neighbouring villages, but Gareth is sent to his uncle Pol, a merchant in the city of Ticao, and expected to work as a clerk.

Although his uncle and aunt are kind to him, Gareth loathes the work, and longs for the chance of adventure on the high seas, and above all else the opportunity for revenge on the Linyati who slew his parents, and who continue to raid the Saros coast. He does get his chance when he incurs the enmity of a powerful nobleman, and his uncle has no choice but to send him away from Ticao on one of his merchant ships. What follows is a series of adventures in which Gareth, reunited with Thom and Knoll and accompanied by the magician Labala, who he knew as a youth in

Ticao, becomes a famously successful 'privateer', and plans his revenge against the Linyati. The most conventional fantasy element, the magic, is convincing, with magicians expecting to be paid for the spells they cast, and the magic being useful, controlling the weather and translating foreign languages, as well as more dramatic spells featuring sea-monsters.

This book is an undemanding, uncomplicated fantasy-adventure yarn featuring pirates, sea-battles, treasure, treks through jungles, and a dash of magic, and as such is readable – if you overlook the minor irritation of few paragraphs being more than two sentences long. What the book is not is any sort of realistic portrayal of the grimness of fighting on sea or on land; ships do get sunk, characters do get run through, but the tone of the book remains jovial overall, its pirates decent fellows on the whole. A swift glance at the shelves of fantasy in any high-street book-shop will yield any number of recently published titles that show the genre has matured in terms of style and subject matter in the last few years. *Corsair* seems to be the product of a more innocent age.

Isobelle Carmody - Ashling: Book Three of the Obernewtyn Chronicles

Tor, 2001, 426pp, \$26.95 ISBN 0-312-86956-8

Reviewed by Penny Hill

As I was reading this third book in the Obernewtyn Chronicles, I became aware that this is a series that has now thoroughly gripped me. I care about the characters and I want to know what happens to them next. These books are improving all the time and are now well-written in an understated way.

The narrative drive continues and our heroine Elspeth comes to realise she is not always right, nor is she always in charge of her own actions. The whole question of the 'Ashling' – true or

prophetic dream which must be obeyed – conflicts with Elspeth's ideas of free will and taking responsibility for your own actions. She questions how much she is being manipulated by others; the futuretellers who relate these dreams and the animals who have given her mythic status.

The characters are gradually maturing into adulthood and the focus on personal responsibility reflects this. The character Domick has had to assume to spy successfully on the council has

coarsened his nature and we sense that more is going on with him underneath the surface. Elspeth is brought up short by some of the consequences of her earlier actions.

The hints of love in the second volume are picked up on and expanded here in a realistic and unsentimental manner. There is a strong sense that personal relationships can fall apart under pressure just as easily as they can be formed.

As well as a greater sense of personal responsibility, there is also a wider awareness of the outside world. More knowledge is rediscovered about the 'Beforetimers' world - our present without everything being laid open and obvious to the characters. The question of the gypsies and their uneasy relationship with the rest of the world is drawn to Elspeth's attention, as is the faltering alliance between the rebels.

Slavery becomes a far larger problem than a mere plot inconvenience and one that Elspeth is unable to solve within this volume, losing one of her closest friends in an attempt to find out more about the slave trade and whether it is tacitly sanctioned by the council.

Meanwhile, the sense of magical power continues to grow as the Misfits are forced to exhibit their talents in their search for allies and Elspeth displays remarkable powers of self-healing that she does not understand and cannot explain.

I am left longing to know what happens next and looking forward to the day when I will be able to re-read the entire series sequentially.

Ann Chamberlin – The Merlin of the Oak Wood **Reviewed by Cherith Baldry**

This book is the second in a series tracing the story of Joan of Arc, following The Merlin of St Gilles' Well. I haven't read the earlier book, but its events are referred to in this novel, and I didn't have any difficulty in picking up the story.

The major - and in my opinion the more successful - part of the book tells of Jehannette d'Arc as she grows up. She loves her family and her village, but she continually feels alienated from them, as she becomes aware that her talents and desires lie in war, rather than in the domestic duties of a girl of her time. At the same time, she shrinks from the idea that she may be La Pucelle, destined to lead France to victory against the English. It's easy to become involved with her, and I found her conflicts compelling.

The central character of the other part of the story is Gilles de Rais, otherwise known as Bluebeard, here presented as a young man dedicated to saving France, with dreams of pledging his service to a noble leader as the

Knights of the Round Table served King Arthur. His chivalric ambitions sit uneasily with his commitment to witchcraft. While I thought that the mixture of Christian and pagan practices works effectively in the village life of Jehannette and her family, it was

less convincing in Gilles' circle. Some of his activities, like the use of a dying child in a magical ritual, make it hard to sympathise with his character. I couldn't relate to him as I could to

Jehannette, because I suspect Chamberlin hadn't thoroughly thought through the moral implications of what he does.

Tor, 2001, 333pp, \$24.95, ISBN 0-312-87284-4

For readers looking for the Matter of Britain, the Arthurian themes are thin. The Merlin of the title is not Arthur's enchanter. 'Merlin' seems to be used as a designation for a pagan priest, and I'd guess that in each book a different character will take on the mantle of Merlin. In this particular novel Père Michel is Jehannette's mentor, and comes over effectively, but doesn't stand as centrally as one might expect.

The book is highly readable, and the historical background comes over as authentic. However, I found it slightly disappointing, especially after reading the glowing comments on the first book quoted on the dust jacket. The

ideas are interesting, and the character of Jehannette at least is strong enough to make me want to read the next episode of her story. But taken as a whole, the novel could have been so much



Simon Clark – The Night of the Triffids **Reviewed by Mark Plummer**

Hodder & Stoughton, 2001, 406 pp, ISBN £17.99 340 76600 X

On Wednesday 8 May in an unspecified year, Bill Masen awoke

to a world gone blind and the beginning of a classic. Thirty years later, it's the turn of his son David to awake to universal darkness. Here we go again.

This, however, isn't a precise revisitation of The Great Blinding which destroyed human society in John Wyndham's The Day of the Triffids (1951, originally serialised in Colliers 1950). David Masen, born after that catastrophic meteor shower (or whatever it was), still has his sight. It's simply that the world has been consumed by an all pervading darkness. And once again the triffids are ready to take advantage of the situation. You'd almost think they were waiting...

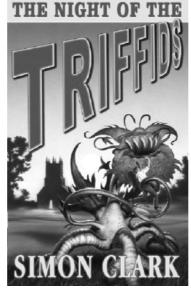
The community of the Isle of Wight established at the end of Day... has been regrouping and rebuilding in the postcatastrophe world, working towards the ultimate aim of "driv[ing] the triffids back... from the face of the land they have usurped." They have grown in strength and numbers in the intervening years, but now this darkness, natural or unnatural, has descended and once

again humanity is on the defensive. David, a pilot, is charged with trying to establish the nature of the darkness, a quest that leads him to discoveries about the triffids and also to other human

communities which are pursuing their own plans for a reconstruction.

As with Wyndham's original novel, here the triffids are an additional inconvenience to the human enclaves. Clark's triffids have evolved from those of Wyndham, but they're still only one enemy of mankind which is struggling to survive with low numbers and a diminishing pool of resources as well as a substantial blind community. It has been argued before that Day... is a book we all think we know, but that our mental picture has been blurred by the passage of years and the subsequent cinematic and TV adaptations of the original work. Anybody contemplating reading Clark's book would do well to first revisit Wyndham's original, as this does help to highlight the areas in which the sequel is true to the original.

Yet if, as some critics have argued, Wyndham's original book should more



properly be titled The Day Nearly Everyone Went Blind, then Clark's sequel might be seen as The Day Quite A Lot Of People Were Still Blind, which perhaps shows up the weakness of the premise. Clark's book does seem to have been written out of a genuine love and admiration for Wyndham's work, but it can't capture the power of the original. Moreover, Day... felt complete in itself, ending with a hopeful forward look to Triffids II: The Return of the Humans yet with the sense that this is a story that doesn't need to be told. Clark clearly felt otherwise.

John Clute – *Appleseed*

Orbit, 2001, 337pp, £14.99 ISBN 1857237587

Reviewed by Tony Cullen

"There had always been something about a planet of cities that made Freer long for the sky."

This wonderful opening line kicks off John Clute's dazzling, and difficult, first sf novel [IC's first novel, The Disinheriting Party (1977) was not sf]. The planet of cities is Trencher, the world

where the trader Daniel Freer arrives in his ship Tile Dance (to whom he is affectionately known as 'Stinky') to pick up a military Al. He gets literally more than he bargained for when two of the devices are delivered. Before he can find out why, all hell breaks loose as an Insort Geronte ark of the Harpe Kith goes after Freer, and they'll stop at nothing to get him, even if it means destroying Trencher and all its inhabitants.

Freer escapes to be offered the sanctuary of Station Klavier. But why does the mysterious and apparently benign Johnny Appleseed want him just as badly as the Insort Geronte do? Meanwhile, in the background, a data plague called Plaque is threatening a new dark age by crashing computer systems throughout the galaxy.

Clute is better-known for his critical work, along with his coediting of The Encylopedia of Science Fiction and the more recent The Encylopedia of Fantasy. He has a reputation in some quarters for verbal obfuscation and I've already heard this book dismissed as unreadable. Nothing more than a streak of bloody-mindedness made me want to prove that opinion wrong by... well, reading the

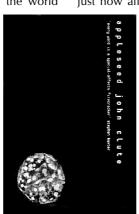
thing. It must be admitted, it's not an easy read, though it is mercifully short in comparison to some recent sf blockbusters. One of the things Clute is doing here is bringing the full weight of his linguistic virtuosity to bear on the difficult task of describing just how alien the human experiences of a few millennia hence

> might appear to the average 20th century observer (that is, the reader), and to try to describe just how alien we humans might appear to the average extraterrestrial. The end result is a style of prose that, a little too often, is opaque and demands rereading, but once you get the hang of the flow of the language it's a joyride. This is not a book for dipping into. It demands attention concentration.

> In case I'm putting anyone off, the end result is well worth reading. Appleseed is an exuberant display of wordplay. The flavour is something like Delany collaborating with Iain M. Banks. A difficult read, certainly, but a mightily satisfying one (the Insorte Geronte assault on Trencher and Freer's escape from the chaos is a particular tour

de force). The aliens are satisfyingly strange, and the whole story is set in a future which, for once, doesn't look like the late 20th Century in deep space.

It would be a give-away to quote it, but the last line is superb, too. I'll leave getting to it as an exercise for the reader.



Storm Constantine – The Way of Light Reviewed by K.V. Bailey

Gollancz, 2001, 408pp, £10.99 ISBN 0-575-60319-4

Throughout the Chronicles of Magravandias, of which this is the

third compelling and climactic volume, two scenarios are so intertwined as eventually to take shape as one. One, which could be called the romantic-dynastic scenario, concerns the actions and interactions of two territorially ruling families, the Palindrakes of

Caradore and the Malagashes of Magravandias; the former subjected by ancient conquest to the latter. The other, underlying scenario concerns the ways by which elemental powers integral to the destinies of both houses manifest themselves through rites and interventions. Fiery mandrakes. Magradore their chief, are the daemonic Magravandian entities, while the watery brood of Sea Dragon Queen, Foy, are those of Caradore. The settings and elemental oppositions were established in the first volume, Sea Dragon Heir, while The Crown of Silence recounted the quest for that emblematic artefact, destined to be worn by the True King

The early happenings in The Way of Light

are predominantly of a dynastic nature. Following the sudden death of the Magravandian emperor, there is endless Byzantine manoeuvring for the succession, involving the princes, the dowager empress Tatrini and the priestly hierarchy. A weak successor, Prince Gastern, is crowned, and in the absence of Valraven Palindrake - the Caradorean Sea Dragon Heir who has risen to the pivotal position in the Magravandian imperial army the state is destabilised. Valraven is away on a search for his

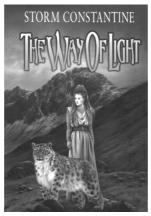
abducted wife, the Magravandrian princess Varencienne, and their daughter, Ellony, while Rav, Ellony's twin brother and the actual object of this thwarted abduction, stays in the Malagash palace.

As the story then proceeds, the elemental scenario increases

in significance The main centres of action are the Magravandian capital, Magrast, and the castle of Old Cadore. Two very significant things have happened. In a mystical encounter with Foy, Valraven's whole disposition has changed. His role as Caradore's Sea Dragon Heir reinstates itself and his vision and idealism look now towards kingship.

Foy gives him promise of the Dragon Daughters' support. In Magrast, meanwhile, the new emperor Gastern's mind gives way as in flaming nightmarish visions he tries and fails to become the avatar of the firedrake, Mandragore. His abdication is forced in favour of Prince Alinorante's regency. Lines mythic and dynastic

come into place for a culminating battle for the Crown. In this, Valraven and Ellony's twin children mediate between the elementals of fire and water, and in so doing play their parts in what is a generational cycle of recurrence. I won't reveal the actual climax and the novel's ending, save to say that what I said at the outset about a harmonious conflation of scenarios is fully demonstrated, and that the final chapter is a surprisingly warm and welcome idyll.



June Counsel – Once Upon Our Time

Glyndley Books and Craftsman, 2000, 202pp, £12.99 ISBN 0-9534232-2-0

Reviewed by Cherith Baldry

This book is attractively produced in an unusual format, and when I first set eyes on it my heart sank; in my experience, books produced by small craft presses, as this appears to be, often concentrate on production values at the expense of the text. The back cover description, "Folk tales for a new age", was not immediately reassuring. However, I'm delighted to say that this initial reaction was extremely unfair.

Once Upon Our Time is a collection of ten short stories which could be loosely described as modern fairy tales. Several of the well-known fairytale themes are included, such as the dreadful consequences of breaking your promise to a witch, and so are many of the traditional characters: the frog prince makes an appearance, though in this story he is not, in fact, a frog. There's a quality of fable; the characters are not only individuals, but represent ideas.

The context, however, is the present day. I was fascinated by the way the writer interweaves the everyday and the strange, and how magic breaks into the characters' lives. I also like the way that fairytale elements have their modern equivalents: the giant is a tycoon; the wicked witch studies chemistry.

Counsel isn't just playing with the traditional forms, however.

There's a lot of depth in these stories, ideas of how we treat each other and the environment, questions about how we should live our lives in order to be fully human, and a deep compassion. The style is clean and elegant, and shows a sharp observation of people and places, and a dry wit. Although I didn't think all the stories were equally successful – the ending of 'All Gone', for example, I thought was predictable rather than inevitable – the general standard is very high, and the best of them are gems.

These stories would be quite at home, for example, in the recent series of reworked fairy stories edited by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling. I wonder why they're available in what must be a more limited edition – possibly because of the well-known publishers' *dictum* that collections of short stories don't sell – and I hope that they'll get the exposure they deserve. I liked this book a lot, and I know that I'll want to come back to it, with the expectation of finding something new. I'd encourage anyone who is interested in fairy tales to seek it out.

[Available from Craftsman-Glyndley Books, 17 Andrew Close, Ailsworth, Peterborough PE5 7AD, Enquiries: 01733 380653, Email: info@craftsman.demon.co.uk]

Stephen Baxter, Peter F. Hamilton, Paul McAuley, Ian McDonald & Peter Crowther (ed.) – Futures

Gollancz, 2001, 320pp, £12.99 ISBN 0-575-07023-

Reviewed by Gary Dalkin

Four novellas, one each by four of the biggest names in the *Interzone* generation of British sf writers, previously published as individual volumes and now collected together in this somewhat odd-sized (8" x 8") hardback. At least two are parts of on-going series, though they stand perfectly well alone. All feature humans with, by contemporary standards, extraordinarily long life spans, though only in one, Peter F. Hamilton's 'Watching Trees Grow', is this fundamental to the plot. Two of the stories, Stephen Baxter's 'Reality Dust' and Paul McAuley's 'Making History' are set either in whole or in part in future ruined cities/colonies in the aftermath of occupation. All four stories are very British, and all four find their various authors at their most direct and accessible, although they are all also a long way from their best.

In 'Reality Dust' the Qax have recently abandoned the solar system, and Hama Druz is tracking down collaborators. When he meets one he finds justice much more complex than he imagined, while on Callisto the 'dust' of the title promises a means of escape from the very structure of the universe. Clearly the universe isn't big enough for Stephen Baxter; he's always looking for a way out. The one he finds here is as intriguing as any, though the story still feels like part of something larger, which it is.

'Watching Trees Grow' follows a murder investigation, in what is presumably a parallel world, over a period of 206 years. This is a world very different from ours, the major difference being that some people live for around 400 years, and with such elongated lifespans have developed an absolute terror of violence, such that murder is almost unknown and any perpetrator must be captured, no matter how long it takes. The interest lies in seeing how the investigation unfolds through two hundred years of advancing technology. Unfortunately the explanations both for the longevity and for the killing itself are weak, and in the case of the former, absurd. In this reality, the Romans selectively bred gladiators for extended life. Try not to injure yourself laughing.

McAuley's 'Making History' is also about an investigation. Here an ageing historian travels to a remote colony where the occupying forces have recently crushed an attempt to gain independence from Earth. His task is to profile the leader of the revolt, but instead he finds himself attracted to, and helping, a young environmental engineer who has been drafted in to suggest means of restoring the damaged ecosystem. Unfortunately the ruthless occupying security officer, torturer and all round bad guy

Darth Vader Dev Veeder (I'm not making this up) also takes a fancy to the beautiful princess engineer. Like 'Reality Dust', the story points out that history is in the hands of those who hold the power, though Orwell told us that in another famous sfnal year. McAuley cops out of the gruelling tragic climax the story seems to be moving inextricably towards in favour of something much less rigorous yet more reader-friendly. The aftermath involves one character explaining the rest of the plot to another in circumstances where to offer such explanations would be to risk everything for nothing, despite Corso being previously portrayed as neither so talkative nor so stupid.

lan McDonald's 'Tendeléo's Story' is another episode in his unfolding Chaga series, in which alien nano-technology is transforming the world into something new, strange, terrifying and wonderful. Set over a handful of years, McDonald recounts the life of a young woman from a Kenyan village, and her adventures which conveniently allow her to become involved in everything of significance. It's a romantic, soft-centred work, in which Tendeléo always manages to avoid the worst of the appalling suffering going on around her, even escaping to Manchester to find true love (though the origin of some absolutely essential photographs from there is never even mentioned, much less explained) before settling for an ending which really does have its (nanotechnological) cake and eat it at the very same moment. It's a seriously flawed story, but grips because Tendeléo is so well characterised. That said, there's nothing new, either from the author, or to the genre in general.

This is a hugely disappointing collection. The stories are all perfectly readable and engrossing while they last, but all, excepting the Baxter, have serious structural or conceptual weaknesses, while Baxter's entry suffers from a lack of strong characterisation.

M.J. Engh - Arslan

Orb, 2001, 296pp, \$14.95 ISBN 0-312-87910-5

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

Once you get past the slightly preposterous premise, *Arslan*, Engh's 1976 story of a Turkmenistan warlord who become effective military dictator of the world and invades the small town

of Kraftsville, Illinois, to set up his base of operations, is both compulsive and gripping. Told from the alternating perspectives of Franklin Bond, mayor of Kraftsville, and Hunt Morgan, who Arslan rapes as young boy, breaks and then rebuilds as his protégé, Arslan remains the focus of both narratives, like a deadly and beautiful snake you cannot, and dare not, take your eyes from. Arslan himself is an enigma, a seemingly contradictory mix of the urbane and cultured (he has Hunt read to him constantly, from Greek history to modern engineering and science) and the brutal and cruel (imposing punitive restrictions and summary executions), a soldier and an ideologue.

It is the complex three-way relationship between Franklin, Hunt and Arslan that makes this novel so stunningly effective. Arslan is not just a parodic 'Ming the Merciless'. Franklin has to tread a fine line between placatory co-operation and subtle resistance – similar to the position of officers in POW camps – in order to protect his townsfolk from Arslan's occupying forces, and from themselves.

The characters of Franklin and Hunt are equally complex. (It is Hunt, perhaps, who is the real focus of this novel, becoming a surrogate son whose loyalty and soul become a prize contested between Franklin and Arslan). Neither do they turn out to be particularly trustworthy narrators; there is a twist at the end that comes as a shock and throws both their positions as 'victims' of Arslan's oppression into a completely new light. Arslan is, in its way, as disturbing and effective a work as Zamyatin's We or Orwell's Nineteen Eighty Four. Very highly recommended.

David Farland – Wizardborn

Earthlight, 2001, 424pp, £10.00 ISBN 0-684-86061-9

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

Wizardborn is the third book in Farland's protracted Runelords series.

Picking up where Brotherhood of the Wolf left off, the Earthking, Gaborn Val Orden is licking his wounds after the battle at Carris. As a result of an apparent misuse of his Earthpowers, he discovers they have diminished to almost non-existence. Without his powers, and still facing an increasingly cunning enemy in the hive-like Reavers, Gaborn discovers that a nine-year-old child might hold the key to their ultimate victory.

Also licking his wounds after Carris is the Wolf Lord, Raj Ahten. Hurting badly from the loss of his beloved at the hands of the Reavers, for which he blames the Earthking, he must return to his own lands which he learns are now being over-run by the Reavers. Having lost most of his 'Endowments' at Carris, Raj Ahten is unprepared for the forthcoming fight. On the very brink of finally achieving the status of 'The Sum of all Men', he is made a proposition that will cost him his very humanity.

This is one of those series which appears endless. There is a story behind the whole which is advancing with every book, and is intriguing, but one wonders how much of the whole is revealed with each book. Originally Gaborn and Raj Ahten were the two main 'sides' in the plot, but this has been supplanted by the Reavers, and although still enemies, their enmity seems to have been put 'on hold'. By the time the Reavers are eventually defeated, Gaborn and Raj Ahten's hostility towards each other will have taken on a completely different perspective.

I can still recommend this series at the moment as it is still different enough to intrigue, but should it go on endlessly as it appears it may well do, then there is only so much one can flog good ideas and originality before they lose their appeal. Let's hope Farland and his publishers know when to call it a day and finish the tale.

Jasper Fforde – *The Eyre Affair*

Hodder & Stoughton (NEL), 2001, 262pp, £6.99, ISBN 0-340-84184-2

Reviewed by Claire Brialey

There are certain qualities most readers will expect to find in a humorous novel: the well-conceived plot, well-realised characters and well-paced action of any good book, together with comic timing, running jokes and genuinely amusing situations. But character names are best left untroubled by humour, so I felt that naming the heroine of The Eyre Affair Thursday Next was a cruel and unusual punishment - for her, too. Amongst a number of lesser crimes, the Man from the Multinational also suffers a naming indignity which goes one step on a banana skin too far: Jack Schitt. Please, no more.

This is Jasper Fforde's first published novel; the publishers do him few favours with their enthusiastic blurble that the author "has been writing purely for his own amusement for the past ten years", a straight line if ever I heard one. Nevertheless, there are some good straight lines in the novel itself, and some pretty good gags as well, together with some entertaining ideas and even some thought-provoking points tucked in amongst the varying levels of humour. But overall it's rather disjointed; the action seems to be in slightly the wrong order and the characters are a bit under-developed, even for comedy. This is a story that feels one redraft light; it's a novel which should be aiming to be described as a romp, whereas from time to time it still staggers.

It also slips from time to time - or at least some of its characters do. It's set in a world where time travel is possible and time can be temporarily halted. Thursday works for the LiteraTecs, one of the least-regarded divisions of the extensive and allpervasive Special Operations forces which police time, place, reality and art. In the mid-1980s the Crimean War is still raging, despite the fact that (unsurprisingly) many people in Britain can no longer see any point to it, the Socialist Republic of Wales has seceded from the Union, the Isle of Wight has been handed back to the French, and the ending of Jane Eyre has always been profoundly unsatisfactory. As the title suggests, it's the last point on which the main plot hinges, making this a humorous literary romantic thriller time travel alternative history. This is a novel which gives a new twist to Jane Eyre. And Martin Chuzzlewit. And Richard III. And in the end Fforde brings all of the disparate plot elements together in a fairly neat conclusion. But I expect his next book will be better.

Maggie Furey – Spirit of the Stone

Orbit, 2001, 426pp, £16.99 ISBN 1-85723-952-0

Reviewed by Vikki Lee

It seems a long time ago that I enjoyed reading Furey's The Heart of Myrial, so Spirit of the Stone, book two of The Shadow League, was very welcome indeed.

The story picks up immediately following events in *The Heart* of Myrial. The curtain-walls that separate the realms are continuing to fail, and the Shadowleague, headed by the irascible

centaur Cergorn, is being ripped apart by indecision and arguments. The Loremasters, Veldan and Elion, along with Toulac and the Firedrake Kazairl undertake a perilous journey, pursued by Lord Blade and his Godswords, to get the rescued former Hierarch, Zavahl - who carries the memories of the expired Dragon, Ethon, in his head - back to Gendival and the

Shadowleague.

Back in Tiarond, the winged demons that breached the curtain wall – allowing the rescue of Zavahl by the Loremasters – are slaughtering the population wholesale. A small band of Godswords and the newly elected Hierarch are trapped with assorted civilians in the temple of Myrial and fighting a desperate battle for survival, while Myrial appears to have forsaken them.

The story really begins to hot up when the Loremasters manage to return to Gendival. Cergorn, beside himself with grief over the apparent loss of his soulmate, blames the Loremasters for that loss. His grief blinds him, and he does not believe that Zavahl, a mere human, retains the mind of Ethon. Other factions in the Shadowleague understand the folly of this and make plans

to secure Zavahl/Ethon for their own ends. Naturally, a power struggle for leadership of the Shadowleague ensues.

Once again Furey enthrals with a well-told, action packed tale. One begins in this second book of the series to understand more of the whole and the mystery of the ancients who created the curtain-walls in the first place. More plot threads are added, as well as more depth for the characters and the world. It's a bit of a shame that Kazairl, the mischievous Firedrake, develops in a much less jovial manner. As a result he loses much of his charm and the book loses the element of fun that was part of *The Heart of Myrial*. That aside, I again highly recommend a Maggie Furey title, and look forward to the next instalment.

Mark C. Glassy – The Biology of Science Fiction Cinema Reviewed by Brian Stableford

McFarland, 2001, 296pp, £37.95 ISBN 0-7864-0998-3

Three years ago I was interviewed for a job teaching 'Biology in a Social Context' on UWE's 'Science, Society & the Media' degree. All the candidates had to offer presentations illustrating a way in which the task might be tackled. I was interested to observe that one of my rivals proposed in his presentation that episodes of Star Trek could be recruited both to introduce topics for discussion and to demonstrate one aspect of the social context. Despite the apparent fashionability of this approach - there seems to be no shortage of 'educational' texts on 'The Science of Star Trek' and related subjects - he didn't get the job (neither did I, despite disdaining to mention sf at all). He had, apparently, failed to observe that (a) more people loathe Star Trek than love it; (b) even those people who love Star Trek don't much care about any socalled "science" supposedly underlying its plots; and (c) the "science" in question - especially the biological "science" - is mostly bilge. The kindest way to regard Mark C. Glassy's The Biology of Science Fiction Cinema is as a parody of such 'Science of Star Trek' books, but even that wouldn't be conspicuously kind, (a) because there isn't much moral credit to be gained by poking fun at the afflicted; and (b) because Mark Glassy has no talent for humour.

The only possible excuse for educationalists to imagine that TV sf might be useful to them is that TV sf is popular. Making the same mistake about *White Zombie* (1932), *The Killer Shrews* (1957), *The Wasp Woman* (1959) and *Astro-Zombies* (1967) – to

name but a few — is as stupid as the movies themselves (the only TV episode included here, typically, is from *Space: 1999*). The films are grouped under various headings, according to the biological problems with which they supposedly deal, so zombie movies are discussed under "Pharmacology", vampire movies mostly under "Hematology". It may come as a surprise to some biologists to discover that there are branches of the science called "Shrinkology", "CULFology" ("the study and analysis of Creating Unusual Life Forms") and "Re-animated Brides". Each mini-essay is divided into three parts: "What is right with the Biological Science Presented", "What is Wrong with the Biological Science Presented" and "What Biological Science Is Necessary to Actually Achieve the Results in the Film". Any Mad Scientist reading this should not take heart; the third sections will be of no practical use to him, and will only encourage him to split infinitives.

Perhaps there is an intellectually respectable and interesting book to be written on 'The Ethnobiology of Hollywood', which would examine the products of TV and cinema sf in the same light as the phenomena of 'psychological probability', but it is difficult to imagine that it would command a wide enough audience to warrant publication. The fact that somebody thought it worthwhile to publish *The Biology of Science Fiction Cinema* establishes the case that no imaginable book is too stupid to appear in print, but not being stupid enough seems another matter entirely.

Christopher Golden & Cliff Richards - Buffy The Vampire Slayer: The Blood of Carthage

Titan Books, 2001, £8.99 ISBN 1-84023-281-1

Christopher Golden, Tom Sniegoski & Christian Zanier – Angel: Earthly Possessions

Titan Books, 2001, £8.99 ISBN 1-84023-280-3

Ron Marz, Jan Duursema & Rik Magyar - Star Wars: Darth Maul

Dark Horse Comics, 2001, £10.99 ISBN 1-84023-265-4

Reviewed by Gary Wilkinson

Three graphic novels featuring collections from *Dark Horse* comics, who seem to have cornered the market in film and TV adaptations.

First up is *The Blood of Carthage*. The Scooby Gang are now at college. Which is good because they can hang out at the old water-filled quarry (which was not a 'school thing'); pity there is something *really* nasty lurking underneath it. *Blood of Carthage* features all the usual characters except for Oz and also Riley and Tara (the introduction explains that at the time the story was written nobody knew how these characters would develop on the show). Spike gets lots to do (and lots of his not-quite English swearing – "you silly git") and Anya (Xander's ex-demoness girlfriend) is terrific, every line priceless: "Even with the lure of sex, men are unreliable". The story is broken up with flashbacks by two different and contrasting artists: sweet Manga-ish stuff on Willow and Xander's childhood, and a darker section revolving round an incident in Spike's past. The plot brings you magic,

fights, ancient evil, demons aplenty and the jokey dialogue which makes the TV series so special. There are a couple of good character based sub-plots. One is based on the aforementioned Xander/Willow flashback – Xander was Willow's protector in childhood (or at least he thought he was) but now Willow's a kick-ass witch, something Xander cannot cope with. Okay, it's no *Watchmen* but it is pretty cool and after reading this I cannot wait for the forthcoming animated series.

After that, *Earthly Possessions* is a bit of a letdown. This is shorter and much more straightforward – think of a padded TV episode instead of *Carthage's* movie-like epic. In this, the broody one gets involved with an ex-priest who is now an exorcist. Nothing too exciting and some pretentious tosh in the middle reflecting on a major incident in the TV series (which I'm not going to spoil). Bad writing, uninspiring art, and overall rather poor.

"Vmmmmmmm VreeOw VreeOw Zzrak Vrakoom! Chunt

Vvv-Rak Zzrk." That's the first five pages of *Darth Maul*. In this prequel to *Phantom Menace*, Lord Sidious sends his pupil, Maul – he of the horns, red and black paint-job and oh-so-cool double-headed light sabre – out to eliminate the criminal organisation Black Sun. And he does. And that's it. One for the pre-teens with

lots and lots of (strangely static-looking) fight sequences with, as you may have guessed, plenty of sound-effects. However, we do see a Sith Witch, rumoured to be one of the baddies in the next Star Wars film, and overall Darth Maul is much better than The Phantom Mince – but then again, what isn't?

Julia Gray – The Jasper Forest 🕮

Orbit, 2001, 567pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-84149-057-1

Reviewed by Carol Ann Kerry-Green

In exile and afloat on a makeshift raft, Terrel is barely alive when brothers Olandis and Aleyn find him. Far from home on the moving islands of Vadanis, Terrel finds himself in Macul, which is ruled by the egomaniacal king, Ekuban. Here he has to overcome hardships and fulfil prophecies before he can hope to even begin his return journey to Vadanis to keep his promise to Alyssa to come back for her. As Alyssa's body sleeps, her spirit wanders, and she is able to 'possess' various creatures and find Terrel. She is accompanied by three ghosts: Elam, Terrel's friend, and Shahan and Muzeni, two sorcerers from different periods in his people's history.

The Jasper Forest is the second novel in The Guardian Cycle and picks up the story after Terrel has kept his bargain with the elemental on Vadanis to keep the moving islands on track. Is he the Guardian, the one who has been prophesied? Terrel learns from his friends that, back on Vadanis, Prince Jax, the emperor's son, is being hailed a hero for saving Vadanis. As he is recovering from his ordeal, Terrel learns that Jax is his twin brother, and was

the cause of Terrel's maiming in their mother's womb. Born with twisted leg and arm, Terrel was rejected by his mother and sent to live far away. It is only now that Terrel realises what the ghosts have known all along – that he, too, is the emperor's son.

Terrel's quest is to avert a tragedy that threatens to engulf the whole of Macul. He has to travel to the capital, Talazoria, but along the way he is acclaimed by the villagers under the clouds as the prophesied Messenger. Will he fulfil their prophecy and still arrive in Talazoria in time to avert the tragedy?

There are a couple of places in the book where the writing could have been tightened a bit to create a more rounded story. However, as a second novel in a trilogy, I found there was enough information here about the actions in the first book without having a need to read it. I found it enjoyable, and the ending rounded off the story nicely and left enough foreshadowing of the next book to make me want to read it. This is one I will look out for in the future.

Mavis Haut – The Hidden Library of Tanith Lee

Reviewed by Storm Constantine

In comparison with the lively Jack Vance tribute I reviewed recently, this is a somewhat dry and po-faced affair. It reads like a thesis and probably was. For die-hard Lee fans, it's a book you'd dip into occasionally, but it is not an easy read.

Haut examines Lee's early and middle period works exhaustively, discussing recurring motifs and symbols in great detail. It's interesting to share Haut's analysis of Lee's use of folklore, fairy tales, Tarot and pagan lore – among other things. Each chapter concentrates on certain novels that share themes or worlds, and covers all but one of Lee's books up to the Blood Opera sequence.

I was surprised to find no mention in this book concerning Lee's curiously bloodless and emotionally autistic heroines, or her apparent distance from (some of) her characters. After all, these qualities add to the mystique of her writing. But then, her earlier characters were not quite as dour and damaged as some that have appeared in more recent works. Haut refers often to Lee's characters being Dionysian,

and perhaps some of the earlier ones are. But mostly they are ascetic Apollonians to a T. Dionysians celebrate life in a free, almost childlike, manner, and this description does not really fit the majority of Lee's characters, especially the women, who are often so removed from meaningful contact with others that they

can only be described as 'anti-life'.

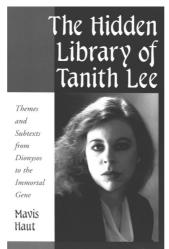
In the conclusion, Haut explains how the constrictions of space within the book precluded her discussing Lee's later work, which might be why there is no assessment of the development of

Lee's treatment of characters. I would like to see a book that studies the difficulty of some of these characters, which is perhaps one of the reasons some readers are put off Lee's work. Haut stresses the need for more examination of this prolific and vivid writer and I couldn't agree more. Lee is a phenomenon and, whether you like her style or not, or whether her writing makes you feel uncomfortable or not, she's one of our most important living fantastists.

McFarland, 2001, 216pp, £30.40 (tpb) ISBN 0-7864-1085-X

At the end of the book is an interview between Haut and Lee, which I found the most fascinating section. Within it, Lee gives details of an unwritten fourth novel in her Blood Opera sequence, which the vagaries of the publishing industry have so far prevented being commissioned.

For the Lee enthusiast, this is an interesting book, and in some ways poses more questions than it answers. It discusses Lee's work from a lofty, academic position, but – to me – failed to get to the heart of this intriguing writer. And, at over £30 for a trade paperback, the book is rather expensive for what you get.



Patrick Neilsen Hayden (ed) – Starlight 3

Reviewed by Carol Ann Kerry-Green

Original short story collections are few and far between these days. One that is now in its third incarnation is *Starlight*, edited by Patrick Neilsen Hayden. In this volume, 17 stories are collected, all of them published in 2001 for the first time. I already know and enjoy some of the author's work; others were new to me. The authors include Colin Greenland and Stephen Baxter from the UK

Tor, 2001, 350pp, \$23.95 ISBN 0-312-86780-8

and another UK writer new to me, Susanna Clarke. Also included are stories from Maureen F. McHugh, Geoffrey A. Landis, Terry Bisson, and other new-to-me authors, Brenda W. Clough, Susan Palwick and Ted Chiang.

The subjects range from angels (two stories), lycanthropy, faerie, myth, and a far flung planet, to the way the mind works.

All are well-written, and most are enjoyable. Of the two angel stories, I preferred Colin Greenland's 'Wings', a tale of angels descending to earth to help us poor wingless creatures cope with a life without flight, to Ted Chiang's downbeat tale of redemption. Brenda W. Clough tells the story of Odysseus' death-bed in 'Home is the Sailor', and Greg van Eekhout deals with the myths of Odin and his sons Hod and Baldr and what happens when the gods get fed up waiting for the sibyl's prophecy to come true.

For me, though, the highlight of the collection was Susan Palwick's lycanthropy story 'Gestella'. When 14 year old Gestella meets Jonathan, he's 35. He's sympathetic, brings her tea when she's transiting from four legs to two, and massages her sore

shoulder blades. But a year later, Stella (as she is now known) is 21, the perfect trophy wife to her 36 year old husband (while her four-legged persona, Jessie, is devoted, doglike, to Jonathan). As Stella continues to age seven years for every year Jonathan does, the story shows how relationships break down and how trust is rewarded. A very poignant story.

Short story collections can be treasure houses where you dip into and pull out a gem, or they can be ones that you battle through from beginning to end. This collection is more the former than the latter, most of the stories being gems, very few that had to be struggled through. Well worth it.

Tom Holt – Nothing But Blue Skies 🕮

Orbit, 2001, 317pp, £15.99 ISBN 1-84149-040-7

Reviewed by Jon Wallace

It rained yesterday, the first of two days I took as annual leave to put a fence up. According to Tom Holt, this was due to the Dragon King of the North-West, and in particular, the Dragon Marshal of Bank Holidays (who has a maximum capacity of

2,000,000,000,000 litres/second/km²). And who now prefers to be called Karen...

Dragons, the Chinese ones of course, control the rainfall. Karen, however, has fallen in love with a mortal, and has decided to give up dragonness, or at least give human shape a go, but it isn't really working out for her. Then there are some disaffected weathermen (who take it personally) and, of course, you've got to have some evil big businessmen/power-crazed maniacs, throw in a bit of plot, stir well, and hey, you've got this book.

Holt has been writing comic novels for a lot of years, and is probably best known for the quality of his titles (well, I liked *Snow White and the Seven Samurai*). The content is a bit spottier, and this book is no exception. The basic story is all right, if you can get behind just why you'd

give up being a super dragon who has lived for millions of years to become an estate agent, and some of the twists are quite... twisty. Oh, and Karen is quite a sympathetic character, the little flaws in her personality being neatly explained because she used to be a dragon. The other characters are not too bad, if a bit stock. There's the gormless son of the ruthless businessman, the office flirt who's not what she seems, and a variety of henchmen and

other hangers-on. And a drunken weather forecaster – he's quite original. And there's some guys running around commissioning a boat and trying to round up two of each animal...

But as to the questions, "is it funny?" and "is it worth reading?". Well, the answer to the first is yes; it's funny in bits – not rip-roaring, slap-yer-thighs, hilarious, but you can smile a lot. And the answer to the second is that it fits into that category of books that aren't Booker nominees. This would be a nice undemanding read if you're on a train or a plane or stuck in a caravan while the Dragon Marshal of Bank Holidays (Karen) unleashes her "B-29's, the big fast saturation-grade raindrops with...the smart guidance system, the latest in launch-and-forget technology; humans assumed they were imagining things when they got the impression that modern rain

was somehow colder and wetter than it had been when they were young...". A holiday book. Well, it is supposedly summer...



'Brilliantly funny' Mattens

David Langford– The Leaky Establishment Reviewed by Mark Greener

Big Engine, 2001, 209pp, £7.99 ISBN 1-903468-00-0

It's some 15 years since I last read *The Leaky Establishment*, and I'd forgotten just how good it is.

I was working as a research biologist at the time. Many of Langford's jokes struck a chord: they apply as much to the biological sciences as nuclear physics. So I lent it to a colleague and never got it back. Then it fell out of print...

Roy Tappen, part of the elite scientific team controlling Britain's nuclear deterrent, accepts a bet that he can't sneak a filing cabinet past Security. He wins his bet with consummate ease. But he's also unintentionally exported a nuclear weapon's plutonium core. The problem isn't getting the nuclear warhead out of the establishment, the trick is to get it back in again. And to tell any more of Tappen's increasingly desperate attempts would be to spoil the plot.

The Leaky Establishment is part of a long tradition of British humour and farce setting the 'small man' against authority. As such, Langford's book belongs alongside those of Tom Sharpe and Michael Green. Indeed, The Leaky Establishment could almost be The Art of Coarse Nuclear Physics.

There are moments of comic genius. The drinking session with Tappen's next door neighbour and co-worker, as well as the Royal Garden Party, made me laugh out loud, which must have been disturbing for the other people in the gym at the time. In places, it's a bit unsubtle – the Leaky Establishment is on Robinson

Heath, for example – and the characterisations seem somewhat thin. But subtlety isn't a feature of British comedy. The *Carry On* films, or even *HHGTTG*, aren't exactly subtle or well-characterised. But the pacing carries you along to the next set piece in this increasingly outlandish farce.

But it also left me disappointed. Langford's obviously a talented comic writer – as his fannish writing also shows – and deserves a wider audience than I suspect *The Leaky Establishment* will get. Yet his comic talent, given the right marketing, could storm up the best-seller lists. It's a much stronger debut than Tom Sharpe, for example. Perhaps if *The Leaky Establishment* becomes a best-seller he'll write another mainstream comic masterpiece. When you consider some of the inane rubbish that passes for humour these days, mainstream British literary humour needs a new star.

Indeed, if it wasn't by Langford, *The Leaky Establishment* wouldn't warrant a *Vector* review. It isn't really an sf book – whatever the blurb tries to claim. An occasional reference to Dick or a scientific backdrop doesn't make a book sf. (Compare this to *HHGTTG* or Shaw's *Who Goes Here*? for example, which are classic sf humour.)

But who cares? Buy a copy. No, buy two. Just in case one isn't returned and it's another 15 years before *The Leaky Establishment* is reprinted.

Stephen Lawhead – The Mystic Rose

Reviewed by Iain Emsley

Harper Collins, 2001, £17.99, 435pp ISBN 0-00-244667-8

In *The Mystic Rose*, Lawhead concludes his Celtic Crusades trilogy in which three generations of the St Clair family have undertaken their own crusade whilst participating in the historical Crusades. Murdo and Duncan have previously joined the Crusades, recovering religious artefacts and bringing them back from the Holy Lands to safety in the Orkney Islands. However, in this novel, Lawhead moves his action to the Pilgrimage trails of Spain.

Duncan is taking his daughter Caitriona around the places where the events of *The Black Rood* took place when de Bracineaux, the Knights Templar's commander, murders him. Caitriona seeks vengeance and steals into his quarters but is prevented from killing him. Instead Brother Andrew, the St Clair's ghostly protector, guides her to a letter from Archbishop Bertrano, which details the whereabouts of the Mystic Rose, the cup from the Last Supper. Caitriona arranges for some Norse knights to be released from prison and travels to Santiago di Compostella with

her retinue to question Bertrano. However, de Bracineaux follows her to Spain and to the Cup, beginning a game of cat and mouse. In a later time-line, in the shadow First World War, Brother Murray continues his education into the history of the Célé Dé, following the diaries of his ancestors in his own hour of need.

There is a sense that Lawhead has revisited *Byzantium*, using this trilogy to enlarge upon the theme of rediscovery of individual faith. Whereas *Byzantium* ended with all the main characters renewing their faith, in *The Mystic Rose* the artefacts are rehidden, awaiting their rediscovery in another age. Thus, Lawhead marries his historical tale with Arthurian myth and the promise of the king that is to be reborn.

Lawhead concludes this sweeping trilogy in a satisfying manner; involving the somewhat naive St Clair family with the schemes of Rome. *The Mystic Rose* finishes this enjoyable series with a sense of hope and freedom.

Holly Lisle – The Courage of Falcons

Reviewed by Iain Emsley

Gollancz, 2001, 406pp, £10.99 ISBN 0-575-07086-2

In this concluding book to The Secret Texts series, we are served with a feast of action, magic and plot twists. While the second novel, *Vengeance of Dragons*, lacked somewhat in pace, it set up this concluding episode with a host of characters who defy simple definitions of being hero or villain.

Kait, Ry and Ian have recaptured the Mirror of Souls and believe that its destruction will defeat the Dragon, Luercas. As they search for a means of destruction, they have to wrestle with their own desires for justice or vengeance. Eventually, Kait finds that she must join Ian and the Falcons, although Ry's conscience will not allow him to do so and so he leaves them. Instead, he kidnaps Crispin's daughter, Ulwe, and takes her to the largely destroyed Galweigh family house with Kait. There they discover that not all of her clan were killed, but have to face an attack by the Sabirs in which Crispin is killed.

Meanwhile, Luercas marches on Calimekka, forcing Danya to masquerade as a Sun Goddess. The Calimekkans have heard

about the army and gather around the Galweigh house, while the Falcons ready themselves for a magical battle.

Lisle has continued to develop this epic fantasy with fully-rounded characters who follow their own motivations rather than plot demands. Kait and Ry's relationship comes under strain through their magical beliefs and also through their distrust of each other's families, particularly after they enter the Galweigh house. Lisle also resurrects Danya's demons, which force her into confronting the Galweighs, for whom she has a special dislike.

Lisle builds towards the inevitable confrontation, and manages to construct a novel of intrigue and subterfuge with various twists to the prophecies, often withholding information from the reader. Indeed, rather than focusing on the coming army, the author takes more interest in the smaller band of characters who find their status quo shattered and have to work their own way through the troubles. Overall, she has developed The Secret Texts into a thrilling tale that has gripped this reader to the end.

Tanith Lee – White as Snow

Reviewed by Tanya Brown

Tor, 2000, 319pp, \$23.95 ISBN 0-312-86993-2

Tor's Fairy Tale series, edited by Terri Windling, has published a number of elegant literary fantasies since its inception in 1987. Each novel in the series aims to retell a classic fairytale in a new and startling way, restoring elements of sensuality and terror which have been bowdlerised by well-meaning children's editors over the years. Authors to date have included Pamela Dean, Charles de Lint and Jane Yolen: the latest in the series, *White as Snow*, is Tanith Lee's interpretation of the tale of Snow White.

It's far from the first time that Tanith Lee has used fairy tales as a source. Her 1982 anthology, *Red as Blood*, retold a number of classic tales in styles ranging from the high-tech science fiction romance of 'Beauty' (Beauty and the Beast) to the more familiar surreal horror of the title story – another version of Snow White.

In recent years, Tanith Lee's adult fiction has seemed ever darker and more decadent: her prose can, at worst, be overblown and humourless. Only her juvenile novels (such as the *Wolf Tower* and *Unicorn* sequences) retain the wit and vigour of earlier works.

White as Snow is, in that sense at least, a refreshing departure from form. Lee intertwines the tales of the evil 'stepmother' and her affection-starved daughter with elements of classical myth and medieval romance. Arpazia is a spoil of war, raped and

impregnated by the conquering king: her disowned daughter Candacis, known as Coira, is no sweet cipher, but a complex personality in her own right. The dwarves, too, are finely-drawn individuals with unexpected depth, rather than the circus troupe one might initially take them for.

The tale unfolds against a lightly-drawn backdrop reminiscent of medieval Italy. There's a dreamlike lack of any sense of place and time. Nothing from the wider world crosses the boundaries of the narrative, although there are vague references to other lands, other wars. Christ and his mother Marusa are worshipped, but the women of the walled town go into the woods at solstice and equinox to pay homage to the forest king, remembering the old myths. Coira's nickname is given to her by her nurse: it's the name of the corn-goddess Demetra's daughter, who was stolen away to a place under the earth by Hadz, the King of Death.

As if acting out a play, the characters in the novel perform various interpretations of the roles suggested by their names, at once blind to the myths and archetypes they embody and desperate to escape them. Unravelling the original texts of the fairy tale, as well as the Disneyfied popular conception, *White as Snow* marks a return to the clarity and vision of Tanith Lee's finest fantasies.

Terry McGarry - Illumination

Reviewed by Fiona Grove

Tor, 2001, 486pp, \$25.95 ISBN 0-312-87389-1

Tor, 2001, 416pp, \$25.95 ISBN 0-312-87431-6

This is the first novel by Terry McGarry, although she has had several short stories published (none of which I've read).

Illumination is the story of Liath, a young illuminator, who, having completed her apprenticeship, gets ready to set out on her journeying to find the other two members of her triad, the group of magicians consisting of illuminator, wordsmith and bindsman (simply put: the words, letters and pictures involved in any spell), only to discover that her talents have abandoned her, or so she thinks.

In order to regain her magic, Liath decides to go to the Ennead – the group of high-level magicians who act as guild masters and police force to magicians within the land – to petition to have her power restored. With a young boy, Mellas, Liath travels to Eiden's Head, to gain an audience with the Ennead, only to be first rejected outright. Following a meeting with Portriel, an elderly, mad woman living deep within the Eiden's head mountain, Liath is able to meet members of the Ennead, and is set a task in order to regain her lost magic.

The book follows her in her travels as she tries to find the reason for her failure, and at the same time help the Ennead to find a renegade magician, Torrin Wordsmith, who is set to wreak havoc throughout the known world. However, nothing is quite as it might seem.

Liath goes out into the land, looking for the renegade Torrin, and discovers questions and problems that have previously been ignored or treated as taboo. Along the way she makes friends, and enemies, and receives help and hindrance from these in about equal measure.

The answers to Liath's questions do not appear in the manner expected, and this causes her to address her own beliefs and assumptions. And of course she helps to save the world too.

llumination is a bit long-winded in places and could probably benefit from being tightened and shortened, but it caught my imagination enough for me to want to read the second in what I assume will be a trilogy, and see what might develop in the new world.

Donna McMahon - Dance of Knives

Reviewed by Carol Ann Kerry-Green

Young and naive Klale Renhardt arrives in Downtown, Vancouver, with no idea what she's going to do when she gets there, or how she's going to support herself on this guildless island. It is the 22nd Century and global economic collapse and rising sea levels have devastated much of North America. Guilds have been built up to survive the economic disasters and provide for members; only in Downtown are the guildless welcome, where they live dominated by the tongs and gangs. A member of the Fisher Guild, Klale has led a protected life in Prince Rupert, where everything is provided. Downtown, where there are no guilds, beggars line the streets and violence is round every corner.

Klale is befriended by Toni, an American bartender at the Klondyke. Given a job by the bar's owner, Mary, she moves into the Klondyke (an old skyscraper) and sets up home on an unused floor. Things are changing in Downtown; the three tongs have ruled for a long time, but now the railroad is coming, and not everyone wants it. Tensions rise amongst the tongs and many realise that tong war is on its way. Mary and the Downtown Residents Association fight to have a say in the changes that are

on the way. Klale makes a powerful enemy and her guild disowns her, leaving her destitute and reliant on her new job, as she finds that life Downtown isn't what she had thought it would be.

As the novel picks up pace, Klale tries to befriend the enigmatic Blade, a biologically altered Tool, a killing machine, listening-post and enforcer for Choi Sung Wai, Downtown's ruthless blackmailer. She cannot believe that he has been stripped of all his humanity; somewhere inside there must remain part of the person, Simon, he was before Choi altered him. Toni also believes Simon is there and reachable, but she also understands just how unstable he is. In order to help Simon, Toni has to go back to her own past, and face her own devils, and Klale learns the hard way that Simon may be human, but Blade isn't.

This first novel by Canadian Donna McMahon is a treat to read. She brings the characters and situations to life with verve and generosity, which leaves you wrapped up in their lives, hopes and disappointments.

John Marco – The Saints Of The Sword: Book Three of Tyrants And Kings

Gollancz, 2001, 550pp, £12.99 ISBN 0-575-07160-5

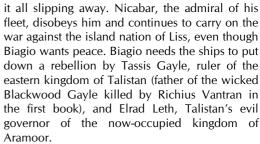
Reviewed by Alan Fraser

The Saints Of The Sword concludes the epic fantasy from new American author John Marco of a hemisphere at war that started

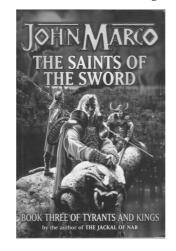
with The Jackal Of Nar and continued with The Grand Design. It's not a stand-alone book for the new reader. Richius Vantran, king of Aramoor, is still in exile in the eastern continent of Lucel-Lor with his wife and child, and Count Renato Biagio, once head of the Emperor of Nar's secret police, is now Emperor of the western continent himself. In my review of the second book I remarked "Towards the end of the book Biagio makes one extremely magnanimous gesture, which, given what has gone before, seems rather unlikely to me!" Throughout the first book and most of the second Biagio was portrayed as the personification of evil. That I thought this incident unlikely is ironic, since the whole of the third book is built upon Biagio's Damascene

conversion!

Having achieved his ambition to become Emperor, Biagio sees



Richius Vantran, who was the major character in *The Jackal Of Nar*, had the spotlight rather taken off him in the second book, and now plays a much lesser role in this one. A new principal character is Alazrian Leth, bastard stepson of Elrad Leth, and grandson of Tassis Gayle.



Fifteen-year-old Alazrian, who hates and is hated by his stepfather, is recruited by Biagio for a secret mission. He is developing magical powers of healing and mind reading, which play an important role in the resolution of the story. Alazrian must contact the Saints of the Sword, Aramoorian rebels resisting the oppression of Elrad Leth, and convince them to go with him into Lucel-Lor to find Richius Vantran. Biagio now needs Vantran's help to provide an army from Lucel-Lor. The Tyrant (Biagio) and the King (Vantran) must form an alliance to prevent an even worse tyrant (in Tassis Gayle) from taking over in Nar!

The difficulty for the reader is in accepting that Biagio, after carrying out acts of extreme wickedness for so long to achieve his goal, has now become a changed character who longs for peace merely because he stopped longevity treatments (Nicabar still continues them and remains wicked). To be fair, Marco does tell us repeatedly how much trouble the other characters have with this. However, Richius Vantran in particular should need more than just the promise of the return of his kingdom to ally with his old arch-enemy.

That having been said, *The Saints Of The Sword* is a good page-turner, with well-drawn characters and many exciting moments, and the conclusion will satisfy those who've made it this far. It's reported that John Marco's next work will not be in the world of Nar, although I'm sure he'll be tempted to return eventually.

Paul McAuley – The Secret of Life

Tor, 2001, 413pp, \$25.95, ISBN 0-765-30080-X Voyager, 2001, 391pp, £16.99 ISBN 0-00-225904-4

Reviewed by Andrew Seaman

Whether authors crave a little variety in their working lives, or are developing a more pragmatic eye with intent to appeal to a wider (and therefore more lucrative) readership, that shadowy area where the science fiction novel meets the hi-tech thriller has become increasingly attractive to many *bona fide* sf writers. Nancy Kress and the two Gregs, Benford and Bear, have produced

novels like *Stinger*, *Cosm*, and *Darwin's Radio*, works that, although they possess excellent sfnal credentials from the cutting edge of research physics and biology, have narratives that are arguably as influenced by the blockbuster thriller as the traditional sf novel. The latest apparent convert to those ranks is Paul McAuley, whose new novel, *The Secret of Life*, is a very timely take on the currently hot topic of the origin and nature of potential Martian biology and its possible relationship to life on our own planet.

Chinese explorers return a native Martian microbe to Earth, but soon a genetically modified variant escapes into the Pacific Ocean, creating an organic bloom that threatens the biosphere.

Unorthodox research biologist Mariella Anders is chosen for a mission to the Red Planet to recover samples of the organism before a second Chinese expedition destroys the evidence. However, also on the team is her long-standing personal and scientific rival, Penn Brown, whose presence (and ulterior allegiances and motives) threaten both the stability of the group and its ultimate success.

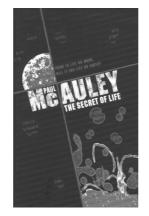
McAuley undoubtedly puts his background and experiences

as a scientist to good work here, neatly delineating and skewering the intensely human rivalries and vanities of his protagonists, particularly in the pressure-cooker atmosphere of a months-long interplanetary journey, and survival on an alien world, while in the feisty persona of Anders he has also drawn a convincing alternative to the boringly competent (male) scientist of much

traditional sf. Contrary to initial expectations, *The Secret of Life* is not so much a race-against-time disaster novel as a thoughtful exploration of the complex and uneasy relationship between the scientific community and the commercial concerns increasingly funding and profiting from it. The battle Anders and her unorthodox allies have to fight upon her return to Earth is just as much about the right to speak the scientific 'truth' as it is about saving the planet from an alien menace.

Although the book borrows from sources as varied as the disaster and spy thriller, and even the academic campus novel, at heart it's still a genuine work of sf, as is abundantly clear from the elegant use McAuley makes of current speculation about

Martian biology and his description of the sublime grandeur of the planet's polar landscape. That the book is cunningly, though misleadingly, disguised as a thriller (at least in its UK edition) shouldn't deter sf fans and might, just possibly, lure in openminded readers from outside the crumbling walls of the genre ghetto. They should be pleasantly surprised and enlightened by what they find within its pages.



K.J. Parker – *Shadow*

Orbit, 2001, 572pp, £10.99 ISBN 1-84149-019-9

Reviewed by Tanya Brown

A man wakes up, half-immersed in a stream that runs through a battlefield, with no recollection of his identity. Overhead, crows circle, waiting. He has a vague memory of arguing with his reflection in the water, but that must have been a dream.

Poldarn, taking the name of an obscure – and possibly made up – god whose priestess he encounters, quickly adapts to a life without a past. His vivid dreams hint at that past, from a bewildering number of viewpoints: which dreams are truly his memories? Against the backdrop of a crumbling empire, beset by Viking-like raiders, Poldarn tries to reconstruct his identity. There are those who recognise him, but none of them live long enough to tell him his name. All that he can be sure of is his superlative skill with the sword and his ability to survive.

With the help of the fake priestess, Copis, he becomes a divine impersonator, a high-risk courier, and a button merchant – each role leading to another teasing encounter with a nameless face from his past. Legends and folk tales seem to link his fate with the story of the god Poldarn: could he, in fact, be a god and not know it?

Meanwhile, the sword-monk Monach ("just a word for 'monk' in the southern dialect") has been instructed by his Order to find the man who is calling himself Poldarn. The Order's purposes are unclear, even to Monach, but they're privy to knowledge about the god Poldarn that might help the mortal version make sense of everything that's happening to him.

K J Parker's first fantasy trilogy, beginning with *Colours in the Steel*, met with critical acclaim for its straightforward grittiness, dark humour and attention to technological detail. The setting of the Fencer trilogy was a world of minimal magic, with few of the supernatural or mystical elements that have come to typify post-Tolkien fantasies. *Shadow* is similarly prosaic, focussing on the mundane rather than the magical. Parker conveys an intimate understanding of the mechanics of day to day life in a mildly industrialised Renaissance world – button-making machines, sword-fighting technique, the decades-long war against the raiders – without losing the tension of the narrative or glorifying its nastier aspects.

There are other similarities to Parker's earlier novels: the

prophetic dreams; the mirroring of dream and reality, highlighted by identical phrasing; the sheer complexity of plot, which is hinted at rather than revealed. Parker also has a rare gift for characterisation, and the plot is driven by credibly flawed individuals, rather than high-minded archetypes. Poldarn's quest for his identity takes some improbable turns, working towards a

revelation that is genuinely surprising and keeps the reader guessing until the end.

Shadow proclaims itself as 'Book One of the Scavenger Trilogy'. Does the world really need another weighty fantasy trilogy, at over £10 for the trade paperback editions? Yes, when it's by a writer as fresh and innovative as K J Parker.

Mike Resnick – The Outpost

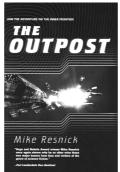
Tor, 2001, 383pp, \$24.95 ISBN 0-312-85485-4

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

LEGEND: We all love tall stories. After all, that's what the great days of sci-fi were all about, weren't they? Mighty-thewed heroes, hairs-breadth escapes, unlikely applications of unlikely theories, unfeasibly big-breasted women, alien monsters intent on rape and destruction: isn't that what we all love about sci-fi? And if you push your tongue just a little way into the cheek, doesn't that make it even better? And if you shake your head at all the shenanigans with a sort of post-ironic detachment, why, it could almost be litratchur!

I'm sorry, I'm not taking this book very seriously. Not that Mike Resnick wants you to take it seriously; but I'm not taking it seriously in a different way from what he intends. He intends you to laugh at an affectionate parody of the excesses of our genre (and I wouldn't care to even count the number of references to other works you'll find scattered through this book). I am simply laughing at a silly book.

It's another of those bar stories beloved of a certain type of hack writer who believes it excuses any idiocy. In this instance, The Outpost is a bar on the most remote planet in the universe, and it's here that all the heroes and adventurers gravitate. Here they come, boasting names like Hurricane Smith, Catastrophe Baker, Gravedigger Gaines, Hellfire Carson, Three-Gun Max... do I have to go on? I'm sure you get the picture. Anyway, during the first part of the novel, which Resnick titles 'Legend', all these



overblown figures without an ounce of real character between the preposterous bunch of them, wander into the bar and tell ludicrous stories about their exploits.

FACT: Even Resnick realises that you can't carry an entire novel with braggadocio and bad puns (a reference to hungry eyes elicits a story about a woman whose eyes go out hunting every night!), so he introduces a modicum of plot. There's an alien attack. There's no logic in this; these are the sort of aliens we grew out of decades ago who are there just to provide a convenient enemy attacking for no reason other than the hell of it. So in the section

called 'Fact' the heroes go out to beat the enemy. The aliens have just defeated our entire navy, but these 20-odd individuals, all operating alone, of course win the war. Along the way a couple are killed, a couple more are shown to be cowards, but most perform the routine trick of wiping out entire armies single-handed.

HISTORY: Then they come back to the bar and tell the story of their exploits. And of course they change the details to make themselves look braver or more heroic than they were. And the resident historian in the bar chooses to print the legend. And Resnick presumably imagines this all amounts to something deep and meaningful. It doesn't.

Alastair Reynolds – Chasm City Reviewed by Claire Brialey

Gollancz, 2001, 524pp, £17.99 ISBN 0-575-06877-9 & £10.99 ISBN 0-575-06878-7

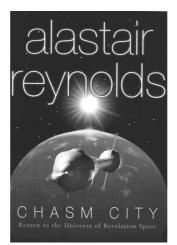
Reynolds's second novel is set in the same universe as his first,

two centuries or so later, and as such provides a different perspective on the 'Belle Epoque' of the Clarke Award-shortlisted *Revelation Space*. It also has a less dizzying narrative perspective than the earlier novel: while there are still epic voyages across space and time and a large-scale view of the horizons of this world, this is a book focused much more closely on its main characters. A lot of the action effectively takes place inside the narrator's head, making this part space opera and part psychological thriller. The narrator himself, Tanner Mirabel, would not be out of place in noir detective fiction.

Reynolds presents a powerful vision of both the changes wrought to a great civilisation by disaster and the tenacity of human existence under these circumstances. The setting, the action, and many of the characters are all darker

and dirtier than the earlier novel; Reynolds has commented that he finds it easier to write about dark and festering landscapes and situations than about anything more wholesome, and the city of the title certainly festers and rots. The novel itself, however, is well-constructed on sound foundations with some twists to its internal architecture which owe more to Escher than Ellroy.

This is a novel with a necessarily unreliable narrator. We learn little about Mirabel before he develops partial amnesia, and his present story thus unfolds while he tries to rediscover his past. Mirabel's returning memories are jumbled together with echoes of



his former employer, Cahuella, to whom he feels he owes

vengeance, and his journey thus primarily takes the form of a quest to find and kill the man who murdered Cahuella's wife.

Mirabel's life is thus already fairly complicated: virtually marooned on a planet in technological and social decline, on the trail of a murderer who is always several steps ahead of him, caught up in a dangerous game involving the local criminal fraternity and a series of fascinating women who (of course) he can't entirely trust, and hampered by puzzling and incomplete memories of his former existence. On top of all this, he has contracted a virus which periodically infects him with visions – or delusions – of the life of Sky Haussmann, the notorious founder of his own homeworld, and since adopted as a prophet by a sect who have developed the virus to spread their faith.

Gradually Mirabel begins to develop a rather different picture of Haussmann than the one presented to history.

The narrative is thus carried forward through a struggle by Mirabel, Cahuella and Haussmann for true memory. The emerging linkages between these memories, and the reasons for their varying reliability, develop at a compelling pace almost until the last moment. At the very last moment, however, the epilogue falls a little flat by patiently pointing out, and thus muting, the many overwhelming implications of the book's real conclusion. But that still gives you 517 pages of the best sf I've read this year.

Reviewed by Stuart Carter

Adam Roberts' first novel, *Salt*, which came out last year, was a very fine start to any career. *On* is only his second novel and raised two important questions for me: one, will his titles continue to shorten (perhaps his third novel will be the chemical name for hydrogen or some such)? And two, would *Salt* prove to have been a mere flash in the pan?

Regarding question two the answer is a cautious 'no' – Roberts looks set to become a regular member of the sf canon, for *On* is an unusual and thought-provoking novel initially reminiscent of Christopher Priest's *Inverted World*.

The pristine white cover shows a boy looking cautiously across a desert landscape towards an insect-like craft floating in the air; however, it is only upon looking around to the back cover that the true perspective of this picture is revealed: that the boy is looking down a steep cliff – *On* accomplishes a not dissimilar confounding of expectations inside too.

The boy of the cover, Tighe, lives on the worldwall, as does everyone else. The wall has no apparent top or bottom, it simply goes on forever and everybody lives upon it. Theirs is a precarious existence largely concerned with mere survival, although travelling tinkers sometimes come bringing miraculous (but old) electronic and plastic devices to entertain the village-folk. One

day, as is wont to happen, Tighe trips off the ledge of his village and falls a long way down the wall. Miraculously he survives and discovers the world is not anything like he has ever imagined. If anything the world is worse than he has ever imagined: a harsh, cruel and utterly amoral place where people die without reason and kill for even less.

What Roberts has tried to do, I suspect, is create a world turned upon its head (or back) that lacks any truly defining logic or morality, as he did in *Salt*; but whereas that book saw well-defined and opposing ideologies fighting each other, *On* almost feels as though it is taking on the nature of the universe (in more ways than one). Tighe's travels up, down and across the worldwall are not particularly edifying, he unearths no great knowledge or revelation from all his suffering, he is little improved as a boy or a man and has little effect upon the world (despite occasional and unfounded claims for his importance). He is a cog in the machine.

As I said to begin with, *On* is an unusual and thought-provoking book that avoids clichés and admits no easy readings. This can make for a frustrating reading experience at times but bodes well, I think, for Roberts' future development as a writer. He could become very important indeed.

Robert Silverberg – The King of Dreams Reviewed by Colin Bird

Voyager, 2001, 514pp, £11.99 ISBN 0-00-224745-3

This is the seventh volume in Silverberg's fantasy saga set in the world of Majipoor: a planet with three continents, colonised by humans many thousands of years ago, when the existing native races were supplanted by the new dominant species. The narrative still chronicles the fortunes of the diminutive Lord Valentine, now Pontifex of Majipoor, but *The King Of Dreams* brings Dekkeret, his successor as Coronal, more to centre stage.

As this volume begins the Pontifex of Majipoor is ageing and soon Valentine must take his place in the Labyrinth, withdrawing from a more visible role in the life of his subjects and allowing his nominated successor, the commoner Dekkeret, to share the reins of power as the new Coronal. Meanwhile, the scheming Count Mandralisca is inciting five self-proclaimed "Lords" on the distant continent of Zimroel to contemplate rebellion against the monarchy. Mandralisca has his own personal reasons for pursuing a vendetta against Valentine and he uses his powers of persuasion to recruit the intellectually-challenged five royal brothers and to begin an insurrection that would spread to the whole of Majipoor.

Mandralisca is using an ancient weapon, a helmet (more of a hairnet really) which allows the wearer to enter the dreams of another, anywhere on the planet, and to wreak havoc with that person's sanity. With this weapon he hopes to topple the monarchy and bring a period of instability to Majipoor.

Is this an example of a science fiction Grand Master slumming it in the fantasy genre? You bet it is! The author's skill is still apparent but his lack of ambition is depressing. This is limp fantasy with such leisurely pace that nothing very much happens to people who we don't really care about anyway. "Silverberg's invention is prodigious," it says on the back but, sadly, there is little evidence here with major plot elements being recycled from previous entries in the Majipoor cycle. Insurrections that threaten the stability of the regime, the helmet of dreams – they've both been used before and Silverberg spends dozens of pages telling us how in unwelcome info-dumps.

The whole Majipoor cycle has an apologetic it's-really-aplanet-colonised-by-humans background so that the author can claim it's distantly related to his sf work. But it sorely lacks the energy and convincingly tortured characters of Silverberg's fertile science fiction back catalogue.

Silverberg could at least have made his heroes break a sweat before they thwarted the bad guy's fiendish plan to overthrow their stale and unrepresentative monarchy, which they do in about thirty pages. This book is written for the market and, if you still want to read quality Silverberg, wait for his occasional short fiction.

James White – *Beginning Operations*Reviewed by Chris Hill

Orb, 2001, 511pp, \$19.95 ISBN 0-312-87544-4

Sector General is a giant hospital in deep space built to provide medical facilities for humans and all know alien races. *Beginning Operations* gathers together the first three 'Sector General' books: *Hospital Station, Star Surgeon* and *Major Operation*.

The main character in these stories is Conway, one of the human doctors. In the first volume we follow him through a number of different cases, while the second focuses on a war with an oppressive empire. The third volume concentrates on the bizarre biology of a planet dubbed 'Meatball' – where the patient turns out to be the size of a small continent!

The first thing that has to be said about the Sector General stories is that they are great fun. In each case Conway is presented

with a medical problem that he needs to solve to treat a patient successfully – medical detective stories if you like. Conway is a pacifist and saving lives is his first priority (initially he has problems with the military organisation that polices and administrates the station). The stories are told with good humour and compassion.

Star Surgeon and Major Operation are both fix-ups and this is rather too obvious at times. Occasionally information is repeated, with almost identical words, even within the same volume. It could be argued that these should have been removed during editing. Reading the three volumes in quick succession also highlights some continuity errors (for example, Star Surgeon takes

place either around a month or two years after the last story in *Hospital Station*).

The stories can also come across as rather sexist; for instance all the human doctors are men while all the nurses are women. More blatantly, we are told that women cannot use diagnostic tapes (which allow people to 'load' into the brain the memories of a doctor from an alien race so that they can operate on members of said race) because they have a sex-linked psychological block

on sharing their mind with another creature.

But perhaps these are minor points. Rereading these stories after some years one particular thing strikes me: in an age when you can often spot the hero of a novel by the fact that they are the most violent, dissolute and morally ambiguous character, it is refreshing to spend time among people whose overriding concern is the sanctity of life.

Kim Wilkins – The Resurrectionists

Reviewed by Mark Greener

Orion, 2001, 503pp £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-793-4

My hopes weren't high for *The Resurrectionists*. At first sight, it seemed riddled with just about every Gothic cliché: the beautiful young women escaping from a stifling life; an isolated mysterious house; a ruined medieval abbey on the wind-swept Yorkshire coast (makes a change from the moors, I suppose) complete with mysterious subterranean passages; threatening, sinister villagers; even a "dark eyed" Gypsy lover. At worst, I expected a dull, facile novel that would end up in Oxfam. At best, I hoped for a diverting few hours with an ultimately forgettable pot-boiler.

Was I wrong. Boy, was I wrong. The Resurrectionists is simply stunning. It's probably the best horror novel I've read for three or four years! Indeed, it could be a neo-Gothic masterpiece.

On the surface, Australian Maisie Fielding has everything going for her. She's a cellist in a leading orchestra. Her partner is a rising opera star. Her family are successful and supportive. But Maisie is unsettled, unfulfilled. Despite the long-standing feud between her mother and recently deceased grandmother, Maisie feigns a hand injury and travels to her gran's house in the village of Solgreve to find herself.

But Maisie finds herself isolated from the community, who seem suspicious, hostile – and very, very old. While tidying her grandmother's chaotic home, Maisie discovers that her grandmother was a witch. Meanwhile, she falls in love with her grandmother's gardener – the "dark eyed" Gypsy – and discovers the diary of Georgette, a young 18th century woman who eloped with her poet lover to the same house.

Soon it becomes clear that Solgreve has a dark secret. A secret linked to her grandmother's suspicious death. A secret that stretches back to Georgette's time. A secret that Maisie decides to discover...

The Resurrectionists is firmly in the tradition of Gothic entertainments established by Stoker and Walpole. So you don't get the more profound insights into human nature offered by Stevenson and Shelly. But it's superb entertainment.

It's extremely well-written and you're carried forward by the intelligent, sophisticated and well-observed narrative. Indeed, Wilkins skilfully avoids the more ludicrous extravagances that make Gothic plots such easy targets for satire, if not ridicule.

I really began to care for the characters (even the supporting cast), which gives you an impression of just how well and carefully they've been drawn. As a result, the book is both moving and disturbing (especially Georgette's story). Indeed, *The Resurrectionists* is far more disturbing than any splatterpunk gorefest

Too often, dark fantasy novels linger over horror as an end in itself. But the protagonists either die grotesquely, if quickly, or survive almost mentally intact. In contrast, Wilkins' characters suffer from their supernatural entanglement, which leaves them fundamentally, irredeemably changed. Georgette's husband, for example, slowly falls apart into a world of despair, poverty and laudanum. *The Resurrectionists* is so well written that you feel their suffering, you share their pain. Horror novels of this quality could help rescue a staid genre from the self-satisfied, post-modernist clutches of *Scream*.

I have one minor criticism. Georgette's diary doesn't read like an 18th century text; its style is too modern. But if Dumas can update his musketeers' 17th century speech to the 19th century vernacular, it seems churlish to complain if Wilkins does the same. Nevertheless, it would have enhanced the historical verisimilitude of this marvellous, engaging and masterful novel.

Robert Charles Wilson - The Chronoliths

Tor Books, 2001, 301pp, \$22.95 ISBN 0-312-87384-0

Reviewed by Gary Wilkinson

The 'hero' of *The Chronoliths* is Scott Warden, an American who at the beginning of the novel is living as a beach-bum expatriate in Thailand. One night the air is shattered by an enormous thunderclap. The source of the noise is soon obvious: overnight a huge mysterious pillar has appeared in the nearby hills. Scott is one of the first on the scene. The pillar is a pale translucent blue made from an exotic form of matter, but strangest of all is the message inscribed on its surface celebrating the victory of the warlord Kuin in 2041 – twenty years in the future.

Unfortunately at the same time that Scott is investigating the pillar, his young daughter back home is taken seriously ill – a virulent bug attacks her inner ear leaving her partially deaf, and his wife has no idea where he is. Big coincidence? But the novel says on page one that: "Nothing is coincidental."

Soon another pillar 'touches down', this time in the centre of Bangkok. The city is blasted apart. More 'Chronoliths' soon appear, and Asia is thrown into chaos.

Scott returns alone to America. His wife and child departed before him, his marriage having been torn apart, the split triggered by his absence during his daughter's illness. He tries to patch up his relationship, fails and eventually becomes involved in the investigation of the Chronoliths – but only on the periphery.

The novel skips over the twenty years from the first Chronolith

to the events it is supposed to be celebrating. For the most part we are involved in Scott's domestic travails which, like Scott, are frankly a bit boring. We see how American society is affected as the Chronoliths celebrating Kuin's victories spread ever closer from Asia to India to Africa to South America to...

I had high hopes for this after the good press Wilson received for *Darwinia* (which I've not read yet) but was left disappointed. An intriguing idea here is not really fully exploited. Wilson does take a different approach to the normal sf trope of scientist as hero but Scott is too Everyman, too passive and uninvolving; things happen to him for the most part, instead of him causing them to happen. Some of this is explained away as the plot evolves, but boring is still boring no matter what the reasons. *The Chronoliths* does have something to say on the nature of destiny and predetermination, it just does not say it very well. However, the book itself is involving and I awaited the end (and what was actually happening in the novel's 'future') with high anticipation, but the final pages dissolve into a quantum foam of half-explanation.

Wilson obviously has high literary ambitions for his sf. It is a pity that *The Chronoliths* does not quite achieve them. Hopefully somewhere in the future he will.

Susan Wright – Star Trek: Dark Passions Book One Susan Wright – Star Trek: Dark Passions Book Two

Pocket Books, 2001, 252pp, \$6.99 ISBN 0-671-78785-3 Pocket Books, 2001, 200pp, \$6.99 ISBN 0-671-78786-1

Reviewed by Lesley Hatch

Set in the Mirror Universe featured in the *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* television series, these volumes featured regular characters in radically different roles and situations. Following the destruction of Earth and the takeover of the Sol Empire, Terrans are slaves to other races, and the Klingons and Cardassians rule in an uneasy alliance. Below this surface layer, numerous plots and counterplots are laid. And one of these plots in Volume One – the assassination of a prominent Klingon by an agent of the Cardassian intelligence agency – sets off a chain reaction of events no-one expects.

Kira Nelys, the Intendant of Bajor, is elected as trade Overseer for the Alpha Quadrant, amid much debate and argument. Around the same time, she acquires an ancient artefact that acts like a sophisticated transporter. Meanwhile the aforementioned (female) assassin and Cardassian agent is commanded to kill Kira, but decides she will play both ends against the middle, with interesting results for all the various protagonists, four of whom are female and *very* ambitious.

In volume two, these four women really come into their own; Kira, Agent Seven, Deanna Troi and B'Elenna Torres all crave total power, and will stop at nothing to obtain it. This includes an assassination that has far-reaching effects for quite a few of the protagonists. Agent Seven and Kira in particular find their lives changing radically as a result of the decisions they make, and one specific decision that Kira puts into action has unexpected consequences for them both.

I was very impressed with these novels, especially the way in which the various female characters were portrayed. In addition, the background against which their lives and ambitions are played out is very well delineated, with references to events in the past that help to explain the actions that occur in both volumes. Even the minor characters – mainly Terrans – are very well handled and, consequently, the reader cannot help but sympathise with their lowly positions.

It would be unfair of me to reveal all the various twists and turns that are included in both novels. Although they may take a bit of getting into if you are not familiar with the *Star Trek* universe, I enjoyed them both and would definitely recommend them to fans.



These are some of the other books we have seen recently. A mention here does not necessarily preclude a full review in a later issue of Vector.

Iain M. Banks - Look To Windward

Orbit, 2001, 403pp, £7.99 ISBN 1-84149-059-8 (First reviewed by Paul Kincaid in *Vector* 213)

The last of Banks's Culture novels before he reportedly takes a sabbattical. The title of *Look to Windward* derives from the same quotation (from T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*) that provided that of Banks's first Culture novel *Consider Phlebas*. The events of that first novel are also about to impinge, across 800 light years, on the latest, as the light of two exploded suns is scheduled to reach Masaq Orbital (obviously, news travels faster). Masaq's controlling Mind, Hub, wants Ziller, an exiled Chelgrian composer, to compose a score for the event. The Chelgrians, who blame the Culture for precipitating a devastating civil war on their world, send their own emissary to Masaq to persuade Ziller to return.

Paul Kincaid wrote: "[I]f what you're look for is epic sweep and hard action you won't be disappointed. On form, Banks really knows how to tell a story, and this is a gripping tale. But it is more than that. Something strange has been happening to his creation of the Culture over the last few science fiction novels... Behind the action is a very thoughtful account of what the Culture is and what makes it peculiar."

James Barclay - Noonshade

Gollancz, 2001, 484pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-786-1 (First reviewed by Vikki Lee in Vector 214)

The second book in Barclay's Chronicles of the Raven, following on from *Dawnthief*. (The third volume, *Nightchild* (Gollancz, 2001, ISBN 0-575-07215-6) has just been published in trade paperback and will be reviewed in a later issue.) The Raven are a band of mercenaries caught between the effects of their unleashing of the devastating "spell of spells" Dawnthief, which has left a dimensional rip in the sky, and the invading Wesman armies who are now sweeping across Balaia.

Vikki Lee recommended this as "a page turning romp with engaging characters and bags of, often brutal, action. It's not the literary event of the year and certainly won't win any awards, but it is storytelling at its very best and provides a few hours of excellent entertainment."

Derel Briarley - Crimson Dawn

Parocosmia Publications, 2001, 37pp (chapbook), £3.50 ISBN 0-9540165-0-5 An apocalyptic sf story (albeit in 6 chapters) by BSFA Orbiter member Derel Briarley. *Crimson Dawn* starts and ends with homosexual rape and satanic ritual, and in between works through an ancient scriptural prophecy, the rise of a demonic ruler and the destruction of the Earth, as seen through the eyes of six teenagers. Odd and intriguing, if rather unfocussed (it either needs to be longer, or to try and cram less into its 37 pages), although to be honest it could really have done with one more round of the Orbiter group before being published. (Available from Parocosmia Publications, 1 St George's Place, Bell's Close, Newcastle Upon Tyne NE15 6YE)

Terry Bisson – In the Upper Room, and other unlikely stories

Tor Books, 2001, 284pp, \$13.95 ISBN 0-312-87420-0 (First reviewed by Andrew Seaman in *Vector* 214)

An odd and eclectic collection, ranging from the provocatively titled First Contact story 'Tell Them They Are All Full of Shit and Should Fuck Off' (*Crank*, 1994) to 'He Loved Lucy' (*Playboy*, 2000).

The four *Playboy* stories show an alarming and almost obsessionally detailed knowledge of the finer points of expensive lingerie (which you'd have thought more *Cosmo* or *Elle* than *Playboy*, but you never can tell), while at the opposite end of the scale is the powerfully disturbing 'macs', inpired by the trial of the Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh, where clones of serial killers are manufactured and farmed out to the victims' families for 'revenge'. 'macs' takes the form of a series of interviews with the families, whose reactions range from horrified to a brutality indistinguishable from the original crime.

Emma Bull - War for the Oaks

Orb, 2001, 332pp, \$13.95 ISBN 0-765-30034-6

Reviewed by Steve Jeffery

First published in 1987 and instantly acclaimed as one of the seminal "elf-punk" novels (and part of a movement that gave rise to the Terri Windling and Delia Sherman 'Bordertown' anthologies), this won a Locus Award for

Best First Novel. The plot itself is slight, even twee: feisty rock and roll chick Eddi McReady takes on the might and magic of Faerie, caught in the middle of a war between the Seelie and Unseelie Courts (in Minneapolis?), and comes through, teaching those stand-offish elves a thing or two about love, friendship and responsibility in the process. But it's done with vast amounts of charm and wit and such obvious enthusiasm that only hardened cynics will cheer for the wrong side. (Though, admittedly, the Queen of Air and Darkness seems far cooler than her lurex mini-skirted and silver booted counterpart The Lady, whose fashion sense seems to have been arrested in the 70s). Bull makes you care for her characters, which all helps, as this is also partly a romance (which the reader can see long before Eddi). I've been hearing about this book for ages, in connection with other 'urban fantasy' writers like Steven Brust, Ellen Kushner, Charles de Lint and the Bordertown anthologies. It's nice to see Tor bring it back into print as part of their Orb line (which has also included Brust's To Reign in Hell and Joan Sloncweski's A Door into Ocean). It doesn't disappoint.

Pat Cadigan - Dervish is Digital

Tor Books, 2001, 230pp, \$22.95 ISBN 0-312-85377-7 (First reviewed by Penny Hill in *Vector* 215)

The First Lady of cyberpunk, La Diva Loca, Pat Cadigan, returns to the world of *Tea From an Empty Cup* (1998) and particularly Detective Lieutenant Doré Konstantin of the Artificial Reality Division (three overworked people and a backlog file of almost insoluble crimes). Konstantin's investigation of millionaire Howard Dervish, accused by his ex-wife of stalking her, bring her into contact with Goku, an East/West agent of the Japanese police, who (to Konstantin's distaste) likes to prowl for AR deviants in the persona of a 9-year-old boy. How can Konstantin's quarry seem to be in two places at once? Can people really download themselves into AR, and is Dervish really digital? Konstantin doesn't think so, but the evidence is starting to point to the possibility.

Peter Darvill-Evans – Asylum

BBC Books, 2001, 254pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 563 53833 3

Justin Richards and Stephen Cole – The Shadow in the Glass BBC Books, 2001, 286pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 563 53838 4

Stephen Cole – Vanishing Point 🛄

BBC Books, 2001, 278pp, £5.99 ISBN 0 563 53839 5

Reviewed by Mark Greener

You don't have to be a Dr Who anorak to appreciate these three spin-off novels. The Shadow in the Glass unites the sixth doctor and the Brigadier in a time-spanning story of neo-nazis, the UK Roswell and conspiracy theories. Asylum brings together the fourth doctor and Nyssa, before they met on TV, in a medieval murder-mystery involving Roger Bacon. Vanishing Point, part of an on-going series of stories involving the eighth doctor, concerns a planet where you're told what your purpose in life was just before you die. It's often surprising just how mature, intelligent and sophisticated these books are. For example, the violence - hidden on TV in case it offended teatime sensibilities - is sometimes unexpectedly disturbing. And each book is fairly self-contained: you don't need to be steeped in Dr Who continuity to understand the stories. The BBC's Dr Who series aren't great literature. But the books themselves are occasionally thought-provoking, often compelling, always a damn good read, and inevitably a great deal of fun. You could do a lot worse than give them a try.

Sara Douglass - Enchanter

Tor, 2001, 511pp, \$27.95 ISBN 0-312-87582-7

(First reviewed by Alan Fraser in Vector 205)

Sara Douglass - The Wayfarer Redemption

Tor, 2001, \$9.99 ISBN 0-765-34130-1

(First reviewed by John Oram under the title *Battleaxe* in *Vector* 203) *Enchanter*, in the original Australian (1996) and later UK HarperCollins editions, was the second volume of Douglass's Axis trilogy (*Battleaxe*, *Enchanter*, *Starman*), which was followed by The Wayfarer Redemption trilogy (*Sinner*, *Pilgrim*, *Crusader*), set 40 years on.

In the Tor editions, Battleaxe was renamed The Wayfarer Redemption, which also appears to form Tor's overall series title for all six books.

This is a complex fantasy, initially centring on the character Axis, also known as Battleaxe and leader of the Axewielders, the elite military arm of the church of Artor, charged with the hunting down of two races, the bird-like Iccari and forest dwelling Avar, anathematised by the church as "monsters". Axis, though, finds himself also the Starman of ancient prophecy, one who will unite the three races and defeat The Destroyer, Axis's half-brother Gorgrael. He also manages to earn the undying hatred of his other half-brother Bornheld, by falling in love with Bornheld's betrothed, Farraday.

John Oram was impressed by the opening volume. Alan Fraser, who hadn't read the first book, found it harder work to become involved.

Terry Goodkind - Wizard's First Rule

Tor Books, 2001, 573pp, \$17.95 ISBN 0-765-30027-3 (first reviewed by K.V Bailey in *Vector* 186)

The first volume in Goodkind's Sword of Truth series, newly re-published by Tor in trade paperback edition (originally 1994). The series, which established Goodkind as one of the bestselling authors of genre fantasy, continued through Stone of Tears, Blood of the Fold and Temple of Winds (both reviewed by Lynne Bispham in their Orion editions V199), Soul of the Fire (reviewed by Sue Thomason, V207) and most recently Faith of the Fallen. The book, and series, rather shamelessly plunders a number of illustrious predecessors, from Arthurian legend to Lord of the Rings (although somewhat over-egging the pudding with a reluctant dragon and a friendly werewolf). Revews of the series have been mixed: K.V. Bailey wrote that "the narrative flows freely but is often repetitive of sadistic mayhem" and "humour is sly although sometimes twee". Lynne Bispham also commented on the "Tarrantino" body counts and plethora of subplots as the series developed, while conceding the addictive quality of what is, essentially, "one long multi-volumed novel", while Sue Thomason was less impressed by the fifth book, where "a wide variety of interesting minor characters are introduced and killed."

Diana Wynne Jones - Year of the Griffin

Gollancz, 2001, 264pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-86798-788-8 (first reviewed by Sue Thomason in Vector 215)

This forms a sort of sequel to Jones's *Dark Lord of Derkholm*, which Sue Thomason described as "Diana Wynne Jones' answer to Harry Potter". *Year of the Griffin* is a school story, featuring a group of misfit first year students in Wizard's University, and appears to be pitched at both teenage and adult readers. However, Jones's answer to Harry Potter arrives in the form of Elda, a large golden griffin, one of Wizard Derk's children. Her fellow first-year students, to the horror of the High Chancellor trying to replenish the coffers of his debt-ridden University, include a runaway dwarf, a penniless Prince and the disowned sister of the Emperor. Between the effort of their various families to get them back (or in one case, to expunge the dishonour of their presence at the University in rather more summary fashion), pompous and even malicious tutors, and the students' own inepitude in practical wizardry, a large amount of chaos ensues. Great fun.

Roger Levy - Reckless Sleep

Gollancz, 2001, 426pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-85798-890-6 (first reviewed by Steve Jeffery in *Vector* 211)

An ambitious first novel by Levy, and one that contains a number of echoes (from Tad William's Otherland and Shepherd's Life During Wartime to Priest's The Affirmation and The Extremes) in the breakdown between reality and a fully realised virtual (or is it?) fantasy world. Jon Sciler used to be a Far Warrior, one of an elite force who were totally routed on the would-be colony world of Diringasept. Shunned and reviled (there are obvious echoes of the reception of returning Vietnam veterans in such films as Born on the Fourth of July), Sciler is approached as a test subject for a new virtual fantasy role play game which provides, in the world of Cathar, an almost hyper-real experience. If Cathar is just a means of temporarily escaping from the depressing reality of a blighted Earth, why are Far Warriors being employed as test subjects for its development? And why are some of them dying, both in the virtual world and the real world? Somewhat uneven – Reckless Sleep tries rather too hard at times to be too many things – this is nonetheless an intriguing and assured debut.

Robert Reed – Marrow

Orbit, 2001, 502pp, £6.99 ISBN 1-84149-078-4 (first review by John Owen in *Vector* 213)

The Marrow of the title is the heart of an immense ship, home to a thousand different races. So huge that even the (immortal) human crew who have taken it over and converted it do not know all it contains. And somewhere in the heart of the ship lies a harsh environment which can test people to destruction and beyond, returning them as very different people from those who entered. John Owen wrote "Marrow is an ambitious book, full of huge imaginings, and it has a relentless pace and an intriguing story to tell. But....Reed's immortal humans seem to hang in a timelessness built on duty and struggle against adversity and very little else."

Will Shetterly - Chimera

Tor Books, 2001, 285pp, \$14.95 ISBN 0-312-87543-6 (first reviewed by Colin Bird in *Vector* 214)

Both the cover by Michael Koelsch – of a rather cute cat-girl (almost as one might imagine Cordwainer Smith's C'Mell) set against a rainy nighttime street scene – and Shetterley's acknowlegements to John M. Ford, Emma Bull (twice), Steven Brust, Patricia C. Wrede and others, set the tone of a sort of film noir 'Borderlands' novel, where human and nonhumans mingle on the edges of society. In *Chimera*, though, the nonhumans are not elves or Faerie but 'critters', genetically engineered underpeople, the new slaves of America. Zoe Domingo is a jaguarwoman, created as a sex slave, although now free, having been bought out by Al expert and abolitionist Janna Gold. But Gold is murdered, and Zoe approaches private eye Chase Maxwell, who reluctantly takes the case.

According to John Owen, although it sometimes "wanders into some woefully cliché-ridden territory at times", *Chimera* has some "surprisingly cerebral undercurrents bubbling under the surface of this cyber-gumshoe novel"

James Tiptree, Jr. - Meet Me at Infinity

Tor Books, 2001, 396pp, \$15.95 ISBN 0-312-86938-X (first reviewed by Steve Jeffery in *Vector* 213)

James Tiptree Jr., otherwise Alice B. Sheldon, remains, after Philip K. Dick, one of the most enigmatic and critically acclaimed sf writers of the 20th century. The fiction contained in *Infinity* (which is by-lined *The Uncollected Tiptree: Fiction and Nonfiction*) is, for the most part, fairly minor Tiptree, although it does contain one of the most genuinely erotic three-way interspecies sex scenes I've read in 'Trey of Hearts', and 'The Color of Neanderthal Eyes', previously only published as part of Tor Double No. 16 (1990), genuinely deserves republication. What makes *Infinity* particularly fascinating and indispensable is the non-fiction, collated from letters, articles, interviews and addresses by Tiptree's long-time friend and now literary executor, Jeffery Smith. They reveal Tip/Sheldon as someone who, until the tragic suicide pact with her dying husband in 1987, packed more into a single life, and a short but sustained brilliant career as an sf writer, than most people could manage in three.

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